

Coordination and Partnerships – Best approach for market access

Corn production has been a primary agricultural activity in Belize and every year there is normally a surplus. However due to the lack of a formalized market for this commodity in neighbouring countries, the informal trade has gone on for quite some time. While the informal trade may seem to be a good option in the beginning, after some time the exporter needs to appease more and more of the middlemen and eventually the trade becomes prohibitively expensive to the point of not being economically feasible.

A few years ago, the private sector began the process of gaining formalized trade of corn grain with Guatemala in order to export the surplus corn from Belize. The requirement given to the Belizean exporter at the time was for the corn to be treated during packing with Aluminum Phosphide- a fumigant used to treat grains in addition to a treatment of Methyl Bromide when the corn reached the Guatemalan border. This requirement was considered unreasonable since it seemed to be a duplication of phytosanitary treatments in addition to being more expensive. It was then that exporters realized the need to involve the NPPO in trying to negotiate a treatment that would meet the appropriate level of protection for Guatemala while at the same time being something that was practical.

The Plant Health Department along with the SPS coordinator reviewed the situation and began communication with counterparts to try and resolve the issue. At one point, Guatemala decided to accept the phytosanitary certificate from Belize however with the condition that the phytosanitary certificate is stamped with the OIRSA stamp; OIRSA being the regional NPPO. We believe that this might have been as a result of OIRSA assuming some of the functions of the quarantine service of that country. This was eventually resolved and Belize's phytosanitary certificate no longer required this stamp.

Formal communication began with emails from the Plant Health Director of Belize to his Guatemalan counterpart however there was no response to our concerns. The director then wrote a formal letter and again there was no response. All this while, the private sector is demanding that we take action since there is only a small 'window' when it is feasible to export their corn. When we did not receive any

response, the Director made a personal phone call to his counterpart whom he knew personally after which it was agreed that Guatemala would agree for Aluminum Phosphide to be used as the phytosanitary treatment. Since Belize is a part of the OIRSA and Plant Health Directors meet regularly, both Plant Health Directors were able to resolve the issue after face to face discussions. Corn from Belize is now being exported without any problems and the private sector is happy to have formal trade rather than informal.

Note: OIRSA- International Regional Organization for Agricultural Health.