

The association Guatemalan Exporters of Agricultural Products (AGEXPORT) has called on maritime shipping lines and on airlines to help to improve the country's rural competitiveness and prevent migration to the U.S.

AGEXPORT said that conditions this year have not been easy for agriculture companies in Guatemala. It explained that although demand for fresh produce has increased recently, Guatemalan agricultural companies have only been able to work at half their capacity, significantly increasing all their costs.

It said these companies were faced with many challenges which forced them to abandon fields, harvest much less product already ready for the picking, face labor shortages for the post-harvest handling and shipping of their products, and also to sell their products already at lower prices.

Andrés Bickford, Manager of AGEXPORT's Agriculture Sector, said: "Rural agriculture workers in Guatemala are really feeling the economic impact of the very high maritime and air freight shipping rates, just when the economy is trying to recover from Covid19."

"We understand that all industries took a hit with the pandemic, which is why we are calling on maritime shipping lines, especially Seaboard and Crowley, and on airlines, especially cargo airlines, to start negotiations with Guatemalan agriculture industries to find the best way to support the rural competitiveness of Guatemala."

He said this was necessary for them to keep the U.S. market supplied with Guatemalan mangoes, pineapples, berries, limes, roasted coffees and vegetables.

"We recognize that the customer experience, service, and expertise on handling fresh vegetables that maritime shipping lines provide give us the trust to continue using their containers for our daily operations," Bickford went on to say.

"We want to negotiate with them a much better container rate, door-to-door, from the packaging plants in Guatemala to our clients' distribution centers in the United States, and for all agriculture products.

"A better shipping rate would have a strong economic impact on the entire value chain, especially on the income of the small producers and on the competitiveness of their products."

He added that it is a win-win situation as well for the shipping lines, "as they guarantee themselves consistent volume from long-lasting clients of fresh and frozen agriculture

products while also cooperating to stop migration influxes from Guatemalan rural areas to the United States, which is the first thing that happens when formal jobs are lost in our country".