

# Grower Profile

## Pragor Avocado Cooperative

PRAGOR, Productores de Aguacate Organico (Producers of Organic Avocado) is a cooperative of Avocado producers, situated in the state of Michoacan, Mexico. PRAGOR is an association of 75 small producers located in 8 different municipalities. The orchards of the 75 members of the association are scattered over the volcanic area of Michoacan around the city of Uruapan. The fertile volcanic soil and the climate at around 5,200 ft. of altitude above sea level are a perfect environment to grow avocados. As such, the region Uruapan, 200 miles west from Mexico City, is known as the world capital of the avocado. The cooperative PRAGOR was established in November 2001. Its goal is to produce high quality organic avocados and to promote and distribute them in the market place. The continuous improvement of organic cultivation is an integral part of the cooperative. Growers have an opportunity to share their experiences and to enhance their understanding of organic practices.

All PRAGOR members are considered smallholders, meaning that as a rule they do not own more than 10 hectares. PRAGOR organizes grower meetings and the logistics of the avocado harvest. This task is challenging since many of the families live in remote and difficult to reach villages.

With joint forces PRAGOR manages to improve the general living standards of its members. Every PRAGOR member has the right to hand in a proposal regarding the social projects to be accomplished with the Fairtrade premium. Given that PRAGOR members live in 8 different municipalities (with different necessities) these proposals are of considerable variety. The members

decide, in a democratic way, how to spend the Fairtrade Funds. Members have already decided to use the first funds to support a centre for handicapped people in Periban. Another proposal, currently under evaluation, is to hire a doctor who will be responsible for all PRAGOR members and their families. As the Mexican health system is very poor (and relatively expensive), such a system would be far more effective and less costly the current system.

Pragor works in cooperation with Nature & More, an independent agency that supports growers with advice, quality assurance, and trade issues. Nature & More originated last century as an additional quality assurance program of EOSTA, a Dutch company dealing in fresh organic and bio-dynamic fruit. Eosta has been involved for many years to convince growers all over the world to change to organic or bio-dynamic practices and has assisted these growers with ecological advice to ensure their economic success. In response to consumer demand for healthy, organic and fairly traded food, Nature & More was created. The aim is to communicate the commitment and effort that individual organic growers make towards the planet and its people. Recently, Nature & More was placed in an independent foundation in order to serve other companies who also share the values of social responsibility, ecological sustainability and quality food. During its short period of existence, Nature & More has enjoyed a tremendous growth, now serving five of the leading companies in the European organic food market. Worldwide, the number of growers (and grower organizations) that benefit from the services of Nature & More is continually on the rise.

*This Grower Profile is excerpted from Nature & More's website at: <http://www.natureandmore.com/English/Growers/Mexico/Pragor.cmt>*

## 2007 Fruit Forecast

Rick Christenson, our fruit buyer from Coop Partners, is full of optimism and excitement after talking to many California growers about the coming crops. In January, California experienced a severe cold snap which devastated vegetable and citrus growers in the central valley. Other fruit growers were delighted with the freeze. "Soft fruit trees need to get a certain number of cold units," explained Rick. The cold units allow the trees to go into dormancy for a period of time and complete its full cycle. They haven't had any cold units in 5 or 6 years. Growers are seeing a large amount of fruit on the trees, although the individual pieces are smaller. The freeze, before the blossom stage, generally helps strengthen the trees and improves the flavor of the fruit. Rick mentioned that he hasn't seen any brown rot and fungus yet this year. Another advantage of the freeze is that it knocked back much of the fungus and mold that has been building over the last 5 or 6 years. That means, as a whole, your fruit will store and taste better this year. All of this bodes well for shareholders. With so much high quality fruit coming out of California, we expect the market prices to go down. Rick ended by saying "I'm worried about meeting our price point without having fruit spilling out of the boxes! Some of that might be offset by the rising fuel costs, but it looks like it is going to be a great year for fruit!"



# Fruit Box

The luscious clusters of the vine  
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;  
The nectarine and curious peach  
Into my hands themselves do reach;

~ Andrew Marvel



## Box Contents

### To Be Eaten first

Rainier Cherries  
Flame Grapes  
Gold Pineapple

### May need ripening...

Hass Avocados  
June Crest Peaches  
Zee-Fire Nectarines

Ethylene Table (Usually fruits produce, and vegetables are sensitive to, ethylene)

EP: Ethylene Producer  
ES: Ethylene Sensitive  
EN: Ethylene Neutral

## Ripening and Storage Techniques

**Rainier Cherries** (EN) are grown by Morada farm in CA. These cherries are exceptionally large, golden, with a red or pink blush and a white heart. **It is very important** to store cherries in the coldest part of your refrigerator, usually near the back and bottom. Cherries can decay more in one hour at room temperature than they can in twenty-four hours at 32°F. The rule of thumb with cherries, as with berries, is not to wash the fruit until you are ready to eat. Not washing helps extend the storage life of the cherries (unless you eat them, of course). Rainier cherries are considered by most to be far superior to other varieties.

**Flame Seedless Grapes** (EN) are grown at the Rucker Homestead in Coachella, CA (in the Mojave desert). They are round and deep red, with a sweet-tart flavor and a crisp pop when eaten. Grapes are harvested when fully ripe and are ready to eat right away. Before storing, remove any spoiled grapes with broken skins or browning from the bunch. They should keep for a week to 10 days in the refrigerator. Note: frozen grapes are a delicious snack for both kids and adults.

Your **Gold Pineapple** (EN) is grown by Hector Rendon located on the border of Vera Cruz and Oxaca, Mexico. The intense levels of sunshine and sandy loam soil that this area is noted for infuses the pineapples with a higher sugar level than other locations. Since pineapples lack a starch reserve, they will **not ripen** after they are picked. Pineapples should be covered in a plastic bag to prevent moisture loss and stored in a refrigerator. Store the pineapples close to the door since they are best stored at a temperature around 45°F. Pineapples stored correctly should last for several days.

**Hass Avocados** (EP) are grown by Calavo Farm in Mexico (See the profile of the Avocado Cooperative of which the Calavo farm is a member on page 2). When the fruit yields to gentle finger pressure, it is ready to be eaten. Store at room temperature until ripe. Monitor daily to check for ripeness. Storing near other ethylene producers accelerates the ripening process and may result in rot if you don't watch closely enough. Perhaps you would like to make a salad using your avocado and the greens and radishes found in your CSA vegetable box.

**June Crest peaches** (EP) are grown by Mas Masumoto just outside Del Rey, CA. These peaches are large, early, and a great way to open the season. If you're not a fan of peach fuzz, this is the one for you - beautiful color and very little fuzz - a great peach to handle. Ripen at room temperature and move to cold storage when ready. Ripe fruit should be eaten in 1 to 3 days. Check each piece daily as they are ripening.

**Zee- Fire Nectarines** (EP) are also grown by Naylor farm in CA. The Zee-Fire variety is a clingstone. (Clingstones tend to be juicier, sweeter, and softer-in-texture than freestones.) Ideally ripen at room temperature on the counter top (not exceeding 78° F). This method requires daily checking for ripeness and eating when the fruit yields to gentle pressure. It is best to have room for air flow around each piece. While fruit is attractive in a big bowl, you increase the chances for over-ripening a piece on the bottom of the bowl that could potentially spoil all of the fruit touching it. Move to cold storage and eat within 1-3 days. Longer storage will diminish their juicy flavor. *Editors note: I tasted one of these, and think the flavor is outstanding!*

Week 1

1

June 13th