

December 4, 2010

To: Henry Bierlink

From: Tom Krugman

Re: Report from IRO Chile 2010 Meeting

The International Raspberry Organization (IRO) met November 30 – December 2 in Talca, Chile for the purpose of exchanging production information, discuss common issues and challenges, and work to build a better international market for raspberries. Attendees included representatives from China, Poland, Bulgaria, Serbia, England, Scotland, Australia, Canada, United States, Ecuador, and the host country, Chile. On the first day, representatives from most of the countries presented formal reports. Copies of their electronic presentations will be submitted separately.

The following two days were spent touring raspberry and blueberry farms, cold storage facilities, and processing plants. Delegates saw asparagus, blueberry, and raspberry processing or re-packing. The comments that follow come from the informal discussions that occurred during the tours and are indicative of the state of the raspberry industry in Chile.

There are between 70 – 80 freezers in Chile, receiving 50 – 60,000 metric tons of raspberries produced by 20,000 growers on approximately 15,000 hectares. The industry is dominated by small farmers, with the average farm approximately .8 hectares. These farmers deliver to a local cold storage facility that acts as a “consolidator” prior to delivery to the freezer. This allows a traceback system that would otherwise not be possible due to the many growers and small deliveries.

The industry has fully embraced food safety as a result of the disruption in the market caused by the 2002 cyclospora contamination initially linked to Chilean raspberries but was eventually traced to Guatemalan strawberries. GAPs, GMPs, and regular field and factory audits are a normal part of business. In every field toured, signs were prominently displayed regarding field sanitation.



Prior to entering processing facilities, we were required to wash our hands, don coats and hair nets, and in one facility, put on rubber boots before going through a foot bath.



The Chilean industry fully understands the catastrophic consequences of product contamination and has taken the steps to minimize the potential for future contamination. All processors discussed their traceback systems, made more complicated by the number of small farms and the consolidation of product at cold storage facilities prior to being sent to the processor.

Chilean growers benefit from deep, rich soil. One organic grower reported that his soil had 16% organic material, in part due to incorporating his cover crop (oats and lupine) back into the soil.



Flood irrigation was typical, with no reports of root rot issues or nematodes. Plants were on low berms, less than 12 inches in height.



Hand labor was utilized extensively throughout the fields and processing facilities, with many functions being done manually that would be automated in the United States. With the entire raspberry crop hand-picked, and hand sorted in the plants, industry-wide production of IQF raspberries was estimated 65+%. Raspberries are predominantly a processed crop in Chile with the largest share destined to export markets in Europe, Asia, and the United States.



From all reports, it would appear that the Chilean government, on both national and regional/local levels, fully embraces agriculture. A recently enacted government program provides assistance to small growers, those of less than 15 hectares. Technology transfer and loans are provided through regional organizations that blend the functions of our county commission structure with cooperative extension. In some instances growers did not participate in these programs, instead taking technical and/or production direction from their freezer.



The Maule region, where Talca is located, is the largest raspberry producing region, with 15,000 growers on 9,000 hectares. Regional growers receive between \$5 – 20,000 of assistance with the goal of improved quality and quantity

of production, and growth of exports leading to improved profitability. Ingrid, pictured above with Antonio Dominguez and two farmers, is the representative of INDAP, the governmental agency providing assistance to local farmers.