An interview with Nicolás Cock Duque, President of ASOBILOCOL

On the occasion of the 2nd Biocontrol LATAM to be held mid-November in Medellin, Colombia, and organized by New Ag International and 2BMonthly in conjunction with IBMA, New Ag International went to talk with Nicolas Cock Duque, President of the Colombian company EcoFlora Agro and President of the recently established Colombian Association of Biocontrol Companies (ASOBILOCOL).

Before we talk about ASOBILOCOL and the market for biopesticides in Colombia and Latin America, can you enlighten us a bit about EcoFlora Agro?

EcoFlora Agro is a green chemistry, purpose driven, discovery company and development platform of plant extract based bionosolutions for safe food production and sustainable crop protection. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) referred to EcoFlora Agro as ‘The Secret Garden of Innovation and Development’ in a case study published a couple of years ago. We are one of the very few companies in the world 100% devoted to innovate and develop

IPM solutions based upon plant extracts, un-tapping the power of botanical biodiversity. Our purpose is ‘Crop and Life Protection’, we currently have 6 products in the market (2 insecticides/repellents, 1 biofungicide, 1 bionematicide, 1 biomolluscicide, and 1 biomiticide), we have 28 international registrations, sales in the main agricultural markets of the Americas (including the USA, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Chile, and Central America), and a unique and differentiated portfolio of products with novel active ingredients, disruptive formulations, modes of action, and plant extract combinations.

When was ASOBILOCOL created and what was the main driver to the establishment of the Association?

ASOBILOCOL was conceived and incubated during the course of the past five years, nonetheless it was formally created during Q4, 2016 with the purpose of enhancing and accelerating the development of the bioprotection / biocontrol industry in Colombia and promoting adequate and proportionate regulations.

As we speak, how many companies are members of the Association and what is their profile?

Colombian companies, subsidiaries of non Colombian companies and if so, how many originate from Central & Latin America?

We currently have twelve members with a balanced combination of technology based Colombian companies (60%) and subsidiaries of non Colombian companies (40%). Ten out of our twelve members are originary from Latin America.

When the Biocontrol LATAM conference will be taking place, the Association will be two years old. What have been the achievements so far?

Our three main achievements have been to become the visible biocontrol industry association in the agricultural sector, to actively participate in the conception and drafting a public policy document which will become mandatory for the next years to come (i.e. documento CONPES de Bioinsumos Agrícolas), and having been able to persuade the organizers to bring Biocontrol LATAM to Medellin, Colombia and serve as national partner / co-organizer.

Asociol has now become a full member of BioProtection Global, the world gathering of the main Biocontrol Associations. You are today the VP of BioProtection Global. What do you expect that this membership will bring to the Colombian Association?

Yes, I had the honor of being appointed as the VP of BioProtection Global one year ago. This membership will enable Asociol to gain even more visibility and credibility to become the industry’s voice to promote harmonized and proportionate regulations, not only in Colombia but perhaps in a more regional level, hopefully encouraging other national associations in LATAM to join BPG.

How would you describe the Colombian market for Biopesticides? Is it similar in shape and structure as other important markets around the world, Brazil in particular? What is the share of the various types of Biopesticides, including macroorganisms?

The Colombian market is a very interesting lab market for biopesticides taking into account its favorable (i.e. clear and specific) regulations and the variety of climates and crops ranging from tropical fruits, ornamentals, banana, coffee, african palm, rice, corn, sugar cane, etc. Although market information is scarce, we estimate that biopesticides represent 50%, plant extracts 30%, and macroorganisms 20% amongst the various types of biopesticides sold in Colombia.

Is the Colombian Government supporting your efforts to implement more biological plant protection in the country, with e.g. incentives to companies or growers or injection of more funds into public research on the topic?

The Colombian Government is progressively understanding the relevance of Biopesticides and has been quite proactive in developing public policy and on updating and establishing proportionate and specific regulations for biopesticide products. Public funding through entities like Colciencias and INNPulsa has been an important contribution to bring innovations and new products to the market.

You have a more global vision on biocontrol than just a deep knowledge about Colombia. In Latin America, apart from Brazil, where do you see the biggest growth potential for the market?

Countries with relevant agro-export activity such as Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Costa Rica represent important growth potential for biopesticides driven mostly by MRLs and organic certifications required by their customers in different destinations.

You have been saying since many years that LATAM will provide the rest of the world with the majority of the botanical extracts that will be used as raw materials for novel Biopesticides. Is this happening?

Colombia and LATAM have been blessed with their rich biological diversity. In the specific case of Ecoflora Agro we are getting ready to introduce to the international markets three new biopesticides with novel ingredients coming from native plant species, going through different stages of technical development and international registration. We firmly believe this aspiration is realistic and with our track record of launching one new botanical biopesticide every three years we are contributing to make possible this aspiration.

A number of your members are involved in the business of Stimulants. Stimulants are the other member of the biologals family. Is Asociol evaluating the possibility of including biostimulants within the portfolio of products that you would like to represent?

Are you promoting a clear specific legislation on biostimulants in Colombia?

Several of our members are involved in the business of biostimulants, nonetheless Colombia does not have specific regulations for this type of products. In Asociol we are currently evaluating the possibility of including biostimulants within the type of products that our association could represent.

What do you expect from the fact that Colombia, and your city of Medellin, have been chosen as venue for the Biocntrol LATAM conference this year?

This is definitely a great opportunity to show to the world the many good things that are taking place in our country and city in terms of innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and agribusiness.