

Village Farms enlists Mexican tomato grower

The Packer on line

By Bryan Scribner

(Dec. 3) EATONTOWN, N.J. — Greenhouse grower-shipper Village Farms LP will increase its year-round supply of beefsteak tomatoes with the addition of a Mexican grower.

Officials at Impulsora Comercial El Camino SA de CV have signed a marketing agreement that gives Village Farms authority to sell the company's tomatoes.

Impulsora Comercial owns a new 10-acre greenhouse in Parral, Mexico, where the company is based. Shipments under the Village Farms label began in late October.

About 5 million to 6 million pounds of beefsteak tomatoes will be shipped from the facility per year, said Michael Minerva, vice president of commercial development at Village Farms.

This supply will help Village Farms and Vancouver, British Columbia-based BC Hot House Foods Inc. eliminate their off-season for greenhouse-grown produce, Minerva said. The two companies formed a supply partnership in late August.

In 2002, Village Farms shipped about 70 million pounds of produce, and BC Hot House shipped 11 million cases. The two companies offer a full line of hydroponically grown tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers.

Impulsora Comercial is new to the growing business. The corporation owns supermarkets, gas stations and pharmacies in Mexico.

Therefore, Village Farms will offer consulting services, training programs and purchasing assistance as part of the marketing agreement. Minerva said the company plans to give Impulsora Comercial more than a marketing fee.

"We're all about working with them in the greenhouse, in the packhouse, to ensure and teach them how to grow quality and teach them how to pack quality," he said. "We're not just a sales agent, we're a full-scale adviser and marketer."

Impulsora Comercial's greenhouse features the newest technology, such as climate control and drip irrigation, Minerva said. He said the company plans to expand its greenhouse every year in 10-acre increments, but that will depend on demand.