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By Maura Maxwell

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Sun Belle and Giddings Mexico sign berry deal

Agreement allows Sun Belle to roll out Giddings' varieties, including the new Aketzali blackberry



Giddings' new Aketzali blackberry

Sun Belle has signed a deal to become the long-term exclusive marketer and distributor of Giddings Fruit Mexico's conventional and organic blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and strawberries.

The agreement strengthens the 18-year relationship between the two companies and is expected to extend their global reach.

"This agreement completely aligns the two companies in their shared mission of providing top quality berries to consumers reliably and in good quantities," said Janice Honigberg, president and founder of Sun Belle.

"For example, we are excited to be marketing peak production through May of the new Aketzali blackberry variety that Giddings developed."

Patricio Cortes, general manager and co-founder of Giddings Mexico, said: "This

new strengthened relationship between our two companies further integrates the work of Giddings Mexico and Sun Belle at all levels – from top management, to sales, logistics and most importantly, varietal innovation and development.

"The Sun Belle team brings years of experience and as a result is able to meet the demands of the market with production throughout the year from all major growing regions."

Giddings is a leading integrated grower and shipper of conventional and organic berries in the states of Michoacán, Jalisco, Guanajuato and Sinaloa.

Its state-of-the-art tissue culture propagation lab and extensive nurseries support its own farms and varietal development programmes as well as those of its grower partners.

Sun Belle is a year-round marketer of a full line of organic and conventional berries and pomegranate arils,

principally sold under the Sun Belle and Green Belle brands, with distribution centres in Illinois, Maryland, California and Florida.

The company supports retail, club, wholesale, and food service customers throughout North America, Europe and Asia.

Hongberg said two companies have formally consolidated the varietal development programmes they have been pursuing during the past 13 years.

"We have brought together agreements with major university and private geneticists in the US and Europe, as well as Giddings' own varietal development programmes," she explained.

"Our goal is to bring fabulous varieties to market to delight the consumer. To that end we carefully evaluate many attributes, including beauty, taste, mouth feel, size, shelf life, productivity and ease of harvesting, plant health and resistance to disease."

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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Honigberg described the Aketzali blackberry as having “excellent flavour and appearance while presenting fewer growing and shipping challenges than earlier varieties”.

Giddings has 322ha of conventional and 40ha of organic Aketzali in production with good quantities through the end of May.

According to Cortes, “the Aketzali is a very sweet blackberry with good size and little regression. It is an excellent alternative to the Tupi variety, which we pioneered together starting in 2003. While the Tupi is no longer a productive variety, it established Mexico as the largest blackberry grower and shipper in the world.”

Honigberg added: “bringing excellent quantities of Aketzali to market this spring is just the beginning of closer work between Sun Belle and Giddings in developing and marketing other superb blackberry, raspberry, blueberry and strawberries varieties next season and in seasons to come”.