

By Tim Linden

## Labor Issues Offer Big Challenge in Brazil

Though the acreage of Fuerte and Hass avocados in Brazil increased by 20 percent over the last two years, it is still a relatively low acreage crop with not a lot of product being exported at the current time, and that is not expected to change any time soon.

Liliana Zayas works for Jaguacy Avocado, one of the larger avocado exporters in Brazil. She recently exchanged emails with *From the Grove* giving information about the size and scope of the Brazilian avocado industry.

She said Brazil has two avocado markets. The larger segment is devoted to what she called “tropical avocados” and includes such varieties as Breda, Fortuna, Geada, Quintal and Margarida. The other segment is for the Hass and Fuerte varieties. “The Jaguacy Farm is the largest producer and exporter of avocado varieties Fuerte and Hass in Brazil,” said Zayas. “Planting the first seedlings started in 1974 at the hands of the agronomist engineer Paulo Roberto Leite de Carvalho who began planting the varieties in Bauru, São Paulo state.”

Of the total volume of Hass and Fuerte produced by Jaguacy, 90 percent is sold in the foreign market to more than 20 countries and only 10 percent is sold in Brazil, mostly direct to supermarkets.

She said Brazil has about 12,000 hectares (30,000 acres) of the tropical varieties and about 1,200 hectares (3,000 acres) of Hass and Fuerte

plantings.

São Paulo is the largest producer of avocados in Brazil, with 20 percent of Brazilian production, according to Zayas. Other major avocado producers are located in the states of Minas Gerais and Parana, located in the southern part of the country. “The production of Hass and Fuerte happen from March to September with the months May to July providing the largest volume of fruit,” said Zayas

According to Zayas, São Paulo produced about 850,000 pounds of Hass and Fuerte fruit in 2013, which was almost double the production of a year earlier. São Paulo’s most prolific variety was Fortuna with about 23 million pounds.

She said domestic consumption of avocados is around 100 grams per capita (3.5 ounces), though it used to be higher. “There was a time when the image of the fruit became pejorative,” said Zayas. “People believe that avocado led to weight gain and had no nutritional value.”

However, she said research on the nutritional value of the avocado intensified about a decade ago, and the tide is starting to shift. “The research reinforced the nutritional appeal,” she said, noting that avocados have many good health benefits.

Zayas said Brazilians traditionally eat avocados in a sweet form, combining the fruit with sugar, or whipped with milk and sugar to create a smoothie. “The increase of the Mexican restaurants and Tex-Mex



Photo by Rodrigo Anholetto

has boosted consumption in the salt form,” she said. “But Brazilians still have a certain resistance in salty use of avocado.”

The challenges for Brazilian avocado producers, according to Zayas, are closely linked to the supply and value of labor. She said the manpower is scarce and too expensive, with the average monthly cost of a basic worker being about US\$500.

She said another challenge is trying to keep the Phythophtora cinammomi fungi in check, stating that it can greatly impact production. Zayas said most of the avocados grown for domestic production in tropical regions are not irrigated though the Hass and Fuerte are in groves that receive surface irrigation. 🥑