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## Costa Rica bananas target Middle East



The country's banana suppliers see clear opportunities to tap into Middle Eastern demand for high-quality and healthy products

**T**he Costa Rican banana industry is gearing up for a significant push in the Middle East in view of the market's "huge potential" and "great growth prospects".

"There is clear potential to increase the current volume of bananas imported by the Middle East," Jorge Sauma, CEO of Costa Rica's national banana corporation (Corbana) told Fruitnet.com.

"We're looking at sources of supply, import countries, transport logistics and distribution channels. Many of Costa Rica's independent producers (who already export directly to various markets) could access

the Middle East, provided they can achieve good financial conditions for the purchase and sale of their fruit.

According to data compiled by Corbana, annual banana imports in the Middle East grew by around 16 per cent between 2001 and 2008, rising from 257,000 tonnes in 2001 to 737,000 tonnes in 2007.

Despite this impressive growth, however, per capita consumption remains less than or equal to 5kg, which is well below the average in the US and the European Union (EU).

While Costa Rica's banana exports are currently concentrated on the US

and the EU, Mr Sauma told Fruitnet.com that the industry recognises the importance of exploring further markets to spread the risk and reduce dependence on a few buyers.

Jorge Sauma will speak in depth about opportunities in the Middle East for new suppliers like Costa Rica at the Eurofruit Congress Middle East, which takes place on 9-11 November at the Shangri-La Hotel in Dubai.