Implantation of corporate social responsibility measures in the horticulture in Mexico and Spain

Implantación de medidas de responsabilidad social corporativa en la horticultura de México y España

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ABSTRACT

This work presents the results of a Delphi survey aimed at experts in the horticultural activity in Mexico and Spain, to find out the main stakeholders and factors that influence the adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) measures and standards, as well as the limitations in their implementation. The Delphi analysis concluded that companies in Mexico and Spain adopt CSR measures and standards mainly at the request of destination supermarkets in the US and Europe, which hold the greatest power in the global value chain. In addition, it is identified that with the adoption of CSR, companies seek to improve their image in the field and gain competitive advantages in the market. Among the limitations are the lack of business culture, ignorance of the protocols, and high administrative burden, especially among smaller production companies. Experts consider that CSR measures and standards have a positive impact on the field. The research is completed with a SWOT analysis (Weaknesses, Threats, Strengths, and Opportunities), providing a ranking list of great interest for the design of competitive improvements.

Keywords

Corporate Social Responsibility • standards • horticulture • Delphi • Mexico • Spain

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Resumen

Este trabajo presenta los resultados de una encuesta Delphi dirigida a expertos de la actividad hortícola de México y España, con el objetivo de conocer los principales grupos de interés (*stakeholders*) y factores que influyen en la adopción de medidas y estándares de Responsabilidad Social Corporativa (RSC) así como las limitaciones para implementarlas. El análisis Delphi permitió concluir que las empresas de México y España adoptan medidas y estándares de RSC principalmente por requerimiento de los supermercados de destino en EE. UU. y Europa, quienes ostentan el mayor poder en la cadena global de valor. Además, se identifica que con la adopción de RSC buscan mejorar la imagen de la empresa en la actividad y ganar ventajas competitivas en el mercado. Entre las limitaciones están la falta de cultura empresarial, el desconocimiento de los protocolos y la alta carga administrativa, en especial entre las empresas productoras de menor tamaño. Los expertos consideran que las medidas y estándares de RSC tienen un impacto positivo en el campo. Se finaliza el estudio con un análisis DAFO (Debilidades, Amenazas, Fortalezas y Oportunidades), aportando un valioso ranking de interés para el diseño de mejoras competitivas en la actividad hortícola de ambos países.

Palabras clave

Responsabilidad Social Corporativa • estándares • horticultura • Delphi • México • España

INTRODUCTION

In Southeastern Spain (Region of Murcia and Almería) and Northwestern Mexico (Sinaloa and Baja California), there are two important horticultural production areas which commonly supply to the European and American markets, outside the summer season. Intensive horticulture in these areas has been developed alongside the implementation of numerous measures and standards of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which are common among the production companies that lead the international agricultural sector.

The CSR was first used in Howard R. Bowen's book "Social Responsibilities of Businessmen" in 1953. Later, in 1979, Archie Carroll defined CSR as what society expects of companies in economic, ethical, legal, and philanthropic matters. Currently, there are more than thirty-seven definitions of CSR in the academy (10). The concept used in this research is that of the ISO 26000, one of the most accepted worldwide. They define the CSR as the responsibility that companies have over the actions, they carry out concerning society and the environment, for which communication with stakeholders is transcendental (26).

In the implementation of CSR, the stakeholder theory explains how companies are obliged to respond to society. Stakeholders are groups or individuals who can benefit or be harmed by the action of the company. Stakeholders can be grouped into two categories: the first one, which includes employees, owners, customers, the local community, and suppliers, is vital for the endurance of the company. The second one includes groups or individuals such as the government, NGOs, and competitors that can be affected by the corporation (10, 15).

According to Esteban (2007), the theory of stakeholders is relevant because it allows the transition from theory to practice in the field of social responsibility. This theory sees the intertwining of relationships that a company is subject to, which is diverse. On the other hand, the existence and recognition of stakeholders have allowed companies to articulate various CSR actions in their management, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes as a strategy to obtain a better reputation, and with it minimize risks. Companies also articulate CSR action pressured by non-governmental organizations, competitors, or even by international regulations (3). At the same time, the benefits of being a responsible company are notable, for instance, making decisions in the present ensures long-term permanence; as many government regulations are avoided by anticipating new demands (11).

In this sense, Porter and Kramer (2006) indicate that companies must adopt CSR measures to obtain competitive advantages over other companies, such as improving the company's image and reputation, or ensuring its permanence in the market. For this, the company must strategically select what actions and CSR measures to develop. These authors consider the stakeholder theory to be a wrong approach on exercising CSR.

For Luhmann and Theuvsen (2016) the development of CSR measures in the agri-business sector is determined by the size of the company, its degree of internationalization, brand orientation, and its position in the value chain. In the agricultural export activity, specifically, Food Retail Markets (FRM) have developed several standards to avoid certain risks that could damage their reputation or image (5, 16, 19, 21, 24). The growing importance of new standards and norms in agricultural systems around the world should not be forgotten, as pointed out by Handschuch *et al.* (2013); in the case of export-oriented countries, abiding those standards and norms ensures continuous access to the main markets.

The private social responsibility standards and measures imposed by the FRM are set considering their global purchasing power, especially in developed countries; for instance, the United Kingdom, where five retailers owned more than 75% of the market share by the end of the 1990s (Freidberg, 2007). This purchasing power allows companies to impose numerous seemingly "voluntary" buying rules on producers, which, if breached, will cause them to not be accepted as suppliers; a similar case can be observed in agro-export companies in the two production zones studied simultaneously in Mexico and Spain.

The decade of the 1990s reported a couple of international incidents related with the lack of food safety in fresh vegetables, which had a lot of media coverage, helped developed countries to achieve an important milestone in food safety regulations (2). This led national governments to make retailers responsible for food safety. In turn, retailers handled their agricultural supplies responsibly through quality standards and traceability, among others (30). Today, private standards have become a market entry requirement for producers, in both Europe and the US, because of environmental and social justice problems that governments have been unable or unwilling to solve (6, 17, 20, 39). The FRM seeks to ensure compliance with national and/or international food safety, quality, labor, and environmental regulations through certifications, setting higher standards than those established by national organizations. Nowadays, the agribusiness sector has a plethora of CSR standards (35).

The objective of this work is to analyze which factors and/or stakeholders drive the development and implementation of CSR measures, as well as the limiting factors for their development, through the Delphi methodology applied to a panel of experts from the horticulture activity in Spain and Mexico. As a secondary objective, it is discussed whether these CSR measures lead to labor conditions and environmental improvements.

The hypothesis underlying this work is that mainly the value chain, controlled by retailers, drives the implementation of CSR measures and standards in the export-oriented horticultural activity in both Mexico and Spain. By adopting measures and standards of social responsibility, agricultural companies seek to gain competitive advantages, remain in the market, and improve the reputation of the sector. On the other hand, the limitations of CSR are the lack of business culture and the administrative burden.

Another hypothesis in this work is that implementing both measures and standards of Corporate Social Responsibility is considered positive for the improvement of labor, human rights, and environmental practices, more as a strategic objective than as a means for immediate benefits for the community. Although there is still a long way to go, the contribution of this work lies in analyzing the implementation of CSR measures and standards in two distant but similar agricultural countries: Mexico and Spain. These countries, despite having different markets, such as North America and Europe as the final destination for their products, share many similarities in the development of CSR initiatives, implemented in their production systems in the last two decades.

Materials and methods

A questionnaire was designed and applied to a panel of experts from the horticultural activity in Mexico and Spain following the Delphi methodology, which was developed iteratively in two rounds. The objective was to know the experts´ qualified opinion on the motivations that lead to the implementation of CSR measures and standards, their limitations, and the situation of the fruit and vegetable export activity in Mexico and Spain.

The qualitative and exploratory Delphi methodology is defined as a systematic and iterative process aimed at obtaining expert group opinions with the objective of reaching consensus (28, 29). It is used to obtain the qualified assessment from a low number of knowledgeable respondents in the object of study, which allows identifying similar trends or aspects where there is a consensus. The possibility that in a 2nd round respondents can modify their responses given in the first submission, allows them to reinforce their agreement or disagreement and include relevant aspects that were not initially considered, providing information about their needs or priorities (27). One of the disadvantages of this approach is the risk of respondents losing interest in participating in the second or later rounds, which is considered normal (27).

In recent decades, the Delphi method has become a tool used to analyze complex realities in the agri-food field in Spain and Mexico. These realities are food consumption (12), agricultural policy analysis (32), design components as a non-technological innovation (22) and the evaluation of the sustainability of production systems and rural areas (1, 33), among others.

The questionnaire designed to carry out the first round of the Delphi method in this work included statements that had to be assessed according to the Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 Strongly Disagree and 5 Strongly Agree), and open-ended questions to generate new options to be assessed in the second round. The questions included in that first round were the result of the opinions expressed in previously conducted personal interviews with some experts, but they were mostly taken from the literature review on CSR in the agricultural sector, as previously mentioned in the introductory heading. Prior to the first contact with the experts, a pilot questionnaire was conducted with only two experts in October 2017, one in Spain and one in Mexico.

The applied questionnaire consisted of four blocks. The first block gathered information about the participating experts such as years of activity in the sector and their level of knowledge in marketing and CSR. The second block gathered information regarding their opinion and motivations for taking CSR initiatives. In the third block, trends in standards, initiatives, and the challenges in the fruit and vegetables export sector in both economies were analyzed using the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats)

For this Delphi, a varied group of participants was gathered in order to ensure the diversity of opinions. The first Delphi round took place in November 2017, in which 40 specialists and technicians participated: 16 experts from Mexico and 8 from Spain, with 24 respondents. The second round of the Delphi was sent in February 2018, obtaining responses from 20 experts: 13 from Mexico and 7 from Spain. It should be noted that the adequate number of experts for a Delphi must be small, ranging from 7 to 30 participants (Landeta, 1999), so the total number of experts participating in this work was considered appropriate. The joint consideration of all responses was valuable, as was the analysis of the individual view that experts from both countries had about certain respects.

As noted, the second round provided the panel of experts who responded to the first round with all the statistical results achieved by the group (mean, mode, and frequency of the answers to all questions from the first submission) in each of the questions. This allows the group of experts to change or maintain their assessments and then assess the new items proposed by the group, as well as the possible questions or answers incorporated into the questionnaire after the first round. A third round was discarded because the responses in the second round achieved an adequate level of stability, as measured by the Coefficient of Variation and the study of the reduction of the Interquartile Range, and because of the significant loss of participants that would occur with a new round (Landeta, 1999).

Characterization of the experts

Out of the 20 experts who were formerly interviewed and responded to the questionnaire in the second round, 13 were from Mexico and 7 from Spain; all of them with various professional backgrounds, which guaranteed the diversity of views. 3 experts were farmers, 2 were field technicians, 1 was the quality manager in an agricultural company, 1 was the manager in the commercial area, 1 was an agricultural company manager, 1 was the representative from a marketing company, 3 were representatives of the distributors' association, 3 were researchers, 2 were certification consultants, and 2 were government offi-

cials in the horticultural field. The respondents were mostly men (65%), all of them with university studies (65%) or postgraduate studies (35%), with an average age of 43 years, and with more than 16 years of experience in the sector. Concerning the level of knowledge in marketing and the CSR measures and standards in the agricultural sector, all technicians demonstrated a "high" level of knowledge on these three aspects, which the questionnaire focused on, and they are analyzed in the following sections.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the experts' responses in the second round, horticultural activity is a leader in the application of measures and standards of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the national agriculture, both in Mexico and Spain. This is due to the consensus in the understanding that those measures and standards are an "imposition by customers and supermarket chains" of their products' destination countries, the fact that 85% of the panel of expert estimated it, confirms the arguments described in the literature (9, 18). Other motivations, such as "the need for the activity to be more environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable" (70%) and the "concern for workers" (60%), are also considered important; these last claims have reached a consensus, while dissent is high in considering that the "positive results of investing in CSR shares" (50%).

Sixty-five percent of the consulted experts consider the adoption of CSR actions "positive" for the horticultural activity, with 40% of them pointing out positive and negative elements. Regarding some considerations described in the literature, there is a high level of consensus to understand such actions, as shown in table 1 (page 170). First there is the adoption of CSR actions allows companies to "gain competitive advantages," with 90% of experts "agreeing or totally agreeing" with that claim, which according to the literature is supposed to be the one that achieves a higher average rating and a median response of 5, equivalent to fully agreeing with it. In second place there is "demands of the distribution chains, which demand and value the efforts of CSR" with 85% of responses; this affirmation could be ranked as the second most important motivation due to the slightly lower than average score it obtained in Spain, with average scores higher than 4, equivalent to agreeing with the statement. It is followed by "improving the image or general reputation of the company within the sector "in third place, then "responding to the demands of end consumers, who demand and value the CSR effort" in forth, and finally "to stay in the market, following the trends that are set in it" in fifth place.

The latter, in which the level of agreement is slightly lower, refers to how the adoption of CSR can allow companies to obtain greater profitability. Other reasons, such as "the company's concern for wanting to take better care of workers and contribute to social welfare," "being concerned about the environment," and "responding to the legal framework and achieving tax benefits", are not relevant issues showing a low level of consensus.

The Delphi survey confirmed the initial hypothesis for this study. There are several stakeholders and important factors in the adoption of CSR standards and measures to consider; among the most important factors are the influence of the distribution chains of food retail in the export's destination countries, improving the image of the companies, and obtaining competitive advantages. It should be noted that the two horticultural production areas studied are part of global food chains in which the power of retail distribution is remarkably high, so they face a lot of competition, for this reason they have become leaders in the implementation of CSR standards.

When comparing the reasons for implementing CSR actions in Mexico and Spain, it is possible to identify that in Mexico the main reason is "to respond to the requirements of the distribution chains, which demand and value CSR efforts". In contrast, Spanish experts considered the aforementioned reason important; however, they believe that the strongest reason to implement CSR actions is "to improve the image or general reputation of the company within the sector". This finding is similar to that of Martos-Pedrero *et al.* (2019) who indicate that CSR measures in the agricultural activity in Almeria have a positive impact on the companies' reputation, economic performance, and their relationship with stakeholders. Meanwhile, Briones Peñalver *et al.* (2017) indicate that CSR measures in the agribusiness in the Region of Murcia have a positive impact on its development, which in turn, positively influences its economic performance.

Table 1. Main reasons that lead companies in the exporting horticulture in Mexico and Spain to implement CSR initiatives.

Tabla 1. Principales motivos que llevan a las empresas de la horticultura de exportación de México y España a implantar iniciativas de RSC.

Valuation from 1 to 5: 1. Not at all Important; 2. Unimportant; 3. Neutral; 4. Important; 5. Very important.	Mexico		Spain		Total	
	Me	Md	Me	Md	Me	Md
Gaining competitive advantages.	4.4	5.0	4.6	5.0	4.5	5.0
Responding to the demands of distribution chains, which demand and value the efforts of CSR.	4.5	5.0	4.3	5.0	4.5	5.0
Improving the overall image or reputation of the company within the sector.	4.1	4.0	4.7	5.0	4.3	5.0
Responding to the demands of end consumers, who demand and value the efforts of CSR.	4.2	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.5
Staying in the market, following its trends.	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.0	4.1	4.0
Getting higher profitability.	3.8	4.0	3.9	4.0	3.9	4.0
Responding to the company's concern for workers to contribute to social welfare.	3.3	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.6	4.0
Complying with the demands of a legal framework developed in the adoption of CSR initiatives.	3.5	4.0	3.7	4.0	3.6	4.0
Responding to the company's concern about its impact on the environment.	3.0	3.0	4.3	4.0	3.5	4.0
Being able to access tax benefits and/or access public funding linked to the CSR measures adopted.	2.6	2.0	3.3	3.0	2.9	3.0
Me= Mean. Md=Median.						

There is a notable difference in the responses regarding the reasons to implement CSR measures; in Spain the "concern of the company for the impact on the environment" is better valued with an average of 4.3 while in Mexico it is valued with 3.0 points. This may mean that in the former country there is a bigger concern about this issue than in the latter. In Mexico it is believed that the adoption of CSR measures means not "being able" to access tax benefits and/or public funding linked to adopting CSR measures, while in Spain they remain neutral about it.

Among the negative arguments about the implementation of CSR initiatives described in the two rounds of interviews, experts pointed out that companies are sometimes "more concerned with their profit than the social or environmental impact they cause". Some experts believe that these are "simulated practices done to comply with customers' demands", considering that there are many entrepreneurs who "are not really concerned or interested in the subject", and that "if managed poorly, these initiatives can generate confrontations and problems".

Regarding the limitations or obstacles companies in the fruit and vegetable agro-export sector of Mexico and Spain face when adopting CSR measures, the level of consensus is high in considering that the "lack of business culture" (with a 90 % of experts ``agree or totally agree" with this statement), "unawareness of the subject" (80%) or the "high administrative burden" (80%) limit the implementation of more measures (table 2, page 171), confirming that the expert panel's considerations were already described in the literature. Considering the relevance given to them by practically all the experts, (they reached an average score close to 4), these three issues are the main obstacles, while the lack of public programs for their promotion was not relevant, or their cost outweighs the benefits.

According to the experts' opinion (table 3, page 171), the CSR initiatives that help make the greatest progress within the export horticultural activity studied, are those referred to as "Labor Practices" (18 out of the 20 experts chose this answer out of the three more advanced answers available). This result differs with De Castro *et al.* (2017) who mention that the adoption of standards in the grape sector in the Region of Murcia (Spain) does not improve labor. On the other hand, the Mexican researchers Avendaño *et al.* (2015) and Villafan and Ayala (2014) indicate that in the agricultural sector in the states of Baja California and Michoacan (Mexico) there are still labor and environmental issues to be worked on. According to table 3 (page 171), the experts interviewed in this Delphi are of the opinion that the fruit and vegetable companies have made progress in the area of CSR, especially in the labor, environmental, and human rights areas both in Mexico and in Spain. This confirms the second hypothesis of this work, the standards and measures of CSR have a positive impact in the sustainability of horticultural activity.

Table 2. Main limitations faced by exporting horticulture companies in Mexico and Spain to develop CSR measures.

Tabla 2. Principales limitaciones a las que se enfrentan las empresas de la horticultura de exportación en México y España para desarrollar medidas de RSC.

*1. Not at all Important; 2. Unimportant; 3. Neutral; 4. Important; 5. Very important.	Mexico		Spain		Total	
	Me	Md	Me	Md	Me	Md
The lack of "business culture" about the importance of the CSR.	4.2	4.0	4.3	4.0	4.3	4.0
The high administrative burden and the lack of personnel implementing more CSR measures.	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Ignorance on the subject.	3.8	4.0	3.9	4.0	3.9	4.0
The lack of public programs to broadcast and promote the CSR, with no government co-responsibility.	3.4	4.0	3.9	4.0	3.6	4.0
The economic cost of CSR measures, which reduce the farmers and marketers' profits.	3.5	4.0	3.1	3.0	3.4	4.0
The activity's characteristics: long work time and a low price of the product.	3.2	3.0	3.7	4.0	3.4	3.5
Me= Mean. Md=Median.						

Table 3. Areas with greater advances in CSR in companies of the exporting horticulture in Mexico and Spain.

Tabla 3. Ámbitos con mayores avances en materia de RSC en las empresas de la horticultura de exportación México y España.

AXES OF ISO 26 000	AF			RF%		
	Mexico	Spain	Total	Mexico	Spain	Total
Labor Practices.	12	7	18	92.3	100.0	95.0
The Environment.	6	7	14	46.2	100.0	65.0
Human Rights.	9	2	11	69.2	28.6	55.0
Organizational Governance.	6	1	7	46.2	14.3	35.0
Community Involvement and Development.	3	2	5	23.1	28.6	25.0
Consumer Issues.	3	2	5	23.1	28.6	25.0
Fair Operating Practices.	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
AF= Absolute Frequency. RF (%) = Relative Frequency. Total=Mexico and Spain.						

The level of consensus is high (85%) in considering that large supermarket chains, especially transnationals value their suppliers and agricultural enterprises, with a median of 5 (table 4, page 172), equivalent to fully agreeing with this assertion. Eighty percent of the panel agrees or totally agrees that the main reason supermarkets value CSR practices is because they "do not want to be involved in boycotts or controversies" for buying from fruit companies that badly perform food safety practices, with a median of 5.0 and an average of 4.4. However, experts from Mexico and Spain indicate that national supermarkets, either Mexican or Spanish, depending on the nationality of the expert, do not value CSR practices because consumers do not either, since they are only interested in paying a lower price. The experts dissented with that statement, as well as with the consideration that the price criterion dictates in which supermarket chain to purchase.

As for whether or not end consumers are aware of and value the efforts of companies in the horticultural activity adopting CSR practices, a level of dissent is detected among experts depending on their nationality. While the majority of the experts, globally, point out that end consumers lack awareness and do not value CSR measures, among the expert group in Spain this assessment shows a higher level of consensus (71.4%) (table 5, page 172). This difference in the results may be pointing that American consumers have greater concern and knowledge about such certifications, or perhaps that they pay more attention to food products when they come from a third world country. For US consumers, these products are not normatively integrated as in the European Union and might be produced in countries of

lower levels of development such as Mexico. Thus, the private standards such as CSR could ensure that third countries meet the minimum requirement established by the market. This is not the case for the Spanish vegetables that are consumed in other European countries, since they share production regulations.

According to the majority of the panel of experts (90%), there are niche markets that do value CSR initiatives in the agri-food activity (table 6). However, there is a low level of consensus regarding if the end consumers' application and value of CSR is marginal (60%) or if there is a lack of diffusion about the niche markets that do value CSR.

Table 4. Assessment of the supermarket chains to companies of the exporting horticulture in Mexico and Spain who are socially responsible.

Tabla 4. Valoración de las grandes cadenas de supermercados a las empresas de la horticultura de exportación en México y España socialmente responsables.

*1. Not at all Important; 2. Unimportant; 3. Neutral; 4. Important; 5. Very important.	RF (%)					Me	Md
	1	2	3	4	5		
Transnational supermarkets value CSR and require their suppliers to comply with these kinds of practices.	5.0	5.0	5.0	30.0	55.0	4.3	5.0
Supermarkets value CSR practices because they do not want to be involved in boycotting or controversy.	0.0	5.0	15.0	20.0	60.0	4.4	5.0
Supermarkets in my country do not value CSR, because consumers are only interested in paying low prices.	5.0	20.0	20.0	40.0	15.0	3.4	4.0
Supermarkets do not value CSR because they usually just try to buy from cheaper sellers.	5.0	50.0	15.0	25.0	5.0	2.8	2.0

Table 5. Knowledge and assessment of end consumers on the CSR efforts of exporting horticulture companies in Mexico and Spain.

Tabla 5. Conocimiento y valoración de los consumidores finales sobre los esfuerzos en materia de RSC de las empresas de la horticultura de exportación en México y España.

	AF			RF (%)		
	Mexico	Spain	Total	Mexico	Spain	Total
Yes	6	2	8	46.2	28.6	40.0
No	7	5	12	53.8	71.4	60.0
Total	13	7	20	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 6. Global assessment of what type of consumers know and value the CSR efforts of companies of the exporting horticulture in Mexico and Spain.

Tabla 6. Valoración global sobre qué tipo de consumidores conocen y valoran en general los esfuerzos en materia de RSC de las empresas de la horticultura de exportación en México y España.

*1. Not at all Important; 2. Unimportant; 3. Neutral; 4. Important; 5. Very important.	RF (%)					Me	Md
	1	2	3	4	5		
CSR is valued in some niche markets, but others are only interested in price.	0.0	10.0	0.0	40.0	50.0	4.3	4.5
Consumers do not value CSR in general and those who do are still a marginal sector.	5.0	10.0	25.0	40.0	20.0	3.6	4.0
Consumers do not rate CSR in general because of its lack of promotion and dissemination.	5.0	10.0	30.0	40.0	15.0	3.5	4.0

To reiterate, the differences between the horticultural activities in Spain and Mexico are the reason why the responses obtained in the assessment that the expert panel made (Mexico / Spain / Both) regarding the level of development of the CSR measures in both agro-export sectors differ. The panel's assessment about the level of development of CSR measures within the fruit and vegetable production (table 7, page 173) - on a scale of 1 to 10 - reached a notable average assessment similar in both production systems (6.6 /6.9 /6.7),

higher in both countries than the assessment obtained from other sectors – whatever they may be – in each country (5.7 /6.1 /5.8). This denotes the high levels of CSR implementation within the highly globalized agro-export sector. However, the experts from Mexico and Spain acknowledge that the CSR implementation in the horticultural activity studied, despite being prominent among companies in the country, is far from the levels of development that CSR practices reach in companies in other developed sectors (7.8 /7.0 /7.5), such as the US or EU countries other than Spain.

Table 7. Assessment of companies of the exporting horticulture in Mexico and Spain against other sectors and countries.

Tabla 7. Valoración en materia de RSC de la horticultura de exportación en México y España frente a otros sectores y países.

Valuation from 1 to 10, corresponding 10 to the highest excellence	Mexico					Spain					Total
	Me	Md	Mo	Max	Min	Me	Md	Mo	Max	Min	Md
The company in your sector (of the country).	6.6	7	8	8	4	6.9	7	8	8	5	6.7
Businesses in general (of the country).	5.7	6	7	7	3	6.1	6	6	8	4	5.8
Companies in general (from other developed countries), such as from the EU or US.	7.8	8	8	9	6	7.0	7	7	8	6	7.5
Me=Mean. Md=Median. Mo=Mode. Max=Maximum. Min=Minimum. Total= Mexico and Spain.											

In the opinion of the experts interviewed, the adoption of CSR measures is considered by companies in the horticulture sector in their respective countries as a "strategic expenditure" (69.2%/71.4%/70.0%) in (Mexico/Spain/Both). Other less selected responses were considering CSR measures to be an "investment, albeit unprofitable" (20.8%), an "expense necessary to contribute to the well-being of the company" (17.3%) or a "medium- and long-term profitable investment" (10.3%). Other opinions proposed by experts in the first round such as "it being an unnecessary expense", "a profitable short-term investment" or "a way to hide or disguise industry problems" (table 8), were not considered which indicates a unanimous disagreement.

Table 8. Assessment of the exporting horticulture in Mexico and Spain about the adoption of CSR initiatives.

Tabla 8. Valoración de la horticultura de exportación en México y España sobre la adopción de acciones de RSC.

	AF			RF(%)		
	Mexico	Spain	Total	Mexico	Spain	Total
A strategic expense for the company.	9	5	14	69.2	71.4	70.0
An expense necessary to contribute to the well-being of society.	4	1	5	30.8	14.3	25.0
An investment, albeit unprofitable.	4	2	6	30.8	28.6	30.0
A profitable investment in the medium and long term	2	1	3	15.4	14.3	15.0
Others: "a disguise for problem sectors".	1	0	1	7.7	0.0	5.0
A profitable investment in the short term.	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
An unnecessary expense.	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0

These results are not in accordance with the considerations shown in the literature, as is the case of the study "Panorama of Social Responsibility in Mexico" done by the Agency Responsible (2019), according to which 36.8% of Mexican companies see the CSR as "a very profitable investment in the short, medium, and long term". Twenty-seven-point five percent of the experts regard it as "a necessary expense to contribute to the well-being of

society" and 21.1% of them as a long-term profitable investment, and only 6.6% see it as a strategic expense for the company, this being the most relevant response by the panel of experts consulted in this work.

Another question in this study explored if "there are incentives for small businesses to take social responsibility actions". The panel of experts from both countries answered "yes", in the case of Spain the panel agreed unanimously and in the case of Mexico 84.6% of the panel agreed. In this regard, authors such as Hartmann (2011) point out that the main reason for medium and small enterprises to adopt CSR measures is the direct pressure of supply chains, unlike large enterprises, in which CSR measures originate or are initiated by non-governmental bodies (NGOs) and activist consumers, who are concerned about the sustainability of the sector and their consumption.

Then, taking advantage of the potential of the Delphi technique to propose predictive analyses, the panel of experts was asked in the first round to indicate what the most frequently implemented CSR standards and initiatives were in the sector. Proceeding to the second round with the objective of finding out which of CSR standards and initiatives will develop more in the coming years by means of a trend analysis. As can be seen in table 9, experts observed a plethora of standards, initiatives, platforms that fruit and vegetable producers can adopt.

Table 9. CSR initiatives and standards implemented in the exporting horticulture in Mexico and Spain with the most growth potential in the coming years.

Tabla 9. Iniciativas y estándares de RSC implantadas en la horticultura de exportación en México y España con más potencial de crecimiento en los próximos años.

	AF			RF%		
	Mexico	Spain	Total	Mexico	Spain	Total
GRASP	2	5	7	15.4%	71.4%	35.0%
Fair Trade	6	0	6	46.2%	0.0%	30.0%
Rainforest Alliance	5	0	5	38.5%	0.0%	25.0%
GRI (Global Report Initiative)	2	3	5	15.4%	42.9%	25.0%
Eleven River	4	0	4	30.8%	0.0%	20.0%
ESR (CEMEFI)	3	0	3	23.1%	0.0%	15.0%
SEDEX	2	1	3	15.4%	14.3%	15.0%
United Nations Global Compact	1	2	3	7.7%	28.6%	15.0%
Most demanding environmental production standards.	0	3	3	0.0%	42.9%	15.0%
DEAR	2	0	2	15.4%	0.0%	10.0%
BSCI	2	0	2	15.4%	0.0%	10.0%
SA 8000	2	0	2	15.4%	0.0%	10.0%
DEALTI (Mexico)	2	0	2	15.4%	0.0%	10.0%

[1] For many researchers Fair Trade is not considered a CSR standard. However, experts as Poetz *et al.*, 2013 consider that Fair Trade is an opportunity to differentiate the product in high quality markets and niches, but at the same time, it has been institutionalized as a mechanism to address both environmental and social problems in the production and consumption of promoting fair international trade rules.

According to the panel of respondents, the belief of the growth potential GRASP (GLOBAL-GAP Risk Assessment on Social Practice) and the development of reports based on GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) in the case of Spain, which are expected to be joined by more environmental standards, are the most demanding. In the case of Mexico the adoption of the Fair Trade [1], Rainforest Alliance, and other standards, such as ESR of Mexican Center for Philanthropy (Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía, CEMEFI), Eleven River -specific to the state of Sinaloa- and DEAR (Distintivo de Empresa Agrícola Responsable, Responsible Agricultural Company Badge) promoted by the Mexican government is predicted. In addition, companies in Mexico and Spain in the horticultural sector have joined the United Nations Global Compact Initiative and the SEDEX (Supplier Ethical Data Exchange) electronic platform.

In conclusion, a plethora of standards and initiatives, some common to both markets, co-exist; which are particularly varied in the case of Mexico. Some of these standards and initiatives are similar in both agro-export centers despite the presence of increasingly global and interconnected markets. According to Busch and Bain (2004), private standards prevail

over public standards in the international food trade and in the free market economy in general. The two horticultural systems studied (Mexico and Spain) are a clear example of the globalization process of the agri-food system and the international expansion of quality standards promoted by large distribution chains, a process that has been studied internationally in other areas of food production (25). It should not be forgotten that the growing importance of new standards and norms in agricultural systems around the world, as pointed out by Handschuch *et al.* (2013), is due to the countries' attempt to ensure their continuous access to the main profitable markets, as is the case of export-oriented countries

Finally, the expert panel gave their assessment on the activity's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) as ranking of the three most important points according to the expert panel, as shown in table 10. Both countries' Strengths are being prominent product areas and having access to international distribution channels, with both agro-export enclaves having extensive experience in the production and international marketing of vegetables. As Opportunities, both Mexico and Spain highlight the potential for access to niche export markets, and those that particularly value the Social Responsibility of their companies and production systems. As Threats, there is a consensus among the Spanish experts that limiting factors in southeastern Europe is mainly the lack of water and general natural resources in both areas of intensive production in winter times, as well as the increasing international competition to expand fruit and vegetable production.

Table 10. Main Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses and Threats of the exporting horticulture in Mexico and Spain (Top 3).

Tabla 10. Principales Debilidades, Amenazas, Fortalezas y Oportunidades de la horticultura de exportación en México y España (Top 3).

Source: Own elaboration from the Delphi Survey (2nd round).

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

Strengths	Mexico		Spain		Weaknesses	Mexico		Spain	
	Me	Md	Me	Md		Me	Md	Me	Md
Outstanding production area in several crops.	4.5	5.0	4.4	5.0	High and increasing production costs.	3.8	4.0	4.6	5.0
Access to international distribution channels.	4.5	5.0	4.4	5.0	Perishable production	4.2	4.0	4.0	4.0
Companies' adaptability.	4.4	5.0	4.4	5.0	Low competitiveness of small producers.	3.6	4.0	3.7	3.0
Opportunities	**Mexico**		**Spain**		**Threats**	**Mexico**		**Spain**	
	Me	Md	Me	Md		Me	Md	Me	Md
New international markets.	4.5	5.0	4.1	4.0	Water scarcity and loss of natural resources.	4.4	5.0	5.0	5.0
High-quality export market niches.	4.8	5.0	4.3	4.0	Climate Change.	4.2	5.0	4.3	4.0
Export niches that value the CRS.	4.3	5.0	4.1	4.0	Growing foreign competition.	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
1 Not at all Important; 2. Unimportant; 3. Neutral; 4. Important; 5.Very important.									

Conclusions

The main reason to implement food safety and CRS standards, certifications, and initiatives in the agro-export fruit and vegetable activity of Mexico and Spain is linked to the demands of the large chains of North American and European supermarkets. These supermarkets are the end consumers of the agro-export activity in Mexico and Spain, so great effort is made to safeguard them from risks that could damage their reputation and image.

The development of CSR is positive for companies in the horticultural sector in terms of reputation, due to their demand to access the increasingly standardized and connected international markets, which makes them stand out in the development of these initiatives within the country. Labor and environmental practices are the areas in which CSR develops most despite the limitations that hinder further development of measures aimed at making their production systems more sustainable, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises that have fewer resources and incentives in the short and medium-term.

However, access to massive commercial export channels requires more effort to develop voluntary certifications that ensure that their production systems are increasingly sustainable (socially, economically, and environmentally) to identify and avoid risks. The panel of experts considers the aforementioned a strategic issue for companies in the sector. The opinions gathered from horticultural activity experts from Mexico and Spain describe the process of proliferation of food safety, quality, and social responsibility standards applied in the sector to identify trends and opportunities, in addition to contrasting the motivations, limitations, and challenges faced by the agro-export sector of these two countries.

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