

Mango Growers from Bahia, Brazil, Find Buyers Overseas

Contributed by Fátima Emediato
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Copefrul, the Brazilian Cooperative of Small Farmers of Fruit from Livramento and Surroundings, in the state of Bahia, in the Northeast of Brazil, which exported its first shipments of mango in November and December 2008, totaling 150 tons, wants to triple that result in 2009.

In order to do so, according to the manager of the Project for Fruit Farming in the Region of Livramento, Mônica Rizério, this year the cooperative should obtain the GlobalCap and Integrated Fruit Production (IFP) certifications, accredited by the Institute of Metrology, Normalization and Industrial Quality of the State of Bahia (Ibametro). After the certification, the fruit farmers will be fully professionalized.

In early November, they celebrated the shipping of the first container. A total of 22 tons mango were sold to Canada by means of the company Agrolime - Limes Agrobusiness Comércio e Exportação de Frutas Ltda. The farmers did not stop there. On November 27, they shipped five other containers, with 22 tons each, of the Tommy Atkins mango variety to Canada and France.

The president at Copefrul, Antônio Alves Silva, said that this was the first time ever that the cooperative exported mango, and that farmers are enthused.

"The Sebrae/Bahia enabled us to have a differential by obtaining knowledge in the sales area, offering courses and promoting technical and trade missions by means of its Sebrae Trade Brazil program, through which we got to know new markets. Lots of mangoes that used to be thrown away, because we were not able to sell them, are now exported. We want to triple our exports."

The sales director at Copefrul, José Aparecido Dourado, explains that in the past, fruit farmers in Livramento barely knew what the word "market" meant.

"Everything changed after we established a partnership with the Sebrae/Bahia for the fruit farming project, which helped strengthen cooperativism among our farmers. The best part was taking part in technical and trade missions, with the support of the Sebrae, by which we got to know other markets, such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

"Early on, we used to sell a box of mangoes to São Paulo for 3 Brazilian reais (US\$ 1.3), but then we met clients in Rio de Janeiro, where we sell a box for 4 reais (US\$ 1.8). From the Sebrae, we learnt to go after the clients instead of waiting around. Now, a minimum of 9 trucks loaded with mangoes leave the Copefrul each week, headed for São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba and the coastline of the state of Bahia," celebrates José Aparecido.

The sales director at the Copefrul reports that the work carried out by the manager Mônica Rizério, of the Sebrae/Bahia, was perfect. "Mônica is the mother of the cooperative. She helped the farmers to prepare the packing house, a warehouse in which the fruit is washed and packed. The project, valued at 620,000 reais (US\$ 283,247), received funding from the Bank of Brazil Foundation.

"With it, we started offering quality mangoes to the market, and that led us to expand our sales to other states, and now to Europe and Canada. We believed in the project and now we are reaping the fruits. This year, we have already managed to exceed our goal of selling the equivalent to 1 million reais (US\$ 456,850)", says José Aparecido Doura.

Mônica Rizério explains that the market access project that was implemented at the Copefrul was only successful thanks to partnerships with the Bank of Brazil Foundation, the Livramento City Hall, the Agricultural Defense Agency of the State of Bahia (Adab) and the Bahia Agricultural Development Company (EBDA).

The coordinator of the Agribusiness II Portfolio at the Sebrae/Bahia, Célia Fernandes, informed that the Copefrul is going to receive 200,000 reais (US\$ 91,370) from Sebrae's Edict for Fair Trade.

"The funds will be invested in market actions and in obtaining a Fair Trade certification for Copefrul, a social certification attesting that the product comes from family farming, that the Cooperative works in a sustainable manner, preserving the environment, without using child or slave labour."

Sebrae