

By Nissa Pierson, of Crespo Organic Mangoes

Let's start with the most important part of the history behind Cinco de Mayo. Contrary to popular belief, *it is not Mexican Independence Day*. It's a day that has become a symbolic holiday for Americans celebrating what they imagine to be the spirit of Mexico and Mexicans. It's also a day that has exacerbated stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexican culture for too long. It's because of the latter reason that we choose to #CelebrateMexico within our space in the mango industry to help educate where we can, hopefully clearing up some misconceptions along the way.

Cinco de Mayo is barely a holiday in Mexico. It's mostly celebrated in Puebla, as that's where the Mexican Army defeated the French in the Battle of Puebla in 1862. In 1961, Napoleon III tried to carve an empire out of Mexican territory, and a well-armed French fleet entered into Veracruz and drove the Mexican government north into retreat.

The story goes like this; the French sent an army of over 6,000 troops into Puebla, in the hopes of crushing the retreated Mexican government. Mexican General Ignacio Zaragoza fortified the town in preparation for the French army's arrival when word got out that the French were coming north. When the battle finally took place, it lasted less than 24 hours and resulted in a French retreat and more than 500 French soldiers lost. The battle was won with what was said to be less than 2,000 minimally (loyal) armed men, mostly of indigenous descent. Fewer than 100 Mexicans were killed in the clash.

The battle was not a super strategic win overall against the French, but it represented a great symbolic victory and bolstered the resistance movement. It gave the Mexican people not only a newfound sense of pride nationally, but the rest of the world began to take notice. In 1867, the French withdrew fully from Mexico. It certainly makes sense that this one battle gave rise to an energy that took on greater significance than the small battle itself. Some historians even argue this battle was significant in protecting the USA from later French invasions.

It was an important battle in a war lost, but how and why did this particular battle create such hysteria for Mexican food and drink and this May 5th date in the USA?

There is, of course, the obvious (and only a partial) answer...In 1846, the Mexican American

war ended. Mexicans who chose to remain on USA soil suddenly became US citizens living under new customs, cultures and most importantly laws. The day became a way for them to celebrate Mexico and continue prior connections to language, customs, history and culture.

Most new Mexican-American populations were treated poorly socioeconomically. America has a deep history of racial injustice with or without land grabs. Celebrating the minor Pueblo battle was more an act of resistance in the face of a newfound disparity between being American and retaining connection to their Mexican homeland and heritage. Celebrating Mexico, rooted them in Mexico, regardless of where they lived.

Also, many historical factoids credit the Chicano Movement ([El Movimiento](#)), a sociopolitical resistance movement amongst people of Mexican descent, with bolstering this “holiday” even further. This is especially so in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago. Again, resistance being the theme that often bound the Mexican-American populations together in history and celebration. Resistance to give up their heritage.

How the holiday went from something about Mexican pride and culture to a sombrero-wearing booze fest, I’d like to say, is beyond me. But I’d argue that losing connection to history and origin is part of the American way - in order to commercialize it. And commercialize it we did. In many places, it has become a horrible boozy celebration of nothing more than selling things at the expense of Mexicans, using stereotypes and misconceptions.

We’d like to take the day back and remember its roots in the resistance. Our mission is not just about increasing production and consumption of Mexican organic mangoes, but it’s also to raise awareness on the Mexican farming industry, to help foster respect and admiration for Mexican people and cultures, and to develop sustainable agricultural markets for our Mexican land and people.

This date feels like an opportunity for us. It’s not just an opportunity to sell more mangoes but to #CelebrateMexico and our rich history of resistance to that which does not benefit our communities and our planet. We can only do that by placing a high value on the education sector of our business, knowing that our position in the industry is one we want to use wisely for communities on both sides of the border. We encourage our industry and our news publications to do the same.

Mexican culture is rich in celebration of its heritage, deeply rooted in respect for people and traditions. It's place of importance in history/in farming, as one of the cradles of human agriculture, continues to exist, which is why building long term sustainable agricultural models that support Mexican people and land are important for both Mexicans and Americans. This is also the reason we fully support the building of more direct trade systems of marketing for Mexican agricultural communities.

We take the job of educators, innovators and motivators seriously. There must be a shared and equal vision of health and prosperity for all, not only in mangoes and produce but in life.

I highly recommend reading this [article](#) for more in-depth ideas on the topic.