



World Banana Forum

Hasta la victoria siempre!

The very numerous agricultural trade union members in producer countries, especially in Latin America, were finally able to write their Christmas wish list and there is nothing to stop them thinking that they will get what they want. They

aired their claims for two days in United Nations premises. This group therapy doubtless has short-term importance for the morale of the delegates from the upstream part of the chain. But it must be followed by effects: the risk of disillusion is maximum as it matches the hopes raised by this kind of forum.

Justified claims

Once the inaugural exultation has passed, it can only be hoped that the now permanent Forum will be anything other than a place for agricultural unions in banana producing countries to let off steam, where all statements are allowed and even those that have no sense in the current regulation and economic contexts. And the other sector stakeholders—and retail distributors in particular—should not be there just for reasons of social cosmetics. Because how can the participation of Wal-Mart at the Forum be taken seriously after its British subsidiary re-launched an nth price-cutting cycle with bananas at 46 pence per kg in the shops,

thus triggering pressure on all the stakeholders in the sector and especially growers? Finally, it would be a pity, and even dangerous, for downstream operators to play with fire and consider that their mere presence at the Forum absolves them from having to improve their social and trade practices.

Less ambition and more realism

It is out of the question to cast doubts on claims that are all legitimate: impacts on workers' health and on the environment, parity between men and women, freedom of association, fair prices, better distribution of value added, etc. However, sincere dialogue is necessary for action to be taken that would lead to progress in the field, and a few illusions must be lost. For example, ceasing to think that the banana sector could be administered in kolkhoz style. Accepting that private initiatives and operators make it possible for the sector to exist and develop. Incorporate the fact that the sector is less and less subject to regulations—at least those of the economic kind—and that nothing will come and regulate the market. Imagine that globalisation has been completed and that it seems impossible to go back. Finally, understand that progress is not imposed by a supreme authority, even a UN authority. Discussion is therefore needed between all the stakeholders on these markets and in the end everybody can come out a winner. This is the whole interest and the issue of the Forum.

Hearing that agricultural markets should be regulated is indeed sweet music to the ears of a European brought up according to the principles of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and convinced of its beneficial effects in the light of its results and recent food crises. In contrast, very great perplexity is generated when the Latin American unions, sometimes in the same sentence, both express their delight about the coming liberalisation of the European market and say that they wish to impose a world banana price on everybody. In this respect, the banana hangover might be even worse. But let the celebrations roll, with congratulatory speeches covering—so far—the sound of the helmless ship pointing straight at the rocks.

It is true that this atmosphere, strange to say the least, was due to a considerable extent to the composition of the people present. As nature hates vacuums, the farming unions had taken the space left vacant by the other banana sector operators, and especially retailers, who were more than discreet during the two days of the meeting.

150 delegates from the entire banana planet met at FAO in Rome on 7 and 8 December 2009 – 12 years of maturation – 2 days of reflection – 1 joint statement and 1 title. These few figures form an almost anthropometric description of the brand new World Banana Forum. One might be tempted to finish the article at this point as any tangible results are very meagre for the moment. Although... the results are impressive when seen in a universe in which surrealism is the standard. Unless the proximity of a meeting on the Commercialisation of Space (yes, it's true!) might have drawn some delegates into other reaches of the cosmos.





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The World Banana Forum

Working together for sustainable banana production and trade



The World Banana Forum (WBF) is a permanent space of assembly for participants representing the global banana supply-chain to promote open dialogue on challenges facing the banana industry.

This groundbreaking initiative brings together producers, their organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, exporter groups, trading companies, retailers, public agencies, governments, research institutions and civil society organizations.

The Mission of the World Banana Forum is to inspire collaboration between stakeholders that produces pragmatic outcomes for the betterment of the banana industry; and, to achieve an industry-wide consensus of Best Practices regarding workplace issues, gender equity, environmental impact, sustainable production and economic issues.

The hope of the World Banana Forum is that all stakeholders can share the vision of a sustainable banana value chain for present and future generations.



Five working groups were formed:

- Distribution of value
- Sustainable production & environmental impact
- Agrochemical use
- Labour rights
- Certification

See the Forum on:

<http://www.fao.org/economic/worldbananforum/msf-documents/en/>

Innovations already available

The members of the five working groups formed during this inaugural session, and who are to network and meet in person from time to time, would be well-inspired to re-focus reflections on subjects where real action can be taken and realistic solutions put forward. Many techniques and much information are already available and could have very positive, rapid effects on the banana world, if only in basic knowledge of how the banana markets work. But isn't this the purpose of the FAO Committee on Commodity Problems? Its meeting (Intergovernmental Group on Banana and on Tropical Fruits, Rome, 9-10 December 2009), following that of the World Forum, made it possible to confirm that it is out of step with the requirements of the sector. The studies proposed—econometric work in particular—left the few delegates who had come to take the pulse of the markets more than a little disoriented.

To finish on an optimistic note and because this initiative is the only valid one, we shall count on the Forum to bring knowledge and know-how, but on one condition, the loss of illusions. That is the price to pay ■

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Banana — World exports

000 tonnes	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total	12 337	12 556	12 704	12 391	13 042	13 725	13 664	13 943	14 541	15 042	15 166
Latin America, incl.	9 614	9 716	9 559	9 313	9 789	10 342	10 340	10 539	10 760	11 555	11 628
Colombia	1 433	1 818	1 680	1 516	1 570	1 423	1 471	1 622	1 697	1 749	1 798
Costa Rica	2 101	2 113	1 883	1 739	1 623	1 901	1 793	1 615	1 961	2 061	1 869
Ecuador	3 856	3 935	3 940	3 990	4 199	4 671	4 537	4 654	4 402	4 651	4 727
Guatemala	793	623	801	874	972	933	1 014	1 046	983	1 330	1 355
Caribbean, incl.	205	188	165	131	144	119	112	82	105	78	75
Jamaica	62	52	42	43	40	42	29	12	32	17	0
Windward Islands	143	135	123	88	104	77	84	70	73	60	75
Asia, incl.	1 350	1 512	1 704	1 690	1 785	1 944	1 905	2 169	2 428	2 326	2 343
China	73	57	50	39	40	53	42	39	39	36	31
Philippines	1 150	1 320	1 599	1 601	1 685	1 829	1 797	2 024	2 312	2 218	2 193
Africa, incl.	383	410	494	489	533	565	557	505	606	531	552
Cameroon	132	165	238	254	259	314	295	266	257	222	280
Côte d'Ivoire	190	218	217	224	256	242	252	234	286	291	264
EU production	785	730	782	768	791	755	750	648	642	552	568

Sources: FAO, CIRAD

Certification in the value chain for fresh fruits

The example of banana industry (Pascal Liu, FAO, 110 pages)



Certification to voluntary standards is increasingly used by banana producers and exporters worldwide. This report deals with voluntary certification schemes, with a particular focus on those that use an on product label targeting consumers and have the potential to generate a price premium. The report describes the main patterns of international trade in certified bananas. It examines the market situation and prospects of certified organic and fair trade bananas. It reviews the various types of benefits and challenges associated with organic and fair trade bananas from the perspective of producing countries. Export prices for certified bananas are analysed and compared to those of conventional fruit for a selection of producing countries. The report analyzes the distribution of prices along selected value chains and seeks to determine whether producing countries reap the full benefits of certified banana exports. It examines the policy implications and suggests areas for further research and action.

Download it free of charge on:

<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/011/i0529e/i0529e00.pdf> (English version)

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