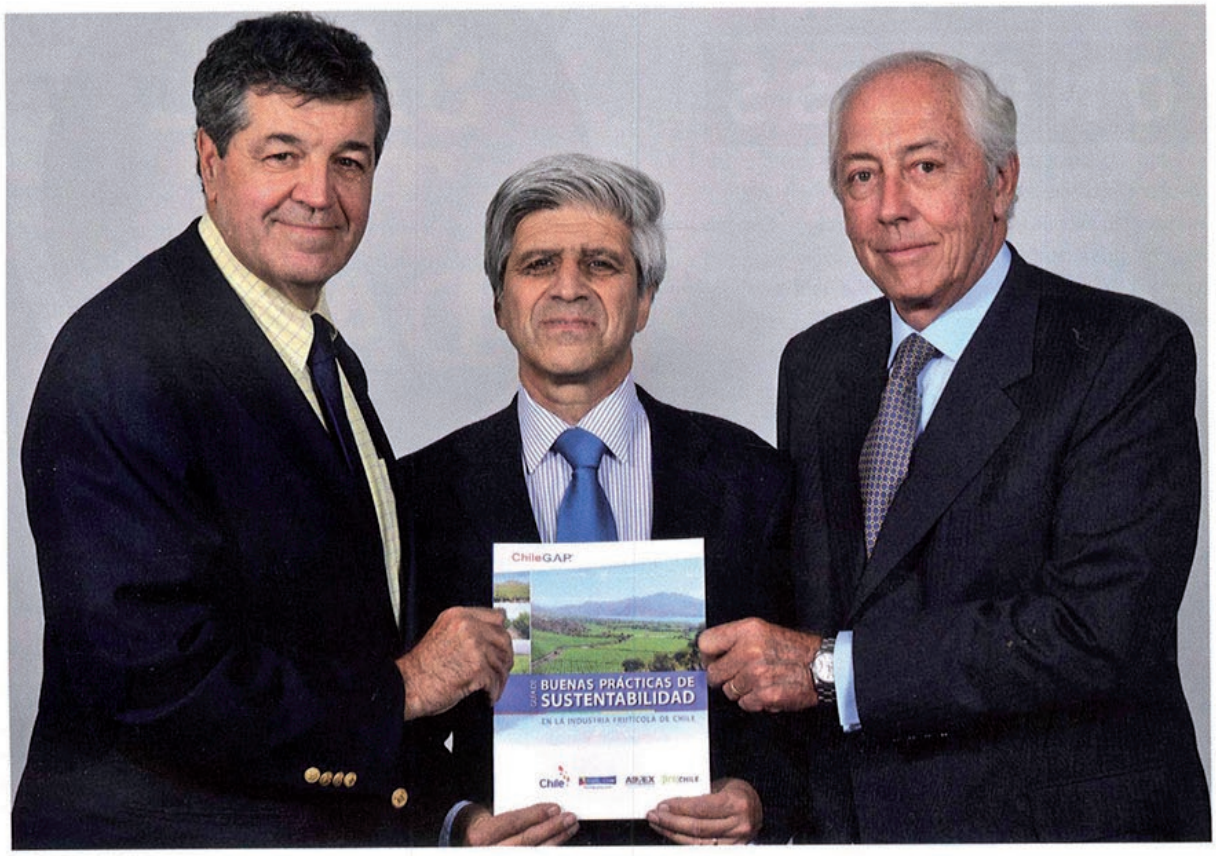
REPORT
—*Sustainability*



Chile launches sustainability guide

SANTIAGO—The Chilean fresh fruit industry is tackling head-on the issue of environmental, economic and social sustainability with the release of a set of grower guidelines benchmarked against global demands.

by Gill McShane

One of the world's first industry-wide efforts to create a set of tools covering the increasingly important issue of sustainability in the fresh fruit industry will be launched in Chile this month. The tools include a guideline on best practices, a checklist for self evaluation and a collection of resources to facilitate the application of techniques related to sustainability.

The best practice guide – compiled by the Fruit Development Foundation (FDF) and the Chilean Fruit Exporters Association (Asoex), with the support of Chile's Export

Promotional Bureau (ProChile) and the agriculture ministry – benchmarks sustainability protocols and agendas published by authorities and retail customers from around the world, and presents them in an easy-to-use online format.

While sustainability has no singly recognised definition, the guide outlines the key elements that growers and exporters need to be aware of, allows them to analyse the situation of their own growing operation, and identifies some basic measures that can be undertaken to bring any business into line with the demands of global customers.

The free-to-download guide has been written for fresh fruit growers in Chile. It will be launched at the Global Berry Congress, organised by EUROFRUIT in Santiago on 24-26 April, and subsequently introduced to the entire Chilean fruit industry through an extensive communications campaign in the following weeks.

"This is an industry initiative which brings together and harmonises the most relevant international sustainability guidelines in a format that is both understandable and relevant at a grower level," says Francisco Letelier, president of FDF. "The same principles are applicable further along the supply chain, for which the guide will be customised in the coming months."

TOP—Chile's fruit suppliers will be able to score their growing operations according to a set of criteria
RIGHT—The guideline will be free to download for all fresh fruit growers
OPPOSITE—(l-r) Asoex's Ronald Bown, Ricardo Adonis of FDF and Francisco Letelier, president of FDF

According to Ricardo Adonis, FDF's general development manager and co-author of the publication, the guide includes an online self-evaluation tool that will allow every Chilean grower and exporter to assess where they are positioned with regards to a set of key sustainability criteria.

"Independently, they can use a scorecard to measure their business on aspects such as environmental, economic and social sustainability, to have a clear picture of which areas they might need to improve, in order to ensure that they continue to meet the demands of international customers in the future," Adonis notes.

Economic uncertainty is the most obvious sustainability issue being faced by fruit growers worldwide, but Chile's fruit industry is also not alone in facing challenges including rising energy costs, the need to preserve water resources, social and environmental challenges. "Undoubtedly, sustainability issues will continue to evolve and it is important that the industry be aware of its implications," adds Ronald Bown, chairman of the board at Asoex.

"Our role is to facilitate this understanding and prepare our growers and exporters on how to adapt to these new requirements.

TOP FRUIT
Chile is the Southern Hemisphere's leading fruit exporter, as well as the world's largest exporter of table grapes, plums and blueberries, in terms of volume. Asoex represents 96.5 per cent of Chile's fruit exports and 63.1 per cent of the total planted area.

"The industry has for many years been involved in the development of Good Agricultural Practices, through our ChileGAP programme, and we see the creation of this industry-lead guide as a complementary step forward to the efforts that our growers and exporters have undertaken in the past to assure our clients about the standards of our products and processes, and our care for the environment and labour force."