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2BMonthly Exclusive Feature

Botanical Solution Inc. Plans Further Expansion into LATAM Markets in Partnership with Syngenta

By Luke Hutson, NAI Editor-in-Chief and 2BM Editor

Botanical Solution Inc., the producer of *Botristop*, a biofungicide derived from plant extract, is set to continue its partnership with Syngenta and commercialize the product in the Peruvian and Mexican markets. Luke Hutson of **2BMonthly** spoke to the co-founder and CEO Gaston Salinas about this development and the company's expansion plans.

With its production facility in Santiago, Chile, Botanical Solution Inc. (BSI) is set to continue its partnership with Syngenta and commercialize its product *Botristop* in the Peruvian and Mexican markets.

The name *Botristop* refers to the product's primary application – to date at least – against the fungal disease *Botrytis cinerea*. The product, which is supplied in liquid formulation, is based on botanical extract from a plant that is native to Chile, named *Quillaja saponaria Molina*.

Botristop has been on the market in Chile since 2019 through a partnership between BSI and Syngenta.

First shipment to Peru

Having received registration approval, the first quantities are currently being shipped to Peru.

"We're expecting to launch sometime this year, working closely with the Syngenta team. This is an exciting year for us, with the first shipment being made," says Salinas.

The product is being shipped in a variety of retail-ready packaging sizes (1 liter, 4 litres, and 20 litres) from the Chilean port of Valparaíso. Salinas says *Botristop* is the first biological product for Syngenta in Peru.

Progress continues with the registration for Mexico, with all the efficacy data generated, along with the crop list, including cucumber, grapes, berries, tomatoes, and melon. The company is aiming for launch in Mexico by late 2022. For the USA, two registration processes are running concurrently. One for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and another for California (DPR).

Partner benefits

Salinas speaks in positive terms about the relationship with Syngenta. "One of the key success factors for start-ups with a new technology is to have the best market access possible," he explains.

"We know we are good on the product side, but we need a sales force, and to be part of a portfolio. Growers are not waiting for a super product, but a specific solution for certain conditions."

While *Botristop* is often applied by exporting producers near to harvest, Salinas says that BSI is now able to provide growers with data to show the benefits of using *Botristop*

earlier in the season. What does this mean for distribution? Salinas explained the company used to be focused on supplying demand for the first and fourth quarter of the year. "Now we're covering the whole year. There are positive consequences to being detached from growing cycles, although that also comes with some challenges."

"We're planning to double capacity in Santiago if everything goes to plan. We can't wait to get to that period," says Salinas, who co-founded BSI with fellow Chilean Gustavo Zuñiga, who led the research work on extracting the botanical compounds from the tissue cultured *Quillaja saponaria* plants.

The company's laboratory and production site covers 500 sqm, and can expand into four times that space in its current location. BSI grows the *Quillaja saponaria* plant indoors, under laboratory conditions. The company is conducting in-field trials of its product in global regions, such as Asia, Europe and Oceania in 2021 and 2022. Salinas says there is also more room to grow the product in LATAM, highlighting the ornamentals market in Ecuador and Colombia.

Name change

Although Salinas could not share details during the conversation, he indicated that the name *Botristop* might be replaced to represent a product that covered more diseases.

"We have a great new name where the focus is not just on botrytis but other fungal diseases," revealed Salinas. BSI expects to reveal the new branding by the third quarter of this year.

Post-harvest

BSI has previously focused on pre-harvest, but is now looking to the other side. "We're quietly entering the post-harvest market," says Salinas. He says they are in discussions with possible collaborators who are looking at the company's product. To be used in post-harvest, Salinas explained that this could simply be done by using specific doses of *Botristop*. He describes the post-harvest market as significantly smaller than pre-harvest, but in its early stages and full of potential.

Vaccine adjuvant

A lesser known end-use for one of the compounds from the *Quillaja saponaria* plant, referred to as QS-21, is used by the pharmaceutical industry as an adjuvant for vaccines, including Covid-19, shingles and malaria vaccines. In a similar way to adjuvants in crop protection, adjuvants improve the effectiveness of the antigen in a vaccine, by boosting an immune system response.

The *in vitro* plants that BSI cultivate in the laboratory also produce QS-21 and in quantities that could be of interest to the pharmaceutical industry.

The challenge, as Salinas explains, is now to get a pharma-grade product. "We're on track. We've confirmed that our extract is rich in QS-21 and can outpace several times the conventional method."

The *Quillaja saponaria* plant has traditionally been harvested from the wild for many decades.

"In 2022, we aim to transition from grams to kilograms," continues Salinas. The task is to keep the production cost as low as possible. "Once you get to kilograms, you can talk about a supply agreement for pharma. At kilograms, that's billions of doses."