



By Ed Leahy

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Chilean avo growers hit back at drought claims

Exporters have travelled to Europe to challenge claims made in the Guardian their industry has caused a drought



Chilean avocado growers have hit back at claims that they are leaving local communities without drinking water, calling them “an injustice”.

Avocado producers, whose crops end up in British supermarkets, were accused of building illegal pipes to steal water as well as intimidating protestors by activists and villagers in the Petorca region of Chile, publicised in The Guardian and other European news sources.

Reporters revealed allegations of intensive avocado production sparking a regional drought, leaving locals dependent on contaminated drinking water delivered by tankers on trucks.

Yet a delegation of Chilean avocado growers from the province are so incensed by the accusations that they have travelled

They state the main cause of the water shortages in the region was a drought between 2007 and 2014, which prompted farmers to destroy six million trees in response.

“This is an unfair situation,” explains Ronald Bown, chairman of the Chilean Fruit Exporters Association. “We want to inform clearly to our importers, sellers and consumers, to give clear information about this situation, and let them know what the facts are.”

Bown and a group of growers and exporters accuse The Guardian newspaper of spreading misleading information about avocado production in their article.

One grower from the region, Jose Luis Oyanadel, said: “I think the situation described is the opposite of what is actually happening in Petorca, which has been one

areas, we have given priority to drinking water to local inhabitants.”

Alfonso Rios, of local irrigation group Agropetorca said the illegal pipes had been closed for a long time ago, and Chile was littered with them. “You can ring up residents of Petorca and I will pay you if you find someone without water running from their tap,” he added.

Regarding reports of death threats made to people speaking out against the avocado growers, Francisco Contardo Sfeir, general manager of the Hass Avocado Committee, said they have not had any official complaints.

“The Guardian quotes a human rights report which doesn’t reference Chile. There’s no farmer or company that has sued us, no threats have been made into formalized complaints. It’s made a lot of noise, but we

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to Europe to assure their customers they are operating fairly.

Contardo Sfeir also dismissed claims that avocados required 1,000 litres per kilo produced, saying they in fact need just 389 litres.

Bown says that area is an agricultural region and the “defamatory” campaign would hit small and medium sized growers the hardest.

of the most drought affected

“Any negative attention is only going to have a negative affect on small producers of Chile. It’s going to have a human effect on small fruit growers, and that is why we are here against this unjust portrayal of our business. We don’t understand this portrayal.”

He added that growers are

don’t have any facts that can be demonstrated. We don’t have anything that proves this.”

subject to several regulatory bodies, including the Rainforest Alliance. The British Retail Consortium said it would investigate the claims made in the report, as did the retailer Lidl.