

# The Secretariat of Agriculture Trains 29 k-9 Handlers for Central America and the Caribbean

In 10 years, the K-9 School of the National Agro-Alimentary Health, Safety and Quality Service (Senasica) has trained 42 canine binomials to provide services in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador



In Mexico, ninety K-9 binomials are working in 21 ports, 38 airports and 27 border points, said the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development

In order to strengthen health protection in the Americas region against the risk of the introduction and spread of pests and plant and animal diseases, in 2022 the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development integrated 20 canine units to provide services in the Dominican Republic, five in Guatemala and four in El Salvador.

To this end, technicians from the K-9 School of the National Agro-Alimentary Health, Safety and Quality Service (Senasica) recruited and trained 20 dogs, which were assigned to the same number of officials who came from those countries to the facilities of the training center located in Tecámac, State of Mexico, for a six-weeks training, to create a bond and to learn how to carry out inspection work with the help of the canines.

With this, in 10 years of operation, Senasica has trained 42 K-9 binomials for the member countries of the International Regional Organization for Agricultural Health (OIRSA), of which Mexico is a member along with Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and the Dominican Republic.

These actions contribute to improving detection systems for risk products at ports, airports and borders and strengthen the efforts of Latin American nations to protect themselves from the spread of pests and diseases such as African swine fever (ASF), *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *cubense* Raza 4, and the giant African snail.

During the graduation of the 46th Generation of the K-9 School, which consisted of 15 new handlers and two changes of command (reassignment of canines), OIRSA's representative in Mexico, Octavio Carranza de Mendoza, pointed out that in the last five years, the Central American and Caribbean region has increased its preventive work exponentially, adjusting to scientific principles and cutting-edge techniques, such as non-intrusive inspection.

He commented that this generation acquires a great responsibility, since tomorrow, at some point of entry to the Dominican Republic and Guatemala, they could prevent the passage of a product carrying a pest or disease of quarantine importance that could endanger the assets of local producers.

Pedro Macías Canales, Director of the Agriculture Agency's K-9 School, emphasized that the new officers graduate with solid knowledge and methodology that will enable them to provide the highest level of service to their country and to the continent, since when a country increases its prevention measures, it protects its neighboring territories.

He recalled that, at the beginning of 2022, OIRSA designated the Senasica K-9 School as a Regional Reference Center, so it has the responsibility to contribute to the phytosanitary and zoosanitary protection of member countries.

He emphasized that to keep K-9 binomial training processes up to date, Senasica maintains technical exchanges with countries that are also international benchmarks in non-intrusive inspection of agri-foodstuffs, such as New Zealand, Australia, and Chile.

More than 1,400 inspection officers work in our country, of which 90 are K-9 binomials, who are responsible for monitoring the 21 ports, 38 airports and 27 border points, and for keeping Mexico free of around 1,000 agricultural pests and 78 animal diseases that are present in other countries.

OIRSA's acting executive director, Óscar Zelaya Estradé; the regional director of Quarantine Services, Raúl Rodas Suazo; and the Agency's representative in Guatemala, Nidia Sandoval, urged the inspection officers to put into practice with professionalism the tools acquired at Senasica's Canine School, which, they agreed, is one of the most highly valued training centers at international level.