Working together to ensure **food safety** and **quality production**

The Mexican Vegetable Project
How it all began
Among the most important vegetables grown in the Mexican state of Guanajuato, the central region of the country known as El Bajío, are broccoli and cauliflower. Over 90% of the produce is exported, above all to the USA. The recent publication of the U.S. Food Safety Modernization Act has led to stricter safety controls on primary producers and packers of food. This has obliged all participants in the value chain to invest more resources in programmes to reduce the infestation risk at all stages from the field and the processing and packing facilities to the distribution and sales outlets.

MarBran, one of Mexico’s largest exporters of frozen broccoli, cauliflower and carrots, has been using Bayer CropScience products to control the main pests affecting broccoli, cauliflower and other vegetables for many years. But as MarBran was increasingly concerned about food safety issues during the production process, Bayer CropScience was invited to present its Food Chain Partnership concept in 2010.

What we aim to achieve
The main goal of this Food Chain Partnership project has been to collaborate in the consolidation of an important Mexican plan, “System-Product-Broccoli”, to establish El Bajío as a premium broccoli production zone in global terms. The idea is that the El Bajío zone should become the safest and most reliable production area of broccoli in the world. MarBran also sees the plan as a means of increasing sales of frozen broccoli, above all to the USA. The third and final goal is to support the correct use of Bayer CropScience’s crop protection products as sustainable solutions for pest control and management and ensure strict compliance with the relevant norms and Maximum Residue Limits.

One of the main concerns of the Association members is that their farmers obtain the SRCR (System for the Reduction of Contamination Risks) certification, but the main focus is on attaining certifications such as SQF (Safe Quality Food) 2000.
Who is involved

Founded in 1962 with just one farm and one processing plant, MarBran is now a world-class company and a leading member of Mexico’s Association of Processors and Exporters of Fruit and Vegetables. The Association represents the most important companies in broccoli and cauliflower production who are responsible for more than 80% of Mexico’s broccoli and cauliflower exports. MarBran exports 93% of its total produce to a variety of countries, though the USA is its main market. MarBran’s mission includes aiming to offer its customers the best possible combination of quality, service and price, while fulfilling its obligations to the community and environment in a responsible way.

Besides supplying crop protection products, Bayer Crop-Science Mexico sees the Food Chain Partnership programme as an ideal tool for supporting vegetable farmers by giving advice and practical training in good agricultural practices and integrated pest management. The goal is to maximise food safety and quality standards as well as to optimise production costs.
The main pests affecting broccoli and cauliflower in this region of Mexico are the diamond back moth (*Plutella xylostella*), other larvae and aphids (*Brevicoryne brassicae*). The Bayer CropScience products Movento®, Belt® and Confidor® have been used to combat these pests. MarBran’s specialists had already designed a pest and disease control programme, but as the Food Chain Partnership project developed it became clear that there were further opportunities to introduce technical innovations to the programme. The solutions developed came from specialists working for the Technical Committee of Freezing Plants (COTECO), universities, government research centres, seed producers and Bayer CropScience.

The training courses run for vegetable farmers, suppliers and MarBran’s technical staff focused on the safe use and management of crop protection products while those for processing plant personnel dealt with the control of rodents and urban pests.
The project continues with the ongoing aim of establishing El Bajío as a premium broccoli production region through the Mexican “System-Product-Broccoli” plan. Moreover, the project is intended to include other members of the Association besides MarBran.

“MarBran and Bayer CropScience are both interested in applying good agricultural practices to ensure food safety, and to fulfil the requirements of purchasers and consumers the world over.”

What we have achieved

The project is still continuing, but already it is clear that all those involved are benefiting from a more responsible and optimised use of crop protection products to control pests and diseases, the application of good agricultural practices, and compliance with food safety requirements.

The next steps

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Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of the need for healthy nutrition. Food Chain Partnerships help to supply consumers with high-quality fresh produce, which forms the basis of a healthy diet. But such partnerships can only succeed if they involve every player in the food chain – from the farmer and processor to the exporter or importer and retailer. Bayer CropScience has the global experience and cutting-edge expertise to create a successful partnership at every level.

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