

For fresh fruit and vegetable marketing and distribution in Asia



By Tom
Joyce

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Sustainable bananas take cooperation

The global banana sector will need to work together in order to become more sustainable, according to experts on webinar to mark Banana Day

On Banana Day this week, expert speakers from Europe discussed the issue of sustainability in the banana sector during a webinar entitled "When Farm To Fork Goes Bananas".

Prof. Gert Kema of Wageningen University opened by acknowledging that banana producers had little option other than to use fertilisers given the susceptibility of the Cavendish variety to disease.

"TR4 is a threat," he said, "but it is still just in Colombia and Peru. Black Sigatoka, however, is everywhere. We grow one very susceptible variety, and that by its definition is not sustainable."

Kema said it was important to remember that "we only grow bananas because of fertilisers", but he added that there was an urgent need to innovate in order to move away from the blanket use of fertilisers and diversify the crop.

Spanish MEP Juan Ignacio Zoido said that pesticide and fertiliser reduction

was a key part of the EU's Farm To Fork strategy to boost quality and sustainability. But he stressed that the "proper administrations" needed to assist growers with the costs of researching and breeding new varieties.

"Cooperation not confrontation"

Koen Van Dyck, from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, said that Farm To Fork was essential if the EU was to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and he stressed that the strategy was "not about confrontation, it's about cooperation".

"The solution is not in one silver bullet, but in different aspects overall that allow the reduction of dangerous pesticides and the safeguarding of the health of consumers," he said.

He highlighted the need for communication, not just with producers, but also the authorities. "It's about health," he concluded. "Trade will follow."

Carolina Dawson of French research centre Cirad said that in order to address the issue of decreasing prices, it was crucial to analyse how value was distributed throughout the supply chain. She stressed the need for transparency in order to discover the real costs and value of efforts that would lead to sustainable bananas.

"Opening up this sort of debate is exactly the way to improve the situation," she noted. "It is necessary to boost dialogue, reach compromises and come out of the traditional price war system, which isn't adequate for the industry overall."

Maija Laurila, of the EC's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, said it was necessary to remind the sector that what was good for the environment was often good for business as well.

"We have a lot of evidence on how good corporate governance and sustainability actions are profitable for businesses," she said. "We need to show that it is also

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Cirad's Carolina Dawson

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good for them and that every company can adopt the transition to a more sustainable business.”

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