

QS-Report Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes 01/2020



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Editorial

An industry you can rely on

Crisis-proof infection protection in uncertain times

If consumers can rely on the supply of safe fresh food even in uncertain times, it is clear that the many years of commitment by companies and producers to high standards of quality assurance are paying off. The general conditions for producers could hardly be more demanding than in the current corona crisis: lack of harvest workers, bottlenecks in

logistics, increased requirements and uncertain prospects. But at the same time, huge expectations are being placed on them and the entire sector to ensure a basic supply of fresh fruit and vegetables at all times. It's good to know that in this situation they can rely on the quality standards of their partners in the supply chain and their own company.

Dear readers,

The corona crisis that we are currently experiencing has us all firmly in its grip. To this end, we are offering an infoportal on our company website (www.q-s.de/information-page-coronavirus) with the latest information and support concerning matters relating to the coronavirus. In the face of all the uncertainty and crisis reports of the past few days, we would like to use this QS-Report to look to the future and present the QS Academy (QS-Akademie), our new further training programme. We also spoke with our Spanish QS scheme participant La Unión Corp. about its quality assurance philosophy.

As the current willingness of the population to provide assistance as harvest workers has shown, the corona crisis can only be overcome together. We are sure that the participants in the fruit and vegetable sector will jointly overcome this crisis. Safe food is a pillar of trust and confidence during times of great uncertainty.

Stay healthy!
Your QS Team



Hand hygiene is important!

Wash your hands thoroughly...



before starting work.



after contact with spoiled products.



after using the bathroom.



after eating or drinking.



after smoking.



after sneezing or coughing.



Get your hands wet



Apply soap



Lather and scrub for 20 seconds
Don't forget to wash between fingers, under nails and the backs of the hands



Rinse for 20 seconds



Dry well with paper towels



Shut off water with a paper towel

More information can be found here: www.q-s.de/en
Qualitätssicherung. Vom Landwirt bis zur Ladentheke.

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In cooperation with the
Fruit Production Control
Zustemmer (NL)



Information poster for hand hygiene

QS has compiled an overview of all important specialist information and supporting documents for the food industry on how to deal with the corona pandemic on the “[Infoportal on the coronavirus](http://www.q-s.de/information-page-coronavirus)” at www.q-s.de/information-page-coronavirus. In addition, educational videos and information posters dealing with hand and work hygiene are available for download free of charge in 7 languages for producers in Germany and abroad.

With its high degree of flexibility on the one hand and proven routines in hygiene and quality assurance on the other, the fruit, vegetable and potato sector is bravely weathering the corona crisis. Based on this, producers and companies are ramping up protection against infection on an ad hoc basis under extreme conditions, directing seasonal workers from outside the industry as quickly as possible and communicating the decisive quality and hygiene standards. Especially now, the sector is showing that, on the basis of joint quality assurance, it also functions well in times of crisis. ■



In the QS scheme, existing eligibilities of delivery for all QS certified locations are currently being automatically extended by two months. QS recommends its scheme participants to refrain from all QS audits for the time being. The current regulations of recognized standards on the corona crisis are accepted by QS.

Scheme participant portrait – La Unión Corp.

QS interviews María Martín



María Martín, Quality Manager at La Unión Corp. (Source: La Unión Corp.)

La Unión Corp. is a global leader in the export of cucumbers. The family business has been a QS scheme participant since the beginning of 2016 and cultivates and exports not only cucumbers but also tomatoes, peppers, aubergines, zucchini, beans, melons and watermelons. Recently they have further expanded their production to include fruits from the tropical coast of Granada (avocados, papayas, medlars and cream apples). More than 70% of their production is exported to the European market. The company employs around 1,500 people at 25 locations between Almería and Granada in southern Spain. The fruit and vegetables are grown all year round by experienced, qualified producers pursuant to the highest quality and food safety standards such as QS. María Martín, Quality Manager at La Unión, talks in detail about the company's quality philosophy in an interview.

WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL FEATURES OF YOUR COMPANY, WHAT ARE YOU PARTICULARLY PROUD OF?

Martín: Quality and food safety are central concerns of La Unión, which is also what our customers value most. Our customer-focused work approach is further enhanced by our own laboratory, which enables us to carry out a wide range of analyses from production and marketing to the final consumer. Soil, water and product samples are collected on a regular basis. The laboratory enables us to perform more than 64,000 analyses per year.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN AREAS OF FOCUS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE?

Martín: We are constantly working on the continuous optimisation of all of our processes. We also keep all market partners informed of the results of our soil, water and product analyses. As such, this enables us to position ourselves on the market as a fruit and vegetable company with its own laboratories and the ability to provide analysis results in less than twenty-four hours.

FOR US, QUALITY AND SAFETY MEANS ...

Martín: For us, quality and food safety are inseparable. The demand for food safety encompasses all production processes throughout the entire value chain. It is our firm belief that the quality of fruit and vegetables at La

Unión Corp. is not only reflected in their taste, but also in the traceability that guarantees each of the food products we market.

WHY DO YOU THINK IT IS IMPORTANT FOR COMPANIES TO HAVE A QS CERTIFICATION MARK?

Martín: For us, standardization and food safety are intertwined. We therefore constantly pursue standardized processes in quality management, in food safety and in dealing with legal requirements. For us, QS also means recognition of our daily work, in which all divisions always work together. QS helps us to incorporate this daily work into traceability systems and transparent processes, thus achieving our goal of being one of the safest fruit and vegetable producers in Europe. ■



The laboratory of La Unión Corp. has had a QS approval for over a year (source: La Unión Corp.)

Application safety

Using plant protection products safely and staying healthy

In order to effectively protect your own health and that of employees during and after the application of plant protection products, suitable protective equipment is crucial. The safe use of plant protection products, the use of suitable protective equipment and compliance with reentry rules in accordance with legal requirements and manufacturer's instructions are central components of application safety in plant protection in the QS guidelines for the production of fruit, vegetables and potatoes. Users of plant protection products and persons carrying out follow-up work in treated crops may come into direct contact with plant protection products.

When plant protection products are approved, it is determined which personal protective equipment (PPE) must be used for users when working directly with plant protection products and for workers carrying out follow-up work in treated crops. The PPE regulations are noted on the packaging or in separate instructions for use for each plant protection product.

REGULATIONS FOR USER PROTECTION MUST BE OBSERVED

The German Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL), as the licensing authority for plant protection products, has increased its focus on the special importance of health protection. Since May 2018, certain requirements that reduce risks to the health of users, workers and uninvolved third parties to an acceptable level have been established as application regulations. Any violations of application regulations may be considered administrative offences by the competent state authorities and subject to a fine. As a result of the EU Control Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2017/625) which was enacted last year, the implementation of legal requirements for the use of plant protection products and user pro-



Appropriate protective clothing is important to ensure that no harmful components of plant protection products are absorbed

tection is now also monitored without prior notification.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT DEPENDS ON THE PLANT PROTECTION PRODUCTS USED AND THE TYPE OF APPLICATION

In order to minimize the health risk to humans when handling plant protection products, long working clothes and sturdy shoes must always be worn. In addition, BVL may prescribe the use of protective suits, gloves, aprons and head, eye, breathing and foot protection, depending on the plant protection product used and the type of application. If only the front part of the body is likely to come into contact with the plant protection product, for example when preparing the spray liquid, a prescribed protective suit can be replaced by a combination of work clothing with a suitable sleeve apron. This way, in most cases a combination of work clothing, sturdy shoes with sleeve apron, protective gloves and a face shield can be used to meet the legal requirements when preparing the spray liquid and when

filling the application equipment. Users seated in a tightly sealed driver's cab with air conditioning and supply air filtration are usually only required to wear work clothing and sturdy shoes as standard protection. All details of the regulations on the protective effect of driver's cabs as a substitute for mandatory PPE were published by BVL in a technical bulletin in January 2020. ■



Information on user protection available online.

Important information and practical tips on proper user protection can be found on the BVL website: **FAQs on application regulations for health protection** (LINK see below). The FAQs, only available in German, provide further information, e.g. on the use of sleeve aprons in plant protection. In addition, BVL maintains an up-to-date list of personal protective equipment for plant protection available on the market: www.bvl.bund.de/EN/Tasks/04_Plant_protection_products/04_Users/03_PersonalProtectiveEquipment/ppp_users_PPE_node.html

Link to the FAQs for Application safety:

https://www.bvl.bund.de/DE/Arbeitsbereiche/04_Pflanzenschutzmittel/04_Anwender/06_FAQ/02_FAQ_AWBGesundheitsschutz/FAQ_AWBGesundheitsschutz_node.html

NEW: The QS Academy

The knowledge portal for all aspects of fresh food

The necessity for further education and training within the value chain is high because of the industry's ever-changing challenges. QS has been active in the industry for more than 15 years with auditor training, information events and a larger number of practice-based workshops. And now, we are offering our experience and expertise from a single source: The QS Academy (QS-Akademie) – the new knowledge portal for all aspects of fresh food – will be launched in the next few days. We spoke with Sabrina Melis, responsible for the QS Academy at QS, about what topics will be offered, who will they be offered to and in what form.



**QS
AKADEMIE**
WISSEN SICHERT QUALITÄT

Do you have any suggestions as to which topics we should include in our Academy programme? Then please contact us at: akademie@q-s.de.

WHY DOES QS, AS A KEY PLAYER IN FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS, ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF FURTHER EDUCATION?

Sabrina Melis: We communicate daily with our scheme participants across all industries on topics related to food quality assurance. We know which current topics and challenges are causing problems. We want to use the insight we have into all areas within the industry. The training courses and events that we have been offering our partners for many years now are very popular and consistently fully booked. QS has been offering qualified training courses (e.g. for auditors) for years, we have the knowledge, know the experts and are well networked within the industry. We are putting this network to good use and are now making it available to the industry even more comprehensively with the Academy. We are convinced: "Knowledge ensures quality."

WHAT CAN THE INDUSTRY EXPECT FROM THE QS ACADEMY?

Melis: We are initially concentrating on the core QS topics of "quality" and "safety". This is a field in which we see ourselves as a 360-degree knowledge portal for all aspects of fresh food for the entire value chain. We provide practical training courses on current and industry relevant topics. In the field of fruit and vegetables, this encompasses areas such as microbiology, pest control and monitoring, hygiene and correct product labelling. Depending on the topic, we offer the courses as workshops, on-site seminars or webinars. But e-learning

modules are also part of the programme. A laboratory workshop will take place in Cologne on 30 June 2020. We are planning a series of practical sampling training courses for QS residue monitoring, which have been in great demand up to now, for late summer. **All current offers can be found in our webshop at www.q-s-akademie.de (so far only available in German). Come and take a look every now and then: We are constantly expanding our range of services.**

WHO IS THE OFFER SPECIFICALLY AIMED AT?

Melis: We address each of our scheme participants at every stage of the value chain – from producers to wholesalers and food retailers. We differentiate between offers for trainees, samplers or QMBs – here, too, we cover all levels within the company that deal with food safety in the broadest sense. In addition, our offering is also aimed at certification bodies/auditors and laboratories, and the entire meat-producing sector will also find their topics here.

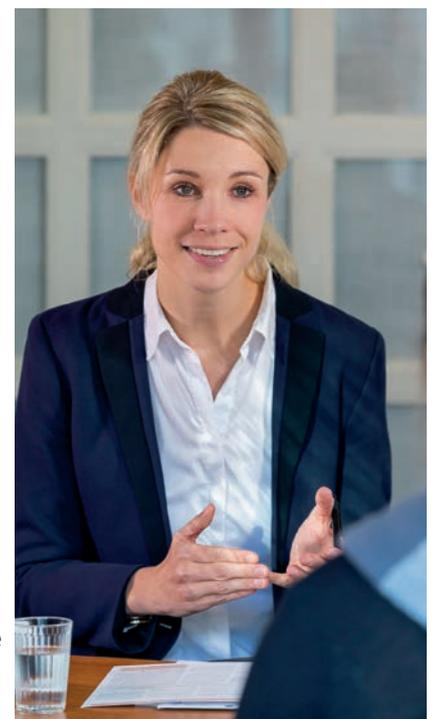
WHAT DISTINGUISHES THE QS ACADEMY FROM OTHER TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMMES?

Melis: In our daily work, we always focus on the entire value chain and we are in daily contact with the full value chain and can respond promptly to the indus-

try's training needs. As a result, our offerings are particularly efficient and practice-oriented.

WHAT HAS CHANGED FOR THE START OF THE QS ACADEMY IN TIMES OF CORONA?

Melis: We will certainly have to consider whether planned onsite events can take place. But webinars have played a major role in the programme planning for us from the very beginning. Especially now, in the face of the corona crisis, we can make optimum use of the tried and tested online formats. ■



Sabrina Melis,
responsible for the QS Academy at QS

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