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# GREENHOUSE TECHNIQUES YIELD BETTER FLAVOR AND RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTION



**A**s greenhouse vegetables continue to grow in demand, top growers and marketers are taking steps to ensure the future of the category is both flavorful and sustainable. PRODUCE BUSINESS spoke with **David Bon, chief executive of Viva Organica Farms** in Culiacan, Sinoloa, Mexico, to better understand how their production methods relate to the flavor and quality of the products. Viva Organica's product is sold through its marketing arm, Divine Flavor LLC in Nogales, AZ.

**PB:** How does your greenhouse production contribute to the mission of Divine Flavor?

**Bon:** Divine Flavor is a strong believer in taking care of its people and the environment. We promote fair trade with all our growers and customers to ensure we continue not only to improve the working conditions at our farms, but also to produce fresh, non-GMO foods grown in nutrient-rich, never over-farmed soil. Our mission is anchored in three major pillars: social responsibility, well-being and innovation. To that end, we have three locations in Mexico in order to guarantee year-round supply and consistency in volume and



quality. All three operations combined are a little more than 400 acres.

**PB:** What are the main products grown in your greenhouses?

**Bon:** Currently, our main products are: grape tomatoes, tomatoes-on-the-vine (TOV), beefsteak tomatoes, sweet mini peppers, English cucumbers, and Persian cucumbers. We will also be starting with a medley tomato program this winter. These are all greenhouse-grown, and we have both organic and conventional in all the categories.

**PB:** So what advantages does a greenhouse program offer customers over open-field, and what does that mean in real terms?

**Bon:** We are very focused on flavor, and all of our systems are designed to optimize flavor in our products. For example, our main product is the grape tomato, and we have one of the best varieties for flavor available in the market. Only we know how to grow that variety to get the best flavor from it. We can have 20 percent more BRIX on average than our main competitors in sweet grape tomatoes.

**PB:** Without revealing any trade secrets, just how do you optimize flavor with production?

**Bon:** It's a combination of many factors, including organic irrigation, fertilization and other techniques we've been adjusting to perfection for many years. We actively invest in pursuing these methods. For example, we brought in agronomists from Spain well known for growing



high flavor tomatoes. Also, flavor is so important to us that we are willing to sacrifice our yield for the flavor.

**PB:** In addition to flavor, sustainability is also important to the company. How do the systems and methods you employ contribute to sustainable production?

**Bon:** I can share several major examples of this. One, we re-use the water from our drainage in hydroponic. In hydroponic, you typically have 30 percent drainage. A typical grower would dispose of that water, but we recirculate the water after it has been disinfected and mixed with other water. Second, all the food waste from our production is used to make our own compost. This is product that doesn't meet grade or leaves we trim from the plant. We also use less fertilizer because we add this compost. Third, we use solar energy in all three locations.

**PB:** What other systems or techniques contribute to your innovative greenhouse production?

**Bon:** What is really unique is our combination of being organic and sustainable. We reduce the use of pesticides, even organic pesticides, by using Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Our IPM typically reduces spraying significantly - sometimes we can reduce by 30 percent just through introducing beneficial insects.

Another interesting technique is our production of a lone micro-organism that we add to our irrigating solution. We do this constantly so it lowers the amount of disease you would typically find in the soil. The headquarters facility of our parent company has a lab, and every two weeks,

they supply us with these micro-organisms. We are looking for every possible method to reduce pesticides and chemical intervention for the good of our environment, our workers and our consumers.

**PB:** Social responsibility is another pillar of the company's mission. Just how invested in social responsibility are your facilities?

**Bon:** We take social responsibility very seriously. A demonstration of this is the high quality campus we designed for our workers. It is a modern facility with many amenities and services. This motivates our employees to not only have a good life, but to be better workers and people.

We can guarantee the quality in every box we sell because the people working on these products share our values and have a good standard of living. We are committed to growing flavorful, consistent year-round products in both organic and conventional with sustainable and socially responsible production methods. We invite buyers and industry members to visit our facilities so they can see first-hand how we

implement our mission – we are doing what we value.

For More Information on Divine Flavor, please contact us:



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"Better Food for a Better World"