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INDIA-CHILE CONNECTION IN AGRICULTURE: 13 YEARS OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP



It was back in the early 2000s, when in the always busy Ministry of Agriculture of Chile, a few visionaries envisaged an important wager, to establish an office with one specific goal: to boost the agricultural relation between both the countries. Pros and cons were pondered and finally, in 2004 Chile became the first Latin American country in having an Agricultural Office in India.

Fostering a relation from scratches was the task assigned to Mr Gonzalo Ibáñez, the very first Agricultural representative from Chile. He started to pave the road and now, after more than one decade, there is a close and fruitful relationship, with MOUs signed on the fields of cooperation and research, with work plans and other documents reflecting the progress and evolution of the partnership. Nowadays, India is a giant in terms of food production, whereas Chile cannot compete in big volumes and prefers to focus on quality and an offer based on dependability. Therefore, for the Agricultural office, one of the challenges today is to complement both countries realities in a way that will benefit both the parties. Thus, Chile's Agri-Office deals with building strategic partnership; technically oriented to facilitate market access within the concept of "safe trade", i.e. providing technically sound solutions to offer the Indian consumers with high class food, without harming Indian consumers, the agriculture and so forth. In recent years, imaginative



Figure 1: Some of the Chilean food offer to India

ways have made possible to reach agreements with Indian authorities in various products, such as seafood, fresh fruit, walnuts, plant germplasm, etc.

WTO's SPS and TBT agreements are part of the A - B - C of the work done at the Office, as well as the IPPC, OIE, CODEX and so forth. This is just too specific for a newcomer like Naina Mahajan, one of the now highly experienced staff, who, while remembering her beginnings she grins: "It was like falling in love with a porcupine", with too many spiny corners. Then Abhishek, assistant of the Office, agrees: "yes, it was pretty much like an octopi fight".

Today, the rapid and sustained economic growth that India is having and the increasing weight and presence in stringent international markets like the US and Europe, show the good health of the Indian Agriculture and the presence in India is -now more than ever- of strategic importance. In the words of Mr. Andrés Barbé, H. Ambassador of Chile in India, "At present, Chile has 12 Agricultural Offices strategically located around the world. The Office in India now completes 13 years, being from the beginning the only agricultural representation from a Latin American country in India. Dealing with technical cooperation, research and trade facilitation, this agricultural connection has yielded multiple benefits for the Indian and Chilean consumers and soundly projects to the future". Thinking about the future, there are new challenges in trade opportunities and technical cooperation. Increasing awareness in consumers, environmental concerns, the need of reliable and simpler certifications schemes, among many other, will keep India -Chile relation busy and increasing. Mankind will need more food and then major

Figure 2: "it was like falling in love with a porcupine", Naina grins.



suppliers like India will play an important role in coping with the ensuing challenges like the so called "9 billion people", a reality that in a few decades will be true and many of them will have Indian and Chilean products as their staple food. If we continue to grow together, a bright future can be foreseen now, for the benefit

of Indians and Chileans as good and friendly partners. Last, but not least, a recognition to all the staff colleagues that were a part of the Agricultural Office of Chile in India; counsellors and assistants, who strived to enhance the relations. Yes, though far away in kilometres, the connection now looks closer and warmer.