

By Tim Linden

## Guatemala Avocado Group Looking at U.S. Market

About five years ago, Guatemala began exporting avocados to Europe and some of its Central American neighbors and now it is eyeing the U.S. market.

Producers in Guatemala have an organization – the Avocado Committee of the Guatemalan Exporters Association (Agexport) – and in May they held their first National Avocado Congress to discuss the industry and its challenges and opportunities. Among the topics on the agenda was the effort to export to the United States. A local Guatemalan newspaper reported on the event and some of that information was relayed to the general produce industry by freshfruitportal.com, an online media publication focused on providing daily news for the global produce industry.

That news organization reported that Guatemala officials are working on the avocado industry's phytosanitary challenges to gain access to the U.S. market. A speaker during the Congress revealed that the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food is currently taking an inventory of pests in the country's avocado crop to determine what hurdles it needs to jump over for U.S. access. During the meeting, a government official noted that Guatemala was planning to submit its application to U.S. authorities as soon as this summer, and it appears it has lofty expectations about the timetable for success. A representative from an avocado production company noted that the goal for approval from the United States was about 18 months.

Since its foray into export mar-



The principal avocado regions of Guatemala, such as Antigua and San Cristobal Verapaz, are highlighted in red on the map above.

kets a handful of years ago, Guatemala has focused on Europe and has not yet gained access to key Asian markets, according to reports from the Congress.

Rob Wedin, executive vice president of sales for Calavo Growers Inc., Santa Paula, CA, gave *From the Grove* a thumbnail sketch of the Guatemalan avocado industry. Guatemala currently has about 15,000 hectares (37,000 acres) of avocados under production. The main season is from December through May with off-bloom production in June and July.

The total production is estimated

to be in the 100 million-pound-range with only 5-7% of that exported. Europe receives about 70% of those exports with 25% going to Central American countries and 5% to Canada.

These numbers do represent a significant increase in the last five years. In 2015, it was reported that Guatemala had 7,500 producing hectares when it launched its first export efforts.

Wedin said approval of phytosanitary requirements to ship to the United States is expected to take several years with 2024/25 being a more reasonable expectation. 🥑