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By Maura Maxwell

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Special Fruit puts sustainability centre stage



The company continues to ramp up its CSR activities in Latin America

Latin America is playing an increasingly important role as a supplier of fruits and vegetables for Belgian importer Special Fruit, with Peru and Colombia accounting for much of the growth in volumes.

According to César Castrat, who works for the company's Peruvian partner Del Sol Fresh, the five years between 2010 and 2015 brought a seven-fold increase in Peruvian volumes and there is still plenty of growth potential in products such as mango, avocado and blueberries.

"Peru's strength lies in the fact that there are a number of products that it can supply either on a year-round basis or by targeting specific market windows – it's this very fact that makes the country so attractive as a source," he says.

Del Sol Fresh handles all of Special Fruit's sourcing in Peru, allowing the company to respond swiftly to any

logistical or quality issues that arise on the ground.

It has not all been plain sailing, however. Business development manager Koen Maes admits that El Niño has caused considerable disruption to the company's Latin American programmes this year and in particular affected product availability in Brazil.

Meanwhile, Special Fruit continues to work towards the ambitious sustainability goals that form a core plank of its growth strategy and which, Maes readily admits, are firmly embedded in the company's DNA.

As well as being signed up to IDH's Sustainability Initiative for Fruits and Vegetables (SIFAV) programme which aims to make imports from Africa, Asia and South America 100 per cent sustainable by 2020, Special Fruit recently obtained Zerya certification for its farms in Spain and Portugal and plans

to roll out the pesticide residue-free standard into its other production areas, including those in Latin America. It is also ramping up its organic production with several new farms currently in the process of being certified.

Besides these two goals the company is working on a number of other CSR projects with its partners, suppliers and retailers, an example being the work it does with FairFruit to transform the lives of small-scale farmers in Guatemala and Peru through the sustainable production of sugar snap and snow peas.

"Agriculture, and especially fruit and vegetable production, requires a large amount of labour, and the creation of new employment is the best way to help a developing country lift itself out of poverty," Castrat notes. "As the market evolves, the supply chain is becoming increasingly involved in the sustainable practices of its stakeholders and this will help all parties achieve their goals."

Maes foresees a bright future for Latin

all sorts of products," he says. "Of course,

macroeconomic policies and this in turn

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American fresh produce exports. “You need two hemispheres to ensure year-round supply and Latin America has a very good climate for

there are logistical and political challenges, but countries like Brazil, Peru and Chile have made huge advances in introducing more stable

will lead to more investment and job creation.”

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