

The Chilean avocado industry has welcomed a recent United Nations study debunking allegations that it has a negative impact on the environment and communities near production areas.

The study was released a few days ago by the Regional Water Centre for Arid and Semi-arid Zones of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAZALAC-UNESCO), showing that there was "good management and efficient use of water, with much lower consumption levels than in other fruits grown in Chile".

FreshFruitPortal.com spoke with Francisco Contardo of the Chilean Hass Avocado Committee and Elir Rojas, who led the study to hear about what was behind it and what it means for the Chilean avocado industry that has suffered from allegations in international news publications regarding its impact on the environment.

The research

Rojas said the study came about following a session of the Chilean Senate in which the Chilean Hass Avocado Committee participated to talk about its planting, production and harvesting systems.

That's when they decided to carry out an analysis, to "have scientific backing for what the avocado committee believed".

Rojas said that "in a context of climate change that has existed for more than 30 years, with desertification processes that have existed since human beings have settled anywhere, to say that a crop is responsible for water scarcity is irresponsible".

He added that drought situations have been recorded in Chile since 1540.

"Moreover, the drought of 1968 was of high impact and nobody blamed, for example, potato crops," he said.

Through technical and scientific analysis, the study determined that avocado cultivation in Chile helps to recover and improve the original condition of the soil in the tenth year after the plantation began.

In fact "in some studied properties, it was possible to determine that the recovery of soils (degraded prior to the plantation of avocados) occurs even in the first five years".

One of the main conclusions of the study emphasized that three years after planting,

avocado crops generate social benefit by providing stable jobs.

Chilean avocado industry the victim of attacks

Contardo said that the avocado industry in Chile has been attacked repeatedly over recent years over its environmental credentials.

He explained that it was therefore very important that a third party such as the UN analyze and investigate the matter.

"Today we are very happy to have received a study that corroborates that the avocado industry in Chile is sustainable and sustainable over time," he said.

In addition, he stressed that this study reaffirms what the Committee had maintained for many years - that avocados make a positive contribution to the environment, biodiversity, and the country.

"In a context where it is easier to criticize, this study aims to objectify the discussion, give a technical framework to the thousands of unsupported accusations that have been made against us," he said.

He stressed that the study's contribution to the discussion is key, since having scientific evidence and speaking from that base seems the healthiest and most civically correct path they can follow.

"There will always be opportunities for improvement, as the conclusions of the study showed, and for this reason we will always be willing to listen to these technical conversations."

Conclusions

Amongst the study's main conclusions was that the oldest plant zones recover soils from arid or semi-arid zones. It found that as the Hass variety has existed in Chile for many decades - and that the first units planted in 1949 are trees that still present quality production - they are sustainable.

It also indicated that an ethical code should be implemented for all members of the Chilean Hass Avocado Committee that allows them to better face the new environmental reality. They should be an internal "regulatory framework", it said, which incorporates the legally

binding international instruments.