

Producers' Commitment has made Mexico a World Leader in Plant Health

The world faces the greatest challenge in its history to ensure production of healthy and safe food, and Mexico serves as a model of how to deal with this reality.

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) pointed out that Mexico constitutes a benchmark for replicating its knowledge and experience in other countries.

Mexico is a world reference in agri-food production as, in addition to guaranteeing domestic supply, it exports healthy and safe products to 191 countries, which is possible thanks to the commitment of producers to the campaigns operated by the National Agro-Alimentary Public Health, Safety and Quality Service (Senasica), said the Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development, Víctor Villalobos Arámbula.

He explained that, as a result of climate change, pests and diseases have become stronger, so food importing nations have increased their sanitary requirements. However, Mexico has maintained its markets and increased its exports, to the direct benefit of domestic producers, mainly small-scale producers.

Upon leading the first worldwide celebration of the International Plant Health Day -proclaimed by the United Nations in October 2021-, the federal official pointed out the importance of taking care of plants, since they provide 80 percent of the food we eat and 98 percent of the air we breathe.

He said that this first celebration is a moment of reflection for Mexico to coordinate efforts and broaden knowledge and experience between the government, the productive sector and society, to maintain a healthy and safe agriculture.

He said that in a globalized environment, in which there is a continuous flow of people, animals and plant products, Mexico is constantly strengthening its capabilities to contain the threats that currently afflict other regions.

He said that the Secretariat, through Senasica, operates different technical mechanisms that reduce the risk of introduction of pests and diseases not present in Mexico, which can jeopardize the country's food security.

In this sense, he pointed out that the American continent has and will continue to have the responsibility of guaranteeing food for humanity, as it is the main world food supplier, therefore we must improve our productive capacity, he noted.

Villalobos Arámbula recalled that in August 2021, during the inauguration of the new rearing and sterilization plant for male

Mediterranean fruit flies in Chiapas, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador stressed the importance of Senasica for the Mexican Government, which he highlighted as "the Secretariat of Health of plants and animals".

The representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Mexico, Lina Pohl Alfaro, pointed out that the world is currently facing the greatest challenge in its history to guarantee production of healthy and safe food, and, in this respect, Mexico is one of the best examples on how to face this situation.

She said that food security is facing a "perfect storm", resulting from the effects of the pandemic, war conflicts, climate change and rising prices, so governments must make ambitious decisions to ensure food supply.

She pointed out that the pandemic was devastating for the world, as the number of people suffering from food insecurity increased by 14 million in Latin America alone, even though the region produces twice as much food as its population requires, so better programs must be implemented to ensure that the most vulnerable people have access to it.

Pohl Alfaro said that FAO's message to governments is to invest in science and innovation to strengthen plant health and, thus, promote more inclusive and sustainable agri-food systems.

The representative in Mexico of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Diego Montenegro Ernts, highlighted Mexico's commitment to agricultural health, which plays a fundamental role in guaranteeing food security and preserving its sanitary status, making it a benchmark for replicating its experiences in the region.

The chief director of Senasica, Francisco Javier Trujillo Arriaga, recalled that Mexico has a history of 122 years of uninterrupted application of phytosanitary measures, and for several years has been a major player in the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), which oversees the application of 44 international standards among its 184 member countries.

He said that plant health in Mexico has given relevant examples of success, including the export of avocado, mango, and strawberries, among others, to various regions of the world.

He also stressed that citrus producers have committed to actions against Huanglongbing (HLB), which has devastated millions of citrus hectares worldwide, while our country has maintained its producing regions, from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico.

The general director of the National Institute of Forestry, Agriculture and Livestock Research (INIFAP), Luis Angel Rodriguez del Bosque, said that together with Senasica, during the last year its researchers have worked on an agro-ecological

plan to support the productive sector against pests, diseases and weeds, which reduce crop productivity.

He specified that research actions have been developed in mechanical and biological control methods in 11 states and, from the second half of 2022, it will be extended to the entire national territory.

Keynote Lectures

As part of the celebration, four experts from Senasica offered technical conferences. The first was delivered by María Eugenia Jiménez Ceballos, who pointed out that Mexico has 27 work plans (WPs) with nine countries for the export of products such as avocados, mangoes, and strawberries.

She indicated that producers must also comply with the sanitary protocols established by importing countries such as China, the United States, South Korea, and Japan.

Guillermo Santiago spoke about the requirements imposed by Mexico for the introduction of vegetable goods into the country. He explained that there are PTs with 16 countries for the import of 44 fresh products, a process in which Mexican technicians go to the exporting markets to verify that the requirements established by Senasica are met and to prevent the shipments from carrying pests that could endanger national agricultural production.

Mario Antonio Poot Pech referred to the methods used by Senasica to combat the Central American locust. He highlighted the need to continue with the research and use of new technologies, since pests are susceptible to climate change effects.

Jesús García Feria spoke about the success that Mexico and the United States have had with the Binational Work Plan for the control of the cotton boll weevil, which for more than 20 years has meant a collaborative experience that has allowed progress in the control and eradication of the pest.

It is a protocol, he said, in which the health authority, technicians and producers of both nations participate, through which the pest has been eradicated in the Mexicali Valley and Chihuahua, where 85 percent of the country's cotton production takes place.