



BANANA NEWSLETTER MAY 2018



CONTENT

- 4 ■ **Capacity building in labor standard compliance**
- 6 ■ **International producer exchange in Magdalena, Colombia**
- 8 ■ **Fincas del Oro: generating impact for small-scale banana producers in Ecuador**
- 10 ■ **Banafrucoop: an example of solidarity and sustainability**
- 12 ■ **Small-scale banana producers fight the threat of fusarium**



INTRODUCTION

More than 90% of Fairtrade bananas are produced and exported by producers in Latin America and the Caribbean, and after coffee, bananas generate the greatest source of Fairtrade Premium funds. If we look at the success that bananas have had in the past, while analyzing future trends, we can see the existing market challenges. Today, most markets show moderate sales growth, however, banana supplies continue to increase; this reflects lower Fairtrade sales at producer level. In addition, the companies and supermarkets that buy Fairtrade demand more information about the risks and impact on supply chains, as a condition to maintain and build sales volumes. This requires an agile response from Fairtrade and CLAC, as well as fast and quality information from producer organizations.

In the current reality of the market, producers face greater demands and pressure for lower prices, in addition to higher production costs and the negative effects of climate change. CLAC is working hard with producers, starting with smallholders, to mitigate those effects and reduce the environmental and social costs of bananas, with projects such as the Program for Increased Productivity (PIP).

CLAC is also working to provide more information to companies and supermarkets, by strengthening our MEL Department (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning), preparing impact studies and contributing to data management.

The 2018 Banana Plan focuses on interventions that improve the income of both producers and workers, as well as defining the costs of environmentally, socially and economically sustainable production.

Enjoy reading,
CLAC Banana Network



CAPACITY BUILDING IN LABOR STANDARD COMPLIANCE

In the Dominican Republic, bananas are the greatest agricultural export product, generating around 27,000 jobs. In addition, more than 300,000 families depend on its production, making the country a leader in both the production and export of Fairtrade organic bananas.



The banana sector in Dominican Republic greatly depends on migrant labor from Haiti, proving labor standard compliance to be a challenge for banana plantations. To combat this issue, CLAC, with the support of Fairtrade Finland and the Finnish government, developed and implemented the following project: Training to Improve Labor Standard Compliance and Social Conformity. The project focused on banana-producing regions, including the provinces of Valverde, Montecristi and Azua.

The main objective of the project was to contribute to the development of a dignified work environment that respects the rights of banana workers, through skills development at both employee and worker level. The project also focused on other topics such as worker vulnerability, social equity and gender.

The project covered 20 Fairtrade certified plantations in the Dominican Republic. In order to achieve this, adult participants were highly trained so that they can facilitate replicate workshops and trainings within their organizations. These included trainings on labor rights and migration guidelines, establishing mechanisms for complaint management and effective suggestions, as well as teaching plantation workers about labor standards and the fundamentals of decent work, and finally, the production of education materials.

RESULTS

In total, nearly 1,300 workers benefited from the project, the majority being Haitian migrant workers from banana plantations. Of these, 81 directly benefited from the “trainers training,” which included 54 plantation workers and 27 managers. Between 65% and 70% of the beneficiaries were migrant workers and 30% were women.

Through this project, CLAC contributed to the development of a working environment based on the fundamentals of fair working conditions on Fairtrade certified plantations, especially for migrant workers. This translates to overall improved standard compliance in areas such as hired labor, social equity, and gender equality; improving competitiveness and sustainability, as well as the development of best labor practices, to improve overall living and working conditions.



“I feel very grateful for all the trainings they have provided for me. I am now a middle manager, which has improved my life, as well as that of my family and the other workers. The farm has greatly improved, and now we know about labor regulations, including complaint procedures; for example, how to file a complaint in front of a supervisor.”

*Fresner Rigaud
Worker, Finca Hispaniola*

INTERNATIONAL PRODUCER EXCHANGE IN MAGDALENA, COLOMBIA

In line with strategy Strengthening and Developing Capacities of CLAC Member Organizations, and focused on best agricultural practices, an international exchange was held for banana producers in Santa Marta, Colombia, one of the country's banana-producing regions. The event's main objective was to bring together producers, field technicians and other officials participating in the Program for Increased Productivity (PIP), in order to share experiences and knowledge about the project. New organizations and producers, recently implementing the PIP Project, also participated in the event.

The following organizations participated in the exchange:

ECUADOR: San Miguel de Brasil, Fincas del Oro, Tierra Fértil and Asoguabo

COLOMBIA: Bonamancoop, Corparaíso, Coobamag, Banafrucoop and Coobafrío

COSTA RICA: Coopetrabasur R. L.

PANAMA: Coobana R. L.

PERU: APOQ, APBOSMAM, APPBOSA, CEPIBO, APBOS and BOS

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: Banelino, Santa Cruz, Azuabana

WINDWARD ISLANDS: St. Vincent, St. Lucia and Dominica

In total, there were representatives from 20 Fairtrade banana organizations. Participants exchanged experiences and ideas in both technical and practical areas of their work, laying the foundation for standard production processes and soil enrichment techniques as an integral part of fertility programs.

Benefitting producers from the “Zona Bananera” gave testimony to the impact that the project has had on their farms, including increased production and income. Many organizations also reduced their production costs, by decreasing the use of agrochemicals and implementing water conservation practices (irrigation).

Although the event was meant to focus on shared experiences from the PIP Project, the exchange also included discussions on technical crop management, touching on themes such as plant thinning, crop renovation, productive plant varieties, soil management and drainage systems, among others.



“Our main objective is to restore the natural microbiological activity to the soil. There are farms that have really improved their production, because the future and wellbeing of our members depends on it.”

Renato Herrera
Ecuador



CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO

FINCAS DEL ORO: GENERATING IMPACT FOR SMALL-SCALE BANANA PRODUCERS IN ECUADOR

Founded in 2012, the Asociación Agraria Bananera Fincas de El Oro is an organization of small and medium-sized producers dedicated to the production and commercialization of conventional and organic Fairtrade bananas. Currently, it is made up of 30 members, producing an average of 10,000 total boxes. The organization was Fairtrade certified (FLO ID 28979) in 2013.

As part of the Fairtrade system, Fincas del Oro joined the Ecuadorian National Fair Trade Platform, participating in assemblies, workshops and trainings; ultimately benefitting producers and their families. The organization also became a member of CLAC's Banana Network, representing Ecuador.



“ Luis Aguirre, producer and president of the organization, says: Fairtrade helps develop communities; Fincas del Oro has generated projects to improve the educational infrastructure of local schools, and in this instance, help the Kleber Franco Cruz School, for a more dignified education for boys and girls. ”



Since becoming an active member of the Fairtrade system, Fincas del Oro has invested the Fairtrade Premium in various projects, programs and activities, resulting in more benefits for small-scale producers.



“The implementation of the bio-factory (through the PIP Project) with resources from the Fairtrade Premium, has become a sustainable alternative to improve my production.”

Geynner Orozco,
Producer and President of the Oversight Committee.

DIVERSIFICATION:

In order to add value to their product, the organization currently produces a traditional pudding-like banana colada, and they are working on other recipes. This type of diversification enables them to make the most of their production and create additional work opportunities for members and workers, with participation from women, youth and other members of the community.

PRODUCTIVITY:

Through adequate fertilization and the application of special microorganisms to crops, alongside the implementation of bio-factories, the organization has greatly improved their productivity. Thanks to the Fairtrade Premium, as well as the support of CLAC and the Program for Increased Productivity (PIP), these activities have become common practice for members. The PIP Project also helped Fincas del Oro to: lower chemical inputs, increase productivity, preserve the environment, increase competitiveness and lower production costs.

WATER REDUCTION:

In order to reduce water use, Fincas del Oro is implementing water-saving nozzles that will be installed along the water pipes that are used for washing bananas. They are also lifting the floor of the washing tub, saving up to 50% of water consumption in processing and packaging.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

Funds from the Fairtrade Premium also support community projects, such as the Kleber Franco Cruz School. Fincas del Oro has used funds to improve its educational infrastructure, including classrooms, sanitary facilities and audiovisuals for classes in Computation, English and Science. In total, around 100 children have benefited. In addition, the organization supports homeless children by donating to Mi Primera Casita, a local collection center.

BANAFRUCOOP: AN EXAMPLE OF SOLIDARITY AND SUSTAINABILITY



Located in the “Zona Bananera” of Magdalena, Colombia, Banafrucoop was founded in 2007 by a group of small-scale banana producers. Currently, it is made up of 39 members with a total of 207 hectares in production. The organization was also Fairtrade certified in 2009.

PROJECT: FINCA LA PALMA II

Finca La Palma II began in 2015 as a productivity project for Banafrucoop; it is based on three pillars: solidarity, productivity and sustainability (economic and environmental).



SOLIDARITY

The current owners of Finca La Palma inherited it from their parents. However, due to lack of resources and support, they were unable to sustain the farm, nearly filing for bankruptcy in fear of losing the family land. It was then that the cooperative proposed the idea to lease the farm and implement a plan to recover its production. During the course of the project, the landowners receive monthly payments for the lease, allowing them to maintain a consistent income. Finally, once the project becomes sustainable, Banafrucoop plans to return the land to its owners.





PRODUCTIVITY

In terms of productivity, the organization pursues three objectives:

- Restore productivity to sustainable levels.
- Establish a demonstration plot to share technology with cooperative members, as well as with members from the Asociación de Cooperativas Bananeras del Magdalena (Asocomag).
- Generate employment in the region.

Banafrucoop established a plan to renovate 7.87 hectares (56% of the total area of production) of the farm; implementing new technology, incorporating highly productive varieties and developing a fertility program with the same soil concepts used in the Program for Increased Productivity (PIP).

After the plan's implementation Finca La Palma demonstrated the following results:

- Farm productivity increased from 327 boxes / hectare / year in 2015 to 3,375 boxes at the end of 2017.
- The renovated area demonstrates some of the highest productivity indexes in the industry, producing around 4,500 / boxes / ha. / year.

In 2017, the organization sold 35 boxes per week. Today, they are selling nearly 900 boxes per week, achieving both productive and financial stability on the farm. In addition, Finca La Palma has become one of the most productive farms in Colombia's banana industry.

FINANCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Greater productivity has resulted in increased gross income from \$250.00 (USD) to \$6,000.00 (USD) per week, exceeding the costs of production (and making a profit). This not only maintains farm operations but also covers all other financial requirements. In addition, the organization was able to provide economic support to the farm owners by leasing the land and lowering the fixed costs of the organization.



SMALL-SCALE BANANA PRODUCERS FIGHT THE THREAT OF FUSARIUM

BACKGROUND

Fusarium wilt, caused by the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *cubense* (Foc) or *Fusarium Tropical Race 4* (TR4), is the most destructive disease affecting Musaceae (family of flowering plants, including bananas), and is considered one of the ten most devastating epidemics in the history of agriculture. The disease spreads through the soil and the fungus can remain active for decades. Once it is present, Fusarium cannot be completely eliminated with present-day fungicides and farming practices.

The best way to fight it is to prevent it from spreading.

Fusarium Race 1 caused the initial epidemic that hit America's banana industry in the 1950s and 60s, specifically affecting the Gros Michel variety; this resulted in the disappearance of most commercial plantations. The only solution to the problem was to replace Gros Michel with resistant varieties of the Cavendish subgroup, which currently represent almost all export bananas on the continent.

Síntomas (1): externos



Source: Dr. Miguel Dita, EMBRAPA, Seminar Presentation on TR4 in Changuinola, Panama, December 2014 (WBF-MIDA-Biodiversity-Chiquita-Asofair-CORBANA)

Síntomas (2): externos



Source: Dr. Miguel Dita, EMBRAPA, Seminar Presentation on TR4 in Changuinola, Panama, December 2014 (WBF-MIDA-Biodiversity-Chiquita-Asofair-CORBANA)

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Although bananas are not native to the region, Latin America and the Caribbean produce 28% of the world's total production. Approximately 20 million tons (64% of production) are for local consumption. In addition, more than 75% of exported bananas are produced in Latin America. These figures demonstrate the role that bananas play in the American economy, as well as its role in food security. Therefore, TR4 is a matter of public interest: millions of families depend on bananas as a means of income or food.

EVOLUTION OF THE DISEASE

For many years, clones of the Cavendish subgroup were only affected by *Fusarium* when facing nutritional stress or low temperatures. However, in the early 1990s, *Fusarium* TR4 appeared in Southeast Asia, severely attacking Cavendish varieties in tropical climates, constituting a serious threat to the banana industry in Latin America and the Caribbean.

An additional factor that makes *Fusarium* TR4 extremely severe is the fact that, in addition to the Cavendish subgroups, it also affects varieties that are important for local sales and consumption, such as plantains, and other varieties used for cooking. Considering the aforementioned, it is clear that a TR4 epidemic in the Americas would have devastating consequences both socially and economically.

DISSEMINATION OF THE DISEASE

Currently, there are confirmed cases of TR4 in Taiwan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Mozambique, Jordan, Oman, Australia and India, but it may also be present in other countries.



PREVENTION MEASURES

The best way to avoid the effects of TR4 on banana production in Latin America and the Caribbean, is to prevent its entry. Once the disease invades the soil, it is necessary to implement extreme phytosanitary measures in order to avoid its spreading. These strict measures are costly and require trained personnel to recognize and measure the disease.

CLAC'S WORK

The Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers and Workers (CLAC) is taking the necessary measures to prevent the threat of TR4, supporting producer organizations at various levels:

- **Training of technical personnel and producers in the region, through workshops, webinars and informative material.**
- **Technical support, so that organizations take the necessary prevention methods into consideration on their farms or plots.**
- **Advocate at institutional level in producer countries, to work together to develop an effective containment plan.**
- **Raise awareness among producers about the importance of implementing the biosafety protocol of the Global Gap Add-On.**
- **Transfer technology and training on soil health management through the Program for Increased Productivity (PIP), which involves the reproduction and inoculation of beneficial (mountain) microorganisms on banana farms, as well as the incorporation of organic matter, to promote resistance mechanisms and increase the potential of phytopathogenic suppressing soils.**





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