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Mexico's Greenhouse Produce Companies to Become Certified Under FMI's Safe Quality Food Program

ARLINGTON, VA — April 3, 2009 — All 150 members of the Mexican association for companies that grow produce in greenhouses and other covered structures, known as protected horticulture, recently committed to be certified under the Safe Quality Food (SQF) Program of the Food Marketing Institute (FMI).

This commitment is part of a new food safety and quality initiative by the Asociación Mexicana de Horticultura Protegida (AMHPAC), whose members produce 900,000 tons of bell and hot peppers, cucumbers, eggplants, tomatoes and specialty items per year — most of it exported to Canada, Europe, Japan and the U.S.

“AMHPAC’s strong commitment to food safety will benefit the millions of American consumers who increasingly enjoy the consistency, quality and taste of produce such as vine-ripened tomatoes grown in controlled environments,” said John Schulz, director of business operations at the SQF Institute, which administers the food safety certification program.

“By working with our members to obtain SQF certification, our plan is to ensure the integrity of our products anywhere they are delivered worldwide. Many retailers have committed to do this. Now is our time to do the same,” said Cesar Campaña, chairman of AMHPAC’s Board of Directors.

AMHPA members will be SQF-certified within two years, he said. Certification will cover safe growing practices, packaging and distribution.

SQF certification audits are among the most rigorous in the food safety field. The program is the only one worldwide recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative for growing fresh produce.

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The SQF Institute, a division of the Food Marketing Institute, offers a leading, global food safety and quality certification program and management system, designed to meet the needs of buyers and suppliers worldwide. The program provides independent certification that a supplier’s food safety and quality management system complies with international and domestic food safety regulations. This enables suppliers to assure their customers that food has been produced, processed, prepared and handled according to the highest possible standards, at all levels of the supply chain.

AMHPAC represents 150 companies involved in the production, packing, distribution and export of fresh fruits and vegetables produced under “protected horticulture.” This includes greenhouse (plastic or glass), net or shade house, macro and micro tunnels and thermal plastic-metallic covers. AMHPAC members are located in 21 Mexican states, totaling 8,650 acres, 35 percent of the total production under protected horticulture in Mexico. The land devoted to protected horticulture in the country increased from 3,214 hectares (7,900 acres) in 2005 to 9,948 hectares (24,600 acres) in 2008.