



“Proud of being involved in the Food Chain Partnership”

Bayer’s Food Chain Partnership initiative is about great sustainable agricultural projects that are spread all over the world. One successful partner is Grupo El Ciruelo, a Spanish growing and trading company for grapes and stone fruit. Read why Rupert Maude, the Group’s Commercial Director, is so proud of being a long-term partner in the Food Chain Partnership initiative.

Mr. Maude, what is the main business of Grupo El Ciruelo and how would you describe your company?

Rupert Maude: “We are growers, packers and exporters. Not everything we do is for export, but most of it is. We keep about 20 percent here at home in Spain and export the other 80 percent. A lot of our products are sold in Europe and abroad: we do business in Africa, Asia, Scandinavia, Central Europe, the UK, and even the Southern Mediterranean. In 2014 our volumes were around 30 million kilos of grapes and 29 million kilos of stone fruit. Our ambition is to further increase volumes by 50 percent in grapes and roughly 25 percent in stone fruit. Our Spanish home market is a very important one since it’s a developing market. Seedless grapes are increasingly in demand in Spain, and that is great.”

Which agricultural challenges do you have to master every single day?

Rupert Maude: “First of all, it is the weather and conditions here in Murcia. They are very different to other places and most of the time the conditions are ideal for what we are doing because the climate is very warm. We are in a part of the world where we have mostly sunshine. But when it rains, we have very strong rain and also get hail. So we have two total extremes. On the one hand, we have to cope with extreme heat, on the other, there is extreme rain and hail. Another challenge is specific individual requirements and certification schemes for each customer. It might be the size of the berries, the level of sugar in the fruit or even the color. We are trying to produce the best possible product and to appeal to as many customers as possible. This, just like the weather, is very challenging. So the whole Food Chain Partnership project is aimed at achieving that.”

What role does the shortage of water and sophisticated water management play here?

Rupert Maude: “Shortage of water is indeed a problem here in the southeast of Spain. This area is very dry. So we have to use the available water as efficiently as possible. To manage this we use reservoirs and irrigation systems. The weather situation is a little bit paradox: Having less rainfall is absolutely an advantage for the crops but it also makes them more difficult to grow. So it is important to use the least amount of water in the right place and at the right time. That is what sustainable agriculture is about.”





You mentioned certifications: How important are they for your business?

Rupert Maude: “In terms of certifications we are involved in all the common schemes: Global GAP, the IFS, the BRC, and a few more. And some of them are very interesting: like the “Field to Fork” which is a Marks & Spencer project that incorporates Bayer’s Food Chain Partnership. We are involved in Leaf (Local Environment Action Fund) as well. That is a project entirely about the environment. So we aren’t just doing the necessary certifications; we are also looking further afield. And I think this is very important for our business.”

How would you describe the feedback you get from your customers?

Rupert Maude: “The feedback we get from our clients is very positive. Actually, a lot of people come to us and visit the farms. There we present our experiences in being involved in the Bayer Food Chain Partnership initiative. We talk about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and what we achieve with it – and therefore we get really good results. Our customers take this information back with them and will use it for their consumers.”

How would you summarize the success of the Food Chain Partnership project so far?

Rupert Maude: “The success of Bayer’s Food Chain Partnership for me has been the reduction in pesticide residues inputs but even more the confidence that we can inspire in our clients. I think this generates trust not only with our customers but also with the end customer: the consumer. The whole thing together is a very successful project. And in my opinion Bayer’s Food Chain Partnership is unique. There is nothing else like it out there. So that is something we feel really proud to be involved in.”

About Grupo El Ciruelo:

Grupo El Ciruelo is located in the southeast of Spain on the Mediterranean and lies between the autonomous communities of Valencia, Castile-La Mancha, and Andalusia. The company farms from the edge of Ave Maria province all the way through to the north of Murcia. It runs 30 different farms with an approximate size of 2,000 hectares and employs 2,500 people in the peak season and around 550 in the off-season (winter). The company was founded in the 1970s and started by selling table grapes and plums. In 1989 the El Ciruelo trading company was founded. Grupo El Ciruelo is an expert in growing, packing and exporting stone fruit and table grapes. The company’s main crops are cherries, apricots, nectarines, plums and peaches, and a large range of seeded and seedless grapes (red, white, and black). Grupo El Ciruelo has been a partner in Bayer’s Food Chain Partnership since 2008.

