

## Brazil's Fragole Uses Art to Sell Clothes Worldwide

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A garment factory from Porto Alegre, capital of the southernmost Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, found in the union of art and fashion a form of entering the wardrobes of consumers worldwide.

Fragole produces clothes painted by artists and, despite having entered the export market just four years ago, already has products traded in 25 countries.

From their industrial unit in the Rio Branco neighbourhood, in Porto Alegre, capital of the southernmost Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, between 10,000 and 20,000 day and night beach fashion garments are produced, among them bikinis, bathing suits, cangas, shorts, bermudas, handbags, trousers, dresses and blouses.

The clothes are hand-painted or embroidered with natural shells, mother of pearl or crystals.

The artistic touch was the differential Fragole found to win markets in and outside Brazil.

"With globalization, products became very similar, everything is widespread, whereas our product is very personal," stated company manager and partner Claudia Regina Tropea.

The products are signed by the artists, all with college degrees, and are made exclusively for each buyer.

"The customer may order thousands of products, each different from the other," she said. Currently, 14 artists work for the company.

Last year foreign trade revenues reached US\$ 200,000. In 2005 they intend to increase the total to US\$ 300,000.

Among the countries that purchased company products are Germany, the United States, Spain, France, Portugal, Australia, Italy, South Africa, Russia, Greece, Mexico, Panama and Finland.

The United Arab Emirates is the only Arab country that purchases products made by Fragole. The first sale to that country took place last year.

"We sell a small volume, around US\$1,900 a month, for market testing. We are anxiously awaiting the results as, according to the client, the products were very well accepted," stated Cláudia.

The manager and partner stated that first of all the company wants to wait for the result of the business so as to enter other Arab countries at a later date.

The clothes purchased by the Emirates are bikinis and bathrobes. The models are the same as those made for Europe, which are a little larger than the ones distributed in Brazil.

Cláudia believes in growth on the Arab market for products made by Fragole. "Arabs and tourists who visit the country like buying different products for personal use or to give their friends," she said.

The efforts to enter the international market began around five years ago, with the help of the SebraExport Moda, a program for the sponsorship of exports by the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae).

The first sale was made to an Argentine shop owner, during a textile sector fair in São Paulo. "We ended our first year on the export market having sold US\$ 5,000," recalled Cláudia.

Export currently answers to half the Fragole production. So as to increase foreign sales in 2005, the company has already programmed participation in various fairs in and outside Brazil, prospecting markets and participating in international missions with sector organizations, chambers of commerce and embassies, as well as sponsoring sales to part of their international distributors.

#### Franchise in Mexico

The company products are distributed in around 400 points of sale in Brazil, as well as two of their own stores on the coast of Rio Grande do Sul, one of them in the city of Capão da Canoa and another in Tramandaí.

There are plans to start an international franchise chain. The first stores should be opened on the Mexican coast, according to Cláudia.

The Fragole factory covers an area of approximately 1,500 square meters. The company has 19 direct employees and three interns, as 95% of production is in the hands of third party service providers.

In peak production months, 200 people provide services to the company. In 2005, they should increase their production by 25%.

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