



Asparagus – a non-native crop rarely used in Peruvian cuisine – make up one of Peru’s top exports. (Photo by Christine Siracusa on Unsplash)

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Peruvian asparagus and customer experience: adaptation, inclusion and success

Peru began exporting asparagus in 1987. Today, the country is one of the world’s leading exporters of the popular crop and home to Panalpina’s first female managing director in the Americas.

While Peru boasts more than 3,000 different kinds of potatoes, 55 varieties of corn and 1,625 types of orchids, two varieties of asparagus – a non-

native crop rarely used in their own cuisine – make up one of their top exports.

It all started in the mid-1980s with a fateful trip to California by two local farmers. “These two farmers took an enormous risk to find a profitable crop that could be easily grown in Peru year-round so it could be exported to other countries when their growing seasons were over,” says Maria Eugenia Barbero, Panalpina’s managing director for Peru.

Starting with seeds from California, the farmers’ first harvest in 1985 yielded nearly three times what was expected. They made their first successful shipment of asparagus to the United States in 1987 and Peru officially entered the perishables export industry. Today, Peru is one of the world’s leading asparagus exporters, shipping 10 million kilos per year.

[Meet Panalpina in Hong Kong at stand 3P01, Hall 3 of Asia Fruit Logistica to see how our perishables experts can help you move your asparagus, potatoes, or anything else.](#)

Listening to both exporters and importers is key in the perishables business

In August 2018 [Panalpina celebrated 50 years of doing business in Peru.](#) At the turn of the millennium, Panalpina became a major player in the country’s perishables export market. It all started in 2000, when Panalpina’s former managing director for Switzerland visited a customer in Lima, Maria Eugenia Barbero. When he asked her why she didn’t use Panalpina to ship more perishables, she explained all the reasons why. His response: “Do you think you could do it better?”

A few months later, Barbero joined Panalpina Peru as perishables manager to develop the business and later became Panalpina’s first female managing director in the Americas. Barbero has since increased Panalpina’s perishables exports market share in Peru from virtually nothing to around 10%. Her growth strategy was simple: listen to the customers and give them the service they need.



Maria Eugenia Barbero, Panalpina's first female managing director in the Americas. (Photo by Panalpina)

“We’ve taken some risks along the way and combined the feedback from our customers here in Peru and in our destination countries together with our internal expertise to ensure an outstanding service,” explains Barbero.

Eighteen years down the road, the conversation goes on – as of today at [Asia Fruit Logistica](#) in Hong Kong. “We are meeting with current and potential customers in China, which is one of our key destination markets for the export of perishables,” adds Barbero. “Meeting in person with customers to better understand their needs is just as important, if not even more important than when I started my career at Panalpina. This is especially true in the perishables business, where you are dealing with such a variety of highly sensitive products.”

Adaptation and inclusion can create something new and wonderful

“As Panalpina continues to expand its Perishables Network across the world, the story of China and Peru will serve as great inspiration,” notes Colin Wells, global head of Industry Vertical Perishables at Panalpina. “Adaptation and inclusion can create something new and wonderful – like “Chifa” and outstanding leaders like Maria Eugenia; calculated risks like growing and exporting asparagus are worth taking; and

customers near and far always have something new to teach us and make us better.”

[Follow Colin's Food for Thought on LinkedIn for the latest insights into perishables from one of the top leaders in the industry.](#)

You're still curious about the many kinds of potatoes grown in Peru aren't you? This Peruvian farmer grows more than 400 varieties, including the one that makes the daughter-in-law cry!



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

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