

The agricultural industry has traditionally seen low participation of women in management and leadership positions compared with other sectors. But times are changing rapidly.

To commemorate International Women's Day, FreshFruitPortal.com asked several women in different positions in the industry around the world for their perspective on the evolution of women's role in the industry and how they see the situation changing in the future.

The following responses have been edited for brevity and clarity.



Mayda Sotomayor-Kirk, CEO, Seald Sweet (U.S.)

Women in general bring a keen perspective which I believe has added to the industry in many areas, as buyers, in sales, in operations and marketing just to name a few. The role has evolved throughout the supply chain and today we see woman's influence in all aspects of the industry to my delight.

I see women evolving into a higher position helping to develop a company's strategy and culture. The produce story resonates with women, it is a story of health and humanity's future. There are opportunities in all areas for women within the industry and it is much more open today than when I started over 36 years ago. This is a great industry to work for where we promote beautiful products that feed the world, why would you not want to work in this industry.



Nissa Pierson, Sales and Marketing Director, Crespo Organic Mangoes (U.S.)

I still see the produce industry as extremely difficult terrain for women, and I think it is still nearly impossible for young, bright, capable women to rise to positions of real power. My own career was built on my ability to challenge from the get-go, and I can credit my unique upbringing for that.

Women's strength and power are rarely as celebrated, never mind financially rewarded, the same as men in this industry. Their leadership often lacks significant power. Those that can carve out their own niche and challenge the status quo usually feel isolated and lonely in the business. I can personally attest to that.

I have spent a great deal of my career working in global agriculture, small organic farming operations all over the globe, and I often find the family business of farming to be more open to advancing women. I see this in the Crespo family with their powerful matriarchs and I see the brothers, who run the company alongside their sister and mother, very much supporting smart women, with power and money. I think this is the key to more success - making room for women to have more power and money.

I don't think the industry is changing; I think women are. They are learning that they must pave their own way and find the resources they need for the success they desire. This means choosing to work for companies that support sharing power and money with women.



Carolina Cruz, president of the Research Commission for the Development of Table Grapes - Uvanova (Chile)

We have already been participating in the changes within agriculture - across the world more and more women are contributing to the labor force. In the particular case of fruit production in Chile, the support of the female sector is unquestionable.

I see a very promising future for women, they are absolutely necessary for the management of any successful company. Invite them to the world where the connection with nature is a precious treasure. Empathizing and sharing with the rural world adds enormous personal value, and also opens doors to an increasingly globalized world. We can contribute to the development of a healthier world, with respect for the land and its people.



Flavia Santoro, President of trade promotion agency ProColombia (Colombia)

The fruit and vegetable sector is one of Colombia's main export drivers and has about 745,000 direct jobs. Within these positions, the female outlook has been very important in managerial roles.

Regarding the message to other women who want to enter the industry, she said "there is a very promising future and there are current signs that indicate that we are on a positive path. The Vice President of the Republic, Martha Lucía Ramírez, has had a very important leadership role which has transferred to other entities of the Government of Colombia.

And this is what we wanted to give as an example in different business sectors such as

agriculture. In the macro business rounds that we run from ProColombia every year, we see that there is increasingly significant participation of women entrepreneurs who are willing to conquer the world with their goods and services. ProColombia will be there to support them, in order to continue with greater development and job creation in Colombia.



**Marianela Ubilla, Chairwoman of the Ecuadorian
Banana Exporters' Association (Ecuador)**

The participation of women in science, technology and engineering careers has been on the rise in the last 20 years. But it is not enough just to be trained as a professional in these careers, we must also build confidence in ourselves that we can work, perform and aspire to managerial positions just like men in a traditionally male field.

The message I give to women who have not yet entered the agricultural sector is to foster self-confidence as a priority. Then along the way, we will continue to develop our skills, which, together with knowledge acquired in our professional training, will lead us to achieve all the goals we set ourselves from the beginning.

Today a great opportunity opens up for us women in this post-pandemic stage, thanks to our communicative and intuitive skills, which combined with something that is said to be a defect in us, "sensitivity", leads us naturally to be leaders more of consensus than hierarchical, resulting in a more appropriate direction in these times of greater instability and predictability for many companies.



Francesca Carnesella, Marketing, Communications and Sustainability Manager at Camposol (Peru)

Women's contribution to companies is increasingly evident. I see many women standing out in the world in all areas and that fills me with joy and pride. I know that there are still important gaps in terms of equity, career paths and compensation, but this is changing in a decisive way.

I also see my two children, both young and close in age, who, belonging to different genders, have developed, grown up and become full citizens, who have equity and respect for differences of any kind in their DNA.



Inés Masallach Armijo, Marketing Director at Imalinxs (Mexico)

The role of women in the industry is becoming increasingly evident as companies in the sector extend their reach in the supply chain. 20 years ago, the number of women at the management level in the industry was very small and today there is more and more participation in management positions and at the board level. An important impact has been the demand for work-life balance not only for women but for all company employees, which has translated into better overall results as well as more follow-through on social responsibility initiatives.

There is still some way to go culturally. While there have been many advances at management levels, at the rural level where women have been essential to agriculture, there are still large gaps in financial resources and overall support. Cohesion, support,

mentoring and camaraderie among women in the industry are important improvements for the future.