

Illegal orchards under scrutiny in US-Mexico avocado trade

By Elizabeth Schroeder | 4 March 2024 | 6:00 am

Environmental and legal uncertainty is threatening the integrity of the international avocado market, amid rising concerns about illegal avocado orchards in Mexico.



This was according to the LatinAmerican Post digital media outlet, which reported that the US ambassador to Mexico, Ken Salazar, “was advocating for stricter export protocols to ensure sustainability and legality in the booming avocado trade between Mexico and the US”.

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During a recent visit to the heartland of Mexico’s avocado production, Michoacan state, Salazar said that as the world’s largest consumer of the fruit, the US was calling for urgent scrutiny of the production of avocados in illegal orchards, which were then being exported to the US.

According to the [*LatinAmerican Post*](#), Michoacan had a unique climate that resulted in avocado trees being able to bloom four times a year.

“The state’s lucrative avocado industry, propelled by the global appetite for guacamole and other avocado-based dishes, faces a shadow cast by the rise of illegal orchards. These illicit operations contribute to significant deforestation and water extraction issues, jeopardising the region’s biodiversity and sustainability,” the report said.

Speaking during a joint media conference with the governor of Michoacan state, Alfredo Ramirez, Salazar stressed that avocados grown “on these unauthorised plots” should be prevented from entering the US market.

He added that there should be consequences for farmers who established such illegal orchards, especially with regard to the environmental degradation that resulted from such action.

According to the [*LatinAmerican Post*](#), this “signalled a pivotal shift towards environmental accountability in trade protocols”.

Some of the statistics divulged by Ramirez during the media briefing included the fact that between 2018 and 2023 about 30 000ha had been deforested in Michoacan, and according to the local government’s Forest Guardian initiative, a total of 817 illegal avocado orchards had been identified during that period.

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To combat this scourge, it was proposed that a revised export protocol be introduced that would incorporate environmental guidelines based on the Forest Guardian’s findings. According to such a protocol, avocados would be traceable from their origin right to the end consumer in the US to ensure compliance with environmental standards.

The [*LatinAmerican Post*](#) reported, however, that this problem was not isolated to Mexico, but countries across Latin America that exported avocados faced similar challenges, including Colombia, Peru and Chile.

“These nations, renowned for their agricultural exports, are grappling with the environmental impact of intensive farming practices, including deforestation, water mismanagement, and biodiversity loss,” the report said.

The environmental ramifications of Mexico’s farming practices were a global concern, as it was the world’s largest avocado exporter, shipping approximately 2,5 million tons around the world every year, according to the report.