



# Banana Trade News Bulletin

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## Editorial

### British supermarkets driving the 'race to the bottom'

Britain is one of the food retail markets most heavily dominated by big chains of supermarkets. Five bananas out of every six sold nationally are traded by one of a dozen retail companies. Tesco, the biggest and most international player, sells one in every four bananas in Britain, making an estimated £1 million pounds per week (over US\$1.5 million) from the sale of its single biggest contributor to annual profits.

Last August, the third biggest chain Asda, now owned by US giant WalMart, started a banana retail price war in a bid to get customers – especially Tesco ones – through its doors. Consumer prices for loose bananas have since come down in all the big five chains by a full 25%. The last banana retail price war was also led by Asda in 1996, but ended when the big supermarkets got together and agreed that it made no sense to slash prices to below cost when nobody was actually selling any more bananas! Loose banana prices were put back up to a level where they remained until nine months ago - £1.08 per kilo. This time however the situation is very different and prices are down as low as £0.81 at time of going to press.

Two major differences mark this current price war. Firstly, the market has gone through a process of rapid concentration with less and less companies supplying bigger and fewer retailers. Secondly, the company which triggered the war has a hidden weapon which is making its rivals very nervous and which is driving further concentration.

Tesco and Asda, for example, now have 3 suppliers between them, compared to 5 and 3 respectively in 2001. Asda is exclusively supplied since just before the first price cut by Del Monte. This exclusive supply deal with Del Monte, renewed for a further 2 years from May this year, was initially contracted at a 'ridiculously low price', according to industry

sources - the new price from May is thought to be 10% lower. One of Tesco's 2 suppliers is a 'partnership' imposed by the buyers between two previously competing suppliers. The price Tesco pay their suppliers has fallen by 30% since the beginning of 2002, to the point where only very cheap bananas from unsustainable sources can be supplied at a profit.

The hidden weapon is the margin – the so-called "net target margin" to which the supermarkets' commercial buyers are required to work. Asda, in a dramatic bid to enhance its market share, has slashed its margin from 32% to 22%. The other major retailers, rather than cutting their own high margins or maintain prices to consumers, have chosen to try and stay in the retail price war by slashing supplier prices. This has now reached the point where growers in countries like Costa Rica – Britain's leading source of bananas (23% of imports in 2002) – cannot sell to Tesco or Asda unless they are prepared to make a loss! Imagine what this means for wages in the plantations and the environmental improvements which had started to take real effect in many producing countries...

In addition, the fifth biggest chain (Morrison) made a bid to buy the fourth biggest (Safeway), before all the other big players jumped in with their own bid. Current favourite to scoop up the 9% of the British retail market that Safeway represents is... Asda/WalMart, unless regulators object.

Del Monte now supplies Asda with bananas from the world's cheapest sources: over half of them come from Cameroon, where wages, labour and environmental conditions are reported to be terrible, and fob prices are thought to be one third cheaper than Ecuador. A growing proportion are also coming from Del Monte's new plantations in Northeast Brazil, where wages are also rock bottom. An example, surely, of how the 'race to the bottom' is being driven by the British retail giants.

Tesco, Carrefour (France) and Metro (Germany) – the leaders in the bid to control food retail markets in the new EU members in Eastern and Central Europe – now call the shots in the banana trade. Their sheer size and buying power makes the biggest fruit multinationals like Dole, Chiquita or Fyffes look small and insignificant. Despite being the first to make a bid for all Tesco's business at a very low price, Europe's biggest fruit company Fyffes was unceremoniously 'thrown out'.

Such is the new climate in the UK banana market that it now makes better business sense to sell bananas into the traditionally low-margin 'transit' markets of Poland, Russia or the Eastern Mediterranean. What's more, when selling outside the current EU, the banana companies do not have to deal with the growing panoply of quality, environmental and social standards which the UK supermarkets now expect their suppliers to meet and pay for if they want shelf-space: EUREP-GAP, ISO 14001, the Ethical Trading Initiative's Code of Labour Practice.

The time has come for the supermarkets to acknowledge that they are taking the lion's share of the profits along the chain and driving a 'race to the bottom' which directly damages the hardest-working and worst-remunerated players in the chain... and which directly goes against the spirit and the letter of the commitments they have made – and the good public relations they seek - by being members of the Ethical Trading Initiative. No company can continue to pretend to be promoting ethical trade along its supply chains when it slashes supplier prices to the point where growers who pay a living wage, treat their workforce with respect and are making environmental improvements are cut out of the market.

It is time these profitable retail giants incorporated the economic dimension into their much-vaunted ethical policymaking.

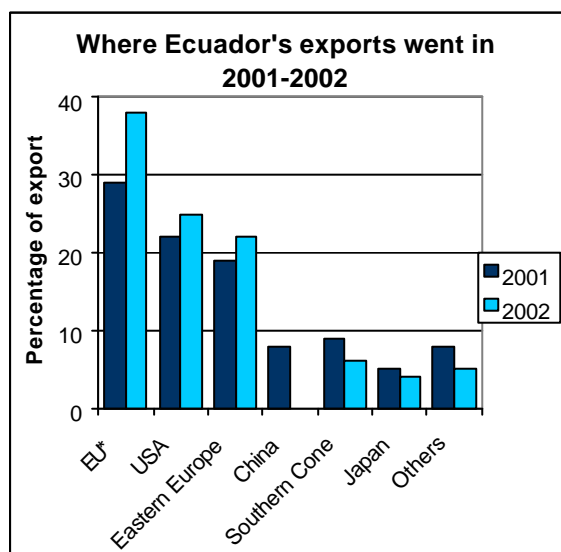


## Issues: Producing countries

### DBCP: A GENERATION LATER...

Finally, banana workers whose health has been damaged by the chemical DBCP, applied in plantations throughout the world after being banned in the USA in the 1970s, look like they may be on course to get some financial compensation from the companies responsible for using such a deadly product. In Costa Rica, a mobile diagnostic laboratory has been doing tests on men and women in the affected communities. The laboratory is satellite linked to the US Department of Health, thanks to recent efforts by a number of legal firms to get workers' cases heard in US courts. In Nicaragua, the unions report that over 500 documented cases are awaiting court proceedings in the US: *"We are struggling for justice in the justice system!"* said Doris Garcia, Women's Officer of ATC in Chinandega, *"We're now hoping that no more obstacles will appear in our way."*

Sources: SITRAP, Costa Rica; ATC, Nicaragua, May 03.



Source: FAO, May 03

\* An unknown proportion of this figure may be for transit to markets in South Eastern Europe and West Asia

### ECUADOR: PRODUCERS STRIKE AGAIN AS OFFENDING EXPORTERS NAMED

Producers blockaded Ecuador's main banana ports in the week starting 19<sup>th</sup> May in their quest to ensure that the government-set legal minimum price of \$3.20 (for a 22kg box) is respected by exporters and intermediaries. Exports fell by 40% that week, according to estimates, particularly from the Southern port of Puerto Bolívar where producers were able to maintain a more effective blockade. The

government expressed sympathy with producers and published a list of nine exporting companies who had failed to pay the legal minimum. The Minister of Agriculture stated that the offending exporters would have their export licences withdrawn, but Reybanpac – the biggest company named – managed to get the threat to its licence annulled in court. An agreement between striking producers' organisations, exporters and the government to respect the price was signed on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, but the two biggest national producers and exporters – Noboa and Reybanpac - had not signed as we went to press. The government continues to investigate the possibility of the Central Bank acting as a mediator to ensure minimum prices are paid to producers. Another of the agreements that ended the strike is the creation of a National Banana Institute.

Sources: various Ecuadorian press, May 03.

### ECUADOR: LABOUR LAW REFORM TOP OF UNION AGENDA

Banana workers have called on their international allies to support reform of Ecuador's labour laws to bring it into line with international standards, especially with respect to protecting the right to organise freely and to bargain collectively. At its annual congress the biggest trade union federation, CEOSL, has also made reforms a priority. Draft texts for changes in the law have already been presented to Ministers. Unions also hope that pressure from the US government to respect minimum labour standards can be turned to their advantage in negotiating with the Gutierrez government.

Sources: FENACLE/CEOSL and US/LEAP, May 03.

### ECUADOR: NEW UNION MEETS WITH SAME OLD HOSTILITY

In March, a new union set up by workers at the Santa Irma plantation (which supplies Chiquita labelled bananas via Reybanpac) met with the same hostility that many plantation owners in Ecuador have shown to such initiatives by workers fed up with low wages and bad conditions: all those workers named on the documents required to register a new union were fired the day after the document was lodged. The 46 workers who formed the union, some of whom had worked there for 15 years, had never been registered with the Social Security institution by their employer, a Chilean company COAGRENE.

Source: FENACLE, March 03.

**Proportion of exports from Ecuador by top 5 exporters in 2002 (by value in US\$)**

Noboa	20%
Dole	16%
Reybanpac	9%
CIPAL	8%
Bandecua (Del Monte)	6%

Source: *El Bananero, Guayaquil, 2003*

**ECUADORIAN PRODUCERS IN SEARCH OF A FAIR PRICE**

A grouping of producer organisations has called on international institutions, marketing companies, supermarkets, NGOs and unions to support their call for a fair price by buying directly from producers. The grouping covers producers of all sizes and the appeal sent to potential interested parties and the press in April notes that guaranteed prices that more than cover the costs of production would allow for "better wages, investment in rural infrastructure, health, education, housing and transport"; it would also mean a halt to the "indiscriminate emigration" of the Ecuadorian poor to developed countries. The appeal denounces the government's "complicity with the exporter oligopoly" and calls for the implementation of a sustainable agricultural development policy. The authors of the statement have also called on the Ecuadorian industry – in order to "avoid cannibalism" - to regulate the supply of bananas onto the world market.

Sources: *APROBAN, Guayaquil, 24/04; Diario Expreso, 02/06.*

**COLOMBIA: UNION TO SET UP CHAIN OF SHOPS**

SINTRAINAGRO, Colombia's agricultural workers' union, has announced that it is to invest in establishing a chain of shops in the main banana growing areas of Urabá. The shops will sell basic consumer goods at prices which workers can afford. The union, in conjunction with local municipalities is also establishing a Consumer Price Index. "All this will allow us to control the cost of the family food basket", said Osvaldo Cuadrado, President of SINTRAINAGRO. At the same time, the union has secured government support to acquire 600 hectares of land to run its own banana farms and to produce livestock and crops such as cocoa and oil-palm.

Source: *El Colombiano, Bogotá, 24/03.*

**COLOMBIA: PROTECTS ITSELF AGAINST DISEASE**

The Colombian Institute of Agriculture (ICA) banned imports of genetic material to produce banana and plantain in April in order to protect crops from Panama Disease (a fungus). The manager of ICA proposed that other countries should do the same given the damage the disease can cause. The disease nearly wiped out the banana export industry several decades ago and is thought to be present in the soil in the Canary Islands, the Philippines and Cameroon.

Source: *Sopisco, Panama, Week 16/03.*

**PANAMA: WORKERS' COOP BUYS CHIQUITA DIVISION**

After months of negotiations, Chiquita has finally signed an agreement with the SITRACHILCO union to sell its subsidiary to a plantation workers' cooperative at the end of April. The new Puerto Armuelles Multiple Services Cooperative (COOPSEMUPAR) will buy the assets of Chiquita subsidiary PAFCO for just under US\$20 million. Chiquita also agreed a \$16 million package of redundancy payments to the nearly 3000 workers. Most of them expect to be rehired by COOPSEMUPAR. The workers originally sought to sell their fruit to another marketer, but have signed a ten-year contract to sell to Chiquita at prevailing market prices. The Coop will also receive technical advice from former PAFCO staff.

Sources: *Panamanian press, April 03.*

**COSTA RICA: EXPORTS FALL AS UNEMPLOYMENT GROWS**

The world's second largest exporter nearly lost its position to Colombia in 2002, as exports fell again to under 1.6 million tonnes, down by 25% in the three years since 1999. In the same period, unions report that 10,000 direct plantation jobs have been lost, wages have come down by some 40%, and the majority of workers are now hired by contractors rather than directly. Meanwhile, many independent plantations teeter on the edge of bankruptcy.

Sources: *COSIBA, May 03; FAO, April 03.*

**GUATEMALA: EXPORTS GROW AS LABOUR SQUEEZED**

Following the establishment of new plantations in the Escuintla region of the Pacific coast in the late 1990s, Guatemala's exports – which

are almost exclusively to the US market – approached one million tonnes for the first time in 2002. The shift of emphasis to the Pacific by the three big multinational buyers, who market all the fruit from there, has however brought with it pressure on wages, conditions and on the unionised workers in the Izabal region and fierce repression in the new plantations. Unions trying to negotiate with Del Monte and Chiquita in Izabal are facing a range of delaying tactics by the companies and constant pressure to reduce pay and conditions. In May, Chiquita subsidiary COBIGUA sacked the whole workforce at Finca Inca in the middle of negotiations.

Such is the anti-union atmosphere around Escuintla, union activists are forced to operate clandestinely and go in fear of their lives.

Sources: SITRABI and UNSITRAGUA unions, Morales and Guatemala City, May 03.

### **NICARAGUA: SOCIAL 'DECOMPOSITION' HAPPENING APACE**

With Nicaraguan plantation workers' wages now down to the lowest in the world at around US\$1.20 per day, even those in work are going to bed hungry. Due to the closure of most banana plantations in the last few years, the majority of those who used to work are now unemployed. For the hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans affected by the collapse in world coffee prices, life is even more grim. Protests are risky because of state repression, but the fact that people are still taking to the streets is a measure of their desperation. The unions who organise rural workers have issued an alert to the effect that society is unravelling and 'social decomposition' is taking place across the country.

Source: Testimonies from ATC and FETRABACH, Chinandega, March 03.

### **BELIZE: CAMPAIGN AGAINST ABUSE BY DANISH ORGANISATION**

A public campaign led by Danish General Workers' Union, SiD, is targeting malpractices in Belizean banana plantations owned by Danish organisation, Tvind. The same organisation also owned three plantations in Ecuador, two of which it has recently sold. The plantations have some of the worst labour conditions in the continent, despite Tvind promoting itself as a humanitarian organisation which funds development projects in several countries. It seems that Tvind has invested monies it was given by its network of teachers -

who donated their salaries to the organisation – to invest in tropical fruit production.

The union had sought dialogue with Tvind, but had made no progress in securing commitments to improve conditions. Tvind member, Soren Sorensen, is the largest single owner of plantations in Belize and Vice-President of the Banana Growers' Association. Fyffes, the sole buyer of Tvind bananas is also being pressed to ensure implementation of its code of conduct which is clearly violated in the case of Tvind-owned farms in Belize.

Source: SiD, Copenhagen, March 03.

### **HONDURAS: EXPORTS BACK UP TO PRE-MITCH LEVELS**

After Hurricane Mitch at the end of 1998, Honduran exports fell by 80%, but have recovered year on year to reach nearly the same volume as in 1997. This means Honduras is now the sixth biggest exporter in the world. 87% of the 515,200 tonnes went to the United States.

Source: FAO, April 03.

### **PERU ENTERS ORGANIC AND FAIRTRADE MARKETS**

Peru entered the organic banana market in a big way in 2002, generating a 136% growth in exports to become the world's third biggest exporter of organic bananas after Dominican Republic and Ecuador. The new grouping of 100 or so small farmers, Asociación Valle de Chira, has also been certified as a Fairtrade producer. The farmers have formed an export company in collaboration with Dutch-based fair trade banana importer Agrofair. Part of the social premium is destined for the contracted workers responsible for harvesting.

Source: Agrofair, Netherlands, April 03.

### **WINDWARDS: EXPORTS SHRINK AS FAIRTRADE GROWS**

Exports in the first quarter of 2003 shrank from over 28,000 tonnes for the four islands put together to less than 18,000. Drought in Dominica and St Vincent accounted for much of this fall. This means that Fairtrade exports from farmers' groups organised by the Windward islands Farmers' Association now account for more than 15% of total exports. Despite its initial reluctance to accept the strategic value of Fairtrade, the industry is starting to see that it may play a vital role in the survival of the islands' most important export.

Source: Caribbean Media Corporation, Bridgetown 08/05

## ST LUCIA: IN THE COLD ARMS OF THE IMF

The International Monetary Fund has called on St Lucia to control wage increases, reform the labour code to enhance flexibility and to continue restructuring public companies. These recommendations came in the same breath as IMF support for the government's banana recovery programme which aims to improve competitiveness ahead of a loss of EU trade preferences in 2006. The IMF also praised collaboration with the World Bank and Caribbean Development Bank to focus public investment on private sector-led growth. Small comfort for those employed in the shrinking banana industry.

Source: Caribbean Media Corporation, Bridgetown, 10/05.

## PHILIPPINES: PUSH-CART PEDDLING TO FAIR TRADING

From its origins in the sugar crisis in Negros in the mid-1980s, Alter Trade has sought to find sustainable production alternatives for families made redundant by the collapse of the large-scale sugar industry in that Philippine island. Alter Trade started providing markets to growers by assisting urban poor groups to peddle farm products using pushcarts, as a



Balangon bananas from Mampas  
Credit: Alter Trade 2002

response to abusive middlemen. Their first export shipment of 'balangon' bananas at the end of the 1980s was a disaster as two thirds of this local variety of banana ripened on the ship to Japan. With organic muscovado sugar, bananas are now one of Alter Trade's two major traded commodities, supporting several thousand farming families. Increasing competition for organic bananas in the Japanese market from Ecuador, Dominican Republic and Thailand has meant that

AlterTrade, which employs 200 staff in Bacolod City, has had to invest in management and technology to meet the demands of volume and product quality that Japanese consumers now expect.

Source: Alter Trade News and Views, Dec 02.

## INDIA: WOMEN ORGANISE FIBRE BUSINESS

Women in the Southern Indian state of Kerala have developed a new method of processing banana fibres to make attractive handicrafts. They have set up a unit to manufacture handbags, dolls, flower vase, wallets, tablemats and doormats. The fibre is extracted from the stems, which previously went to waste, then dried, and spun. The 60 women are organised into 6 groups and are all members of the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council which provides advice on production, sales and exports.

Source: Business Line, India, 13/02/03.

## Issues: Consuming Countries

### ORGANIC IMPORTS GROW BUT SLOWER

Organic imports to the major markets of Europe, North America and Japan grew by 15% in 2002 to over 1% of world consumption, meaning that the very rapid growth of previous years has started to slow down. The EU still accounts for 60% of those imports, whilst the Dominican Republic remains the biggest supplier, with Peru and Ecuador growing fast as suppliers. Import growth in the USA was 23%, compared to 78% the previous year. In Japan, the introduction of new standards in 2001 continued to affect the market, as many bananas previously sold as organic did not meet the new JAS standards. The FAO predicts that consumption worldwide will continue to grow at the same rate in 2003, although new 'bio-security' regulations in the USA may well affect fresh produce imports negatively.

Source: FAO Banana Information Note, Rome, April 03.

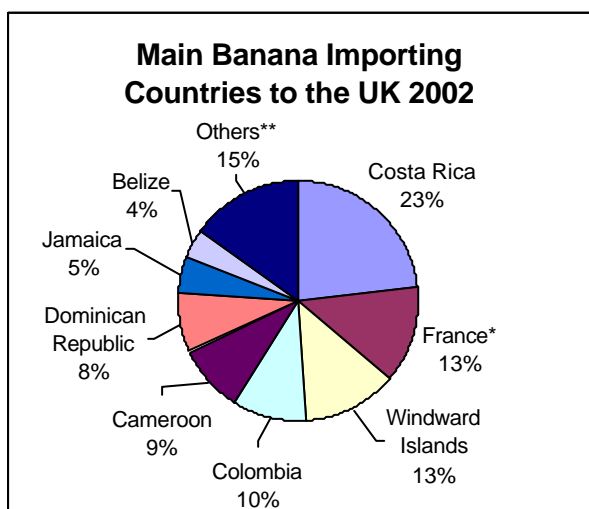
### VIRTUAL WASHINGTON BANANA MUSEUM

"Time flies like an arrow, fruit flies like a banana," is the Groucho Marx opening quote of the Washington Banana Museum, a website dedicated to a collection of over 4,000 banana-inspired oddments. Source: [www.bananamuseum.com](http://www.bananamuseum.com)

## STANDARDS PRODUCERS CANNOT AFFORD

Supermarket buyers, especially in Europe, are increasingly likely to be demanding compliance with labour and environmental standards by effectively making voluntary certification schemes like EUREP-GAP compulsory. British supermarket Sainsbury is leading the way, saying that it will not buy fruit which does not meet the European supermarkets' new 'three-in-one' standard for fresh produce growers. EUREP – a grouping of the major European supermarkets – originally developed standards of "good agricultural practice", which mainly focused on quality, as defined by the supermarkets themselves. Since then, consumer pressure has led them to add environmental and labour criteria. The costs of compliance and actual certification can only be borne by the bigger players. The first Costa Rican plantation to gain EUREP certification was not until this year. In Ecuador, producers are only just beginning to hear that this may become a new requirement for selling into the European market. The Ecuadorian banana growers' association, ABO, expressed the feelings of many about these new 'non-tariff' barriers: "It is impossible to comply with the standards if we don't get a fair price." Producers also fear that compliance with social accountability standard SA 8000 may also become a buyer requirement when no extra money is on offer to producers.

Sources: Notifax 342, CORBANA, Costa Rica; Diario Expreso, Ecuador, 09/06.



\*Some of this may be other fruit transiting through France, eg Cote d'ivoire, Cameroon or dollar

\*\*Mainly dollar fruit via Benelux and Ireland

Source: DEFRA

## SPAIN: CANARIAN AWARENESS REMAINS HIGH

Nearly all Spanish consumers are aware of Canarian bananas, whilst 85% of them continue to buy them. Most consumers value them for their taste, whilst half buy them for their nutritional value. The survey was undertaken together with the Canarian producers' umbrella body, ASPROCAN. Producers hope that this high level of awareness will help them survive the inevitable changes provoked by reform of the EU banana regime by 2006.

Source: Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Madrid, 11/04.

## ETI BANANA PILOT FOLDS



Credit: Paul Barham

The ETI banana pilot project in Costa Rica was brought to an end in February, before all the audits planned to investigate compliance with the Ethical Trading Initiative base code in the banana industry had taken place. The pilot was set up to investigate monitoring of voluntary codes of conduct using two different auditing methodologies. The first audit used a private auditing company, but the unions and NGOs involved were dissatisfied with the private auditing companies' ability to monitor 'freedom of association'. The second type of audit, which never took place, was a so-called multi-stakeholder project which aimed to involve the unions and companies directly. ETI in the UK is currently considering undertaking a project in another banana exporting country.

Source: Banana Link, March 03.

## **USA: RECORD CONSUMPTION IN 2002**

US banana consumption reached nearly 4 million tonnes in 2002, an almost identical volume to the total consumption of the 15 EU members. For the first time ever, Guatemala became the second biggest supplier, with nearly 24% of the market. Costa Rica was knocked into third place, having been the biggest supplier for the last few years. Average import prices were \$528/ton, slightly higher in dollar equivalents than French import prices for the first time in history.

*Source: FAO, April 03.*

## **Issues: International Policy**

### **« TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL BANANA AGREEMENT?» EUROBAN CONSULTATION**

The European Banana Action Network (EUROBAN) has produced a discussion paper on the future of banana trade policy. The paper raises a number of possibilities for creating a trade policy framework within which sustainable production and trade of bananas could take place. These include an International Banana Agreement which could impose production quotas and different tariff levels according to how sustainably bananas are produced.

*The paper can be downloaded from the EU-US Trade War and News sections at [www.bananalink.org.uk](http://www.bananalink.org.uk)*

### **CHIRAC – RHETORIC OR REALITY?**

The French President, Jacques Chirac, in his address to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of African Heads of State on agricultural development, held in Paris on 21st February, reinforced his new identity as the champion of the poor and underprivileged. France would, he said, propose to its EU partners and the G8 a moratorium on export dumping, protection for Africa's preferential access to the EU markets and an improvement to the terms of trade for basic agricultural commodities. Whether such fine words can be believed or not is another matter however. For a less optimistic view, see the report on Oxfam's new Briefing Note in *Publications* section.

*Source: Communiqué de Presse, Paris 21/02/03.*

## **WTO NEGOTIATORS MAY BE REDUNDANT**

The Common Market Organisation of Bananas, despite its many difficulties, has provided some protection for ACP and Community producers since 1993, but its effectiveness in realising the principles on which it was based have been steadily eroded under US pressure. However, recent failures to control supply in the EU market have already made the CMOB largely ineffective, according to FruiTrop. With EU enlargement, it suggests that a de facto tariff only system may well develop long before the 2006 deadline. If so, the European and American negotiators will have saved themselves a job...

*Source: FruiTrop Paris, Dec 02.*

### **FUTURE SAFE WITH EUROCOMMERCE?**

EuroCommerce which represents some 4.7 million retail, wholesale and international trading businesses in the EU, the majority of which are small or medium sized enterprises, has submitted proposals to the European Commission for changes to the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) system for the next cycle (2005-2014). Given the organisations it represents, it is unsurprising that it is strongly in favour of liberalising world trade. Changes to the GSP should be made, EuroCommerce says, on the basis of the experience of the previous GSP cycle. Experience has shown that the system so far has been too complex, lacking in transparency and legal predictability and that it has not been as effective in achieving its goals as its architects would have hoped. EuroCommerce recommends a simpler set of rules, an end to protectionism for EU domestic industries, including agriculture and ideally the deletion of the Graduation Clause. It also rejects special incentive arrangements, which are aimed at protecting labour rights and the environment. These areas should be left to organisations like EuroCommerce to deal with as part of the ongoing debate on Corporate Social Responsibility. As for decisions about the GSP system itself, these need to be made in full consultation with the stakeholders. The stakeholders are the beneficiary (exporting) countries and importers based in the EU (i.e. EuroCommerce and its members).

*Source: EuroCommerce, Brussels, March 03*

## **EU GSP: INDIAN CHALLENGE TO DRUGS REGIME**

In March, the Indian government dropped part of its challenge in the WTO to the EU's GSP scheme. The initial complaint by India challenged both the special incentive schemes for countries prepared to abide by certain labour and environmental standards as well as the tariff preferences for countries combating drug production and trafficking. India then dropped the part of the complaint which attacked the labour and environment conditionality. India claims that it is against WTO rules to discriminate between different developing countries when deciding on concessions. If successful, this could undermine the whole of the EU's GSP scheme as well as future attempts to graduate tariffs according to criteria such as the sustainability of production methods, for example.

*Sources : WTO, Geneva, Dec 02 and EC Official Journal, 06/03.*

## **LAMY READY TO SUBSCRIBE TO CODE OF CONDUCT IN WTO**

At a conference in Brussels in May, the EU's Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy recognised that developing countries are sometimes put under unacceptable pressure in WTO negotiations. He stated that the EU rejected these methods and would support a code of conduct if other WTO members were also prepared to sign.

*Source: Press release by CIDSE, Oxfam and Solidar, Brussels, 09/05.*

## **US-CAFTA ON TRACK FOR YEAR END?**

*"We believe we are on track to finish the free trade agreement this year,"* declared US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick following a meeting with Central American leaders at the White House on April 10<sup>th</sup>. The Central American Free Trade Agreement is between the USA and Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. A review of labour rights, mandated by the 2002 Trade Act, has to be completed before any deal can be finalised. During a visit to Costa Rica at the end of May however, US negotiators and private sector representatives expressed concern at the labour rights situation, indicating that this may hold up the process. Regina Vargo, chief US negotiator, told the El Salvador press that if the US does not see real

improvements then the treaty may be in danger. The concerns of the trade unions were expressed by Jorge Estrada of Guatemalan union UNSITRAGUA at a round table with government negotiators earlier in May: *"What the US wants to do with CAFTA is put labour standards at the service of free trade and then trample those standards under foot."* The Guatemalan government negotiator considered that raising labour standards would bring more jobs.

*Sources: International Trade reporter, Washington, 17/04; Prensa Libre, Guatemala, 21/05; Prensa Gráfica, El Salvador, 25/05; La Nación, Costa Rica, 31/05.*

## **FRENCH PLAYERS PREPARE THEIR CASE**

The French Economy Minister and banana industry had a first meeting in February to define their position ahead of reforms to the EU regime. In the face of growing social problems linked to declining banana income in both Martinique and Guadeloupe, the government committed itself to *"defending French interests"* in the forthcoming EU negotiations. The question is how will the players achieve their aims of *"improving profitability"*, *"finding synergies"* and *"safeguarding income"* for French banana producers.

*Source: Fruchthandel, Germany, No.7/03*

## **GLOBAL UNIONS STEP UP ACTION ON CSR**

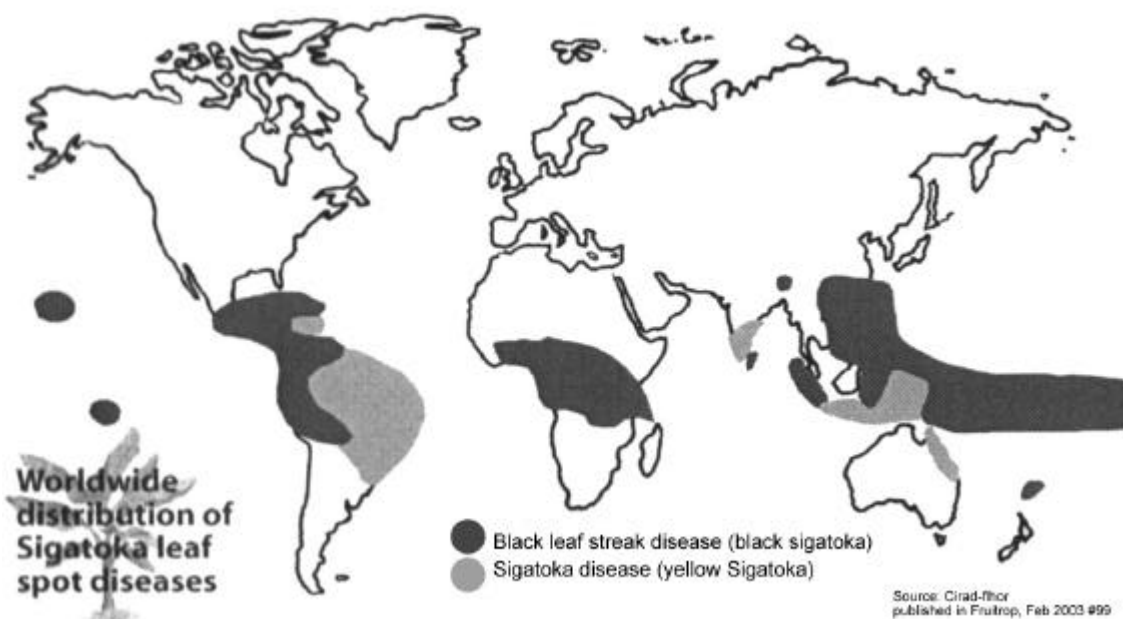
International trade union federations are concerned that many companies are not putting compliance with core international labour standards at the centre of their *"Corporate Social Responsibility"* agenda. The unions, at a conference organised by Swedish confederation LO in Stockholm in April, agreed to step up their work to ensure that businesses live up to their social responsibilities and do not use this agenda for public relations purposes when, for example, workers in their operations and supply chains are not allowed to form and join trade unions so they can bargain for decent wages and conditions.

*Source: ICFTU press release, Brussels, 15/04.*

## Special Feature: *No more bananas?*

Earlier this year scientists issued a warning that dessert bananas are under threat. Media reports put out the message that they are on the verge of extinction. The facts to which scientists at the International Network for the Improvement of bananas and Plantain (INIBAP) wanted to draw attention were that a virulent new strain of Panama disease has appeared in Asia and that the lack of attention given by the industry and governments to the breeding of resistant varieties of banana

threatens the crops of small subsistence farmers and the export banana industry worldwide. The article which appeared in "*New Scientist*" magazine concluded on the controversial note that the only salvation may be genetic modification, raising much-needed debate in the banana world. As the material translated below demonstrates however, this conclusion was not one that most banana scientists themselves espouse.



### The real threat

What is certain is that the Cavendish banana is very vulnerable, due to the almost total dependence of the world banana trade on this single variety. INIBAP director, Emile Frison made clear that: "*The uniformity of bananas makes them ripe for disease like no other crop on earth.*" Lessons about monoculture from the Irish potato famine 150 years ago have still clearly yet to be learned.

Another fungal disease called black sigatoka has been wreaking havoc in the wall-to-wall plantations of identical banana plants and only unsustainable volumes of chemicals have been keeping it at bay. The extinction of the Cavendish would be a social and economic disaster for some ten million people in 25 tropical countries who depend on the trade for their livelihoods. The dilemma facing these communities is that they are suffering from the consequences of the aerially applied chemicals used to control fungal disease -

skin and eye problems, cancers, cancers, even birth defects - but would also suffer if bananas were to disappear.

The US-based International Banana Association however – which groups the major banana companies – made clear that the industry sees no real problems with continuing business as usual, despite scientists' warnings: "*While plant pests and diseases will continue to challenge the banana industry, there is no evidence or indication that banana farmers will be unable to sustain commercial banana production in the future using modern pest management strategies and techniques. In fact, today's sound farm management principles, good agricultural practices and integrated pest management approaches have achieved success against all pests that currently impact the crop, while still producing a quality banana and protecting workers and the natural environment.*"

Workers would certainly not agree that they feel protected when two or three times as much is spent on “protecting” the crop as is spent on remunerating their labour. If the natural environment could speak, it would also protest such an evident mistruth.

## So what is the needed?

*“Neither pesticides nor genetic manipulation will prevent the disappearance of the Cavendish banana,”* said Jean-Vincent Escalant, INIBAP’s research coordinator, in an interview a few weeks later. *“Nor are these long-term solutions. Current knowledge of genetics would mean scientists could only intervene on one or two banana genes. Any pathogen, never mind the latest strain of the fusarium fungus (that causes Panama disease), would very quickly overcome any such simplistic genetic block.”*

In relation to the article which provoked the media storm, Escalant stated that most reactions were *“positive and came from researchers in banana producing countries who said the article was useful in helping them convince their governments and other institutions to improve research efforts on disease control. The negative reactions were to the call for GM, which came from the editors and not INIBAP.”*

*“We are convinced that conventional breeding methods are the most efficient in the long term. The banana we consume is a sexually sterile fruit, but biologists can make some varieties artificially fertile by applying large quantities of pollen. This produces a fertile female variety which we cross with wild male bananas resistant to the new strain of Panama disease, in turn producing a variety which is both edible and immune.”*

*“What is needed is funding. Even though bananas are the fourth most important staple crop after rice, maize and wheat, there are nearly a thousand institutes working on increasing rice food security, whilst for bananas there are only five. Bananas have suffered from the negative image of a product in the hands of a few multinationals who are only interested in exporting. The hundreds of thousands of small farmers who depend on bananas for their livelihood get forgotten.”*<sup>1</sup>

## French researchers confirm a bright future

Researchers at the French government-funded Centre for Research on International Agricultural Development (CIRAD) reacted to the scare story by stating that *“banana plants will continue to flourish in all four corners of the tropics”*. However, their scientists agree that a substantial research effort is needed to maintain the crop as a staple as well as an export crop. CIRAD has one of the largest teams working on conventional improvement methods, and have created new varieties destined for local consumption. *“Other varieties destined for the world market are at an advanced stage of testing.”*

*“Furthermore, in order to respond to pest and disease threats, we do not just need new more resistant banana varieties; we also need good agricultural practices based on an in-depth knowledge of plant agronomy and biology. Research in this area is less well-known, but just as vital as the work on breeding.”*<sup>2</sup>

## A wake-up call

*“The future may be terrible, but what’s even worse is that the world’s No.1 exporter is not involved in the scientific network which is looking at alternatives to extinction,”* warned an article in the Ecuadorian press. Particularly galling for the author is the fact that INIBAP is working in Bolivia on developing organic varieties, but Ecuador remains on the sidelines. Since then, following pressure from both producers and exporters, the new government has approved the creation of a national institution which, amongst other things, would be responsible for coordinating scientific research<sup>3</sup>.

So, despite the pro-GM spin given by the *“New Scientist”* editors, it may just be that the ‘scare’ is waking up the banana world to the need to act.

*“Governments, industry and scientists need to get together to agree public and private investment in research into sustainable production practices and on varieties which are not chemical junkies and don’t depend on genetic modification.”* concluded Alistair Smith, International Coordinator of Banana Link.

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewed by Julio Godoy for *Tierramérica*, 06/03/03

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<sup>2</sup> Press release, CIRAD, Montpellier, 21/01/03

<sup>3</sup> *El Comercio*, Quito, Ecuador 20/01 and 03/06/03

## Companies

### DBPL: DOMINICA'S SUCCESS STORY

Dominica Banana Producers Limited reported a profit of US\$150,000 after just five months of trading. The private company replaced the state-owned Marketing Corporation, beginning operations with less than \$1000. Soon after the company was established, farmers were contracted to supply Fairtrade labelled bananas by the UK's leading supermarket, Tesco, giving farmers involved \$7.40 per box as against \$5.90. Despite declining production, quality has improved massively. DBPL has also concentrated on supplying the most important inputs.

Source: Caribbean Media Corporation, Bridgetown, 15/04.

### WINDWARDS COME OUT AGAINST WALMART BID

In an unprecedented move, the government of St Vincent and the Grenadines and the Windward Island banana exporting company (WIBDECO) have been lobbying aggressively to influence the purchase of Britain's fourth biggest supermarket chain, Safeway. An initial bid by the fifth biggest chain, Morrisons, was followed by a flurry of bids from other big players in the UK retail market. The current favourite to win the bid to buy Safeway is the cash-rich Asda/WalMart, but the decision now depends on the decision of the Competition Commission.

The St Vincent Prime Minister, Ralph Gonsalves, warned that the Caribbean industry would face "dire consequences" if the US giant was allowed to take another 9% of the UK market. WIBDECO accused Wal-Mart of engineering the low banana prices facing the region's producers: "What we have seen is a direct result of what Asda and Wal-Mart are doing in the industry... Should you bring cheap goods to the consumer if people are forced to live below the poverty line in order to deliver them?" said CEO Bernard Cornibert. Gonsalves went even further and wrote to the UK Office of Fair Trading and the British government protesting Wal-Mart's banana price war, and recommending Sainsbury as the best choice for the Safeway merger.

Source: Caribbean Media Corporation news agency, Bridgetown, 11/02/03.

### ASDA/WALMART: PRICE WAR LEADERS RENEW EXCLUSIVE DEAL

Britain's third biggest retailer has renewed an exclusive supply contract with Fresh Del Monte for a further two years. The contract to supply some 85,000 boxes per week was extended from 1<sup>st</sup> May after a year. Last year industry insiders referred to the price at which Del Monte agreed to supply Asda as "ridiculously low". In any case, the chain launched a banana price war in August 2002 which is still going on and which forced other major chains to follow. The new price from May 2003 is reported to be 10% lower.

Source: Banana Link, April 03.

### AHOLD IN DISGRACE



The world's third largest retailing chain, the Dutch Ahold, revealed an accounting scandal on the scale of the Enron case in its US Foodservice subsidiary, the second largest chain in the USA.

Income had been overstated by over \$500 million. The company's rapid expansion is now called into serious question, with the possibility that the group may have to be broken up. Ahold's shares fell nearly two-thirds to €3.59, barely a tenth of their price a year ago, leaving it with a market value of just €3bn.

Source: Financial Times, London, 24/02

### TESCO: DOCTOR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE

Flush with record operating profits of £1.48 billion pounds and a further 15% growth in the first quarter of this trading year, Britain's No.1 retailer is keen to dispel its image of a hungry lion. CEO Sir Terry Leahy saw his total pay and benefits package rise to £2.84 million. When it comes to bananas, Tesco continue to make nearly £1 million per week profit, despite savage cuts in prices paid to suppliers. The retailer still manages to reap a full 40% of the price charged to consumers on its sales of conventional bananas, the majority of which is profit. Interestingly, a bag of Fairtrade labelled bananas from the Windward Islands adorns the cover of the company's latest Corporate Responsibility Report, presumably to demonstrate to investors and consumers that it is a friend of small farmers in developing countries. However, at the rock-bottom prices currently paid by Tesco to its shrinking number of banana suppliers, growers simply cannot pay the "living wage" to which the

supermarket is committed through its membership of the Ethical Trading Initiative.

Sources: *Financial Times*, London, 16/05 and 13/06; *Banana Link* and industry sources.

### **DOLE: MAJOR INVESTMENT IN ECUADOR**

The world's biggest fruit company sent a delegation of 15 senior executives to meet Ecuadorian President and Trade Minister in the Presidential Palace in Quito in May. Dole came to advance its proposal for an undisclosed multi-million dollar investment in the banana and flower sectors. The delegation was headed by CEO and new outright owner of Dole Food Company, David Murdock. Last year Dole completed a \$30 million investment in its own port facility near Guayaquil. Dole was the country's second biggest banana exporter in 2002 and has recently started acquiring its own banana farms for the first time.

Source: *El Universo*, Guayaquil, 06/05.

### **DOLE: MINOR INVESTMENT IN HONDURAS**

Standard Fruit, the Dole subsidiary in Honduras is to invest US\$14 million in new banana and pineapple plantations. The announcement from the Honduran President Ricardo Maduro was accompanied by news that Dole expects a 20% increase in its exports in 2003. Maduro also said that Dole was studying the possibility of building houses for its workers.

Source: *ACAN-EFE*, Tegucigalpa, 15/04.

### **DOLE ACCUSED IN MAJOR POLLUTION INCIDENT**

On 15th January, a serious pollution incident caused large-scale deaths of fish and other river life along a ten-mile stretch of the River Pacuare near Costa Rica's Caribbean coast. According to local people, there had been a spill of a poisonous chemical used for aerial spraying bananas. The Environment Minister stated on TV that it was impossible to say who was responsible, but evidence gathered by the trade union SITRAP and the Regional Environmental Council points to Dole. Thanks to the pressure that SITRAP and the local people have exerted, the Environment Minister has assigned a lawyer to prepare a case for the relevant courts.

*"We are aware that no sum of money can repair the damage, but are sure that if the company is brought to justice and punished with a heavy fine*

*they would take more care in future not to damage our natural resources,"* commented Carlos Arguedas, Environmental Officer for SITRAP.

Source: *SITRAP*, Siquirres, Costa Rica.

### **DOLE TRIES TO AVOID DBCP COMPENSATION**

On a visit to Nicaragua in January, Dole representative Michael Carter, told DBCP victims that their only chance of getting compensation was not to have recourse to Nicaraguan Law 364 which tries to streamline the procedures for victim compensation. Dole believes the law is unconstitutional, because *"the law purports to make large awards to thousands of Nicaraguans who are not injured"*. Carter, confident that the Nicaraguan cases would not reach US courts, recommended that workers seek out-of-court settlements with the company, citing \$6-7,000 payments to victims in other countries.

Sources: *El Nuevo Diario*, Managua, 20/01; correspondence with company, 14/04.

### **DEL MONTE BANKS ON CHEAP LABOUR IN CAMEROON**

Reports from the UK market indicate that Fresh Del Monte Produce is sourcing at least half of the 85,000 boxes per week it sells to Asda/WalMart from Cameroon. Information on labour conditions and prices in the biggest African banana exporter are hard to come by; but export statistics show that fob prices are lower than anywhere in Latin America, whilst one independent local report stated that conditions for workers are *"not far from slavery"*.

Sources: *Banana Link* and [www.wagne.net](http://www.wagne.net).

### **CHIQUITA'S SECOND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY REPORT**

Chiquita has produced a second high quality report on the social dimension of their global operations. Like the first one in 2001, the report is unusually honest in its assessment of progress made and to be made. Chiquita's biggest problem in relation to enforcing the terms of its international trade union and workers' rights agreement with COLSIBA and IUF is with some of its managers who still hang on to the old, anti-union corporate culture.

See [www.chiquita.com](http://www.chiquita.com) for details of second report.

## CHIQUITA: INSIDER TRADING BOOSTS SHARE VALUE

Reports in early March state that Chiquita's CEO, Cyrus Freidheim, bought 25,000 of his own company's shares. Another few thousand were bought by officers and a director. This insider activity boosted the company's share value to nearly \$12 per share.

Source: Sopisco, Panama, Week 14/03.

## FYFFES: PROTEST AT AGM

Shareholders were picketed as they attended the Fyffes Annual General meeting in Dublin on 30<sup>th</sup> May. Aidan Cahill, LASC coordinator, said "Workers in Belize have been intimidated and fired because they joined a trade union. Fyffes have stood idly by despite their promise to protect worker's rights and hold their suppliers to account. For a company so proud of their good name, Fyffes is still 'slipping up' on workers' rights." The company's "Banana Code of Practice" states clearly their commitment to ensuring all suppliers comply with local labour laws and ILO conventions, specifically to organise and bargain collectively.

Sources: Press release, LASC, Dublin, 29/05/03; Fyffes Banana Code of Practice 2000.

## DEL MONTE: NEW CREDIT FOR EUROPEAN EXPANSION

Fresh Del Monte Produce Inc. has secured a major US \$400 million loan to finance its expansion in Germany and into the new EU members of Central and Eastern Europe. The loan is made by leading food and agriculture bank, the Dutch Rabobank.

Source: Fruchthandel, Germany, No.13/03.

## NOBOA: WORLD RECORD ON GHOST COMPANIES?

Since last year's strike and the international attention given to the plight of workers at the Los Alamos division of Noboa, the company has multiplied the number of sub-contracting companies hiring its workforce from three to nineteen! This seems designed to further frustrate the efforts by workers to form independent trade unions. At present, there is nothing illegal in creating these 'phantom' companies with the same address – and the same legal representatives – as the mother company.

Source: FENACLE, Guayaquil, May 03.

## NESTLÉ SUPPORT FOR NEW INTERNATIONAL COFFEE AGREEMENT?

Nestlé has come under pressure from an alliance of civil society organisations about the abuse of its buying power. "Like Oxfam, we would support initiatives aimed at better managing supply, reducing volatility and maintaining coffee prices within price bands that provide a satisfactory livelihood for producers and allows consumption to grow.... Similar to the former economic clauses of the International Coffee Agreement," stated Nestlé in response to the campaign.

Source: Nestlé communication, Switzerland, 11/04.

## Publications and events



Banana Link has published a 28-page booklet on banana workers' rights in the world's largest banana exporting country. Includes testimonies from workers as well as background information on the industry and the drive to organise plantation workers led by the Ecuadorian Federation of Free Farmers and Indigenous Peoples, FENACLE.

Copies available for £5.00 each from Banana Link via [blink@gn.apc.org](mailto:blink@gn.apc.org) Discounts for bulk orders.

## COLSIBA CONFERENCE IN GUAYAQUIL

The seventh conference of the Latin American coordination of Banana Workers' Unions took place in Guayaquil, Ecuador from 28<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> May. Government Ministers addresses the conference at which delegates discussed issues ranging from the continuing violations of basic

trade union and workers' human rights in many countries of the continent, to the consequences of a change in EU import policy from 2006 and the emerging low-wage export industry in Brazil.

For more information contact [colsiba@racsa.co.cr](mailto:colsiba@racsa.co.cr)

### **“SOLIDARISMO OR UNION-BUSTING COSTA RICA STYLE”**

Banana Link and War on Want have published a four-page leaflet in English, Spanish and Italian on the Costa Rican workers' movement which set about trying to destroy the independent trade union movement in the banana plantations from the early 1980s.

For copies, contact Banana Link via [blink@gn.apc.org](mailto:blink@gn.apc.org)

### **FAIRTRADE FRUIT NEWS**

FLO's April Bulletin reported that total sales of Fairtrade certified bananas reached 37,500 tonnes in 2002. There is increasing demand for organic Fairtrade from many continental European supermarkets which FLO-certified producers hope to meet in 2003. Medium-sized plantations have been registered in the Dominican Republic, whilst small producers in Peru and Ecuador are seeking certification.

To receive a copy of FLO Fruit News, contact Product Manager, Emilie Dardaine at [e.dardaine@fairtrade.net](mailto:e.dardaine@fairtrade.net)

**WWW.REEFERTRENDS.COM** is a new website and weekly trade bulletin on the fresh produce shipping business. It also includes regular news stories on the banana trade. One very significant item for the banana world is the concern that a cartel is operating amongst the biggest banana shipping companies to keep transport prices artificially high. *Subscriptions available online*

### **FAO SEMINAR ON RESPONSIBLE PRACTICES**

The third FAO seminar on responsible practices along the horticultural supply chains held in Nürnberg in February generated some useful debates amongst diverse stakeholders.

For a summary, contact Cora Dankers at [cora.dankers@fao.org](mailto:cora.dankers@fao.org)

### **SAI CONFERENCE, FLORENCE, JUNE 25<sup>TH</sup>**

A one day conference on “Using SA 8000 to Assure Supply Chain Labor Standards” takes place in Florence (Italy) with presentations from Coop Italia and Dole amongst others.

*Details from Teresa Borrello at [tborrello@itslabtest-ita.com](mailto:tborrello@itslabtest-ita.com)*

### **SMALL STEP FOR EU, GIANT LEAP FOR MANKIND**

Oxfam International has published a 'Briefing Note' in which it argues that the EU's undertaking at the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Doha in Nov 2001 (that it would make the so-called Doha Development Round good for developing countries) has turned out to be little more than a sham. While the EU has issued fine words, the reality of its trade policy bears little relation to its rhetoric. The EU's real behaviour has remained firmly in the mercantilist tradition, in which negotiators promote their own interests, rather than trying to pioneer a new approach in which equitable and sustainable development for all provides the guiding principle for future agreements.

In agriculture, the EU has done little to reduce export subsidies, in spite of its promise to reduce these by 45%. The much vaunted 45% reduction is, in fact, merely a reduction from a previously defined maximum level rather than a reduction from actual amounts paid and cuts in export subsidies for beef, sugar and dairy products (where the problem is most acute) will be minimal. Delays in meaningful reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy until at least 2012 and the continuation of decoupled support (subsidies which are not directly linked to production) also mean that hidden export subsidies will continue for the foreseeable future, the Briefing argues. Oxfam calls on the EU to take a leap forward in its thinking before the Ministerial Meeting at Cancun, Mexico in September, if it is really to fulfil its promise to make development central to its WTO negotiating programme. A small step for the EU's Trade Commissioner, Pascal Lamy, who has promised so much... but it would represent a giant leap for mankind.

*Source: Oxfam International, 05/05/03*

### **“ONE CUP AT A TIME”: STUDY ON FAIR TRADE**

An academic contribution to analysis of the emerging market for fair trade coffee as a tool for poverty alleviation in Latin America. The study comes from the Fair Trade Research Group at Colorado State University in collaboration with Mexican academics and NGOs.

*The summary and a number of case studies can be consulted at [www.colostate.edu/Depts/Sociology/FairTradeResearchGroup](http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/Sociology/FairTradeResearchGroup)*

**“LES ENJEUX DE CANCUN”**

A 45-page booklet in French on the issues to be debated at the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Cancun from 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> September has been published by Oxfam Solidarité/URFIG.

Copies available for 5 euros from Oxfam Solidarité, 60 rue des Quatre Vents; B-1080 Bruxelles.

**INFOMUSA** is the scientific publication from the International Network for the Improvement of Banana and Plantain (INIBAP). It is published with support from the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA). Subscriptions are free for developing country readers.

Contact [inibap@cgiar.org](mailto:inibap@cgiar.org)



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