

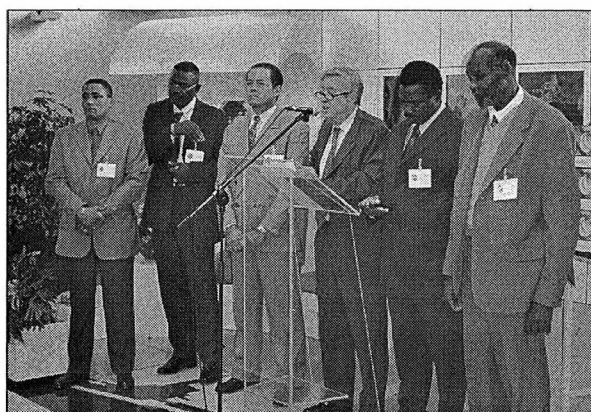
French bananas

Producers' union making progress



In mid-February, Eric de Lucy, President of the *Union des groupements de producteurs de banane* (Union of banana producers' groups) assembled its clients—ripeners—to show them that after five months his strategy of grouping West Indian banana supplies is still going strong. The operation first concerned Martinique and is being extended to Guadeloupe. Karubana, one of the two producers' groups in the latter island, used the occasion to announce that it is joining the Union.

Let's work together! This is how Eric de Lucy, President of the *Union des groupements de producteurs de banane*, started the day devoted to visiting the port installations in Dunkirk, the leading European port for French bananas, and presentation of the Union's new banana box (photo).



Eric de Lucy with group presidents and union representatives

The some 160 ripeners, state officials and service providers in the French banana sector soon understood that the aim of the day's event was to show the progress made by the Union in only five months. The geography of the French West Indian banana sector is as follows:

- Sicabam, Gipam and Karubana (which joined very recently) form the *Union des groupements*;
- part of Banalliance should join the Union while another part is trying to attract the former producers of the late Cobamar;
- the smallest group in Guadeloupe, Banagua, remains independent.

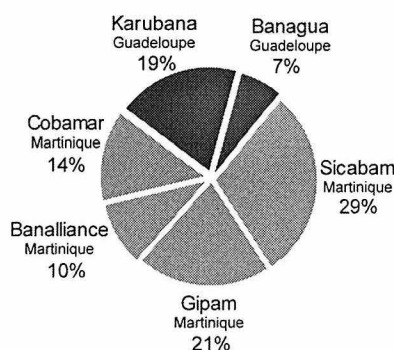
The Union will finally market 270 000 tonnes of bananas, that is to say 82 % of the potential in the French West Indies. This in itself is a great event. Martinique and the French West Indies as a whole have been divided with regard to market releases since the end of the 1970s and the splitting up of Sicabam, hitherto the only group. The Union now aims at mastering fruit marketing.

Union—sometimes painful

The remodelling of the banana sector in the French West Indies

involved changing marketing procedures. The Union wishes to perform its own sales to ripeners. Importers are watching this reconstruction of the sector with interest. Some feel that producers are going too far and should return to dealing with them.

French bananas
Shipments by groups in 2003



330 000 t, including
Martinique: 245 000 t
Guadeloupe: 85 000 t

While it is already difficult to structure marketing, another difficulty is emerging. Indeed, marked differences are observed between the Union and Banalliance or at least part of the latter. Banalliance would like to keep its marketing channel via importers.

Apart from these crises, the Union is making progress and Eric de Lucy wants this to be inexorable. He also stressed the full, very active support of local politicians such as

Lucette Michaux-Chevry and national authorities (the ministries of agriculture and of overseas affairs). The managers of the Union have clear objectives: unified commercial organisation, controlled quality and homogeneity, mastery of food and environmental safety and respect of the rights of man and of workers. A vast marketing operation is scheduled to support this approach and highlight bananas on retail shelves, selling the Guadeloupe and Martinique origin. Once the produce has been clearly identified in the shops, the Union will run an advertising campaign aimed at the general public 'to recruit new consumers of West Indian bananas and regain market shares'.

After a reorganisation phase, the Union is face to face with its destiny. It will be a brilliant one if the economic results are achieved. If this is the case, those with reluctance with regard to the system will surely be the first to back this unified strategy ■

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