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By Maura Maxwell

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LatAm producers square up to Rainforest Alliance



Banana industry says new certification rules fail to take into account the main challenges facing producers

Latin America's banana industry has called into question the Rainforest Alliance's standard setting process and accused the organisation of being out of touch with today's market realities.

Producers and exporters from Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica and Guatemala – which together account for 65 per cent of the world's banana output – point out that the RA of has failed to take their opinions into account when developing the criteria for certification.

"On the one hand, RA claims to encourage open and democratic spaces for dialogue, and received more than 200 opinions [from us]," Emerson Aguirre of Colombia's Augura said at a meeting held last Thursday between industry representatives and the RA.

"But our survey shows that barely 2 per cent of our contributions were taken into account."

Producers said the latest version of the norm, published two weeks ago, showed critical differences with the previous rules from 2019, and was not preceded by the due consultation period.

They claimed the new rules fail to take into account the main challenges facing the region, such as the economic impact of Covid-19, TR4 and Black Sigatoka, and said the growing gap between RA requirements and market reality is threatening the regional industry.

Furthermore, they said the immense effort and related costs they have made in recent years to become more socially and environmentally sustainable had failed to improve returns, since "European retailers always impose lower and lower prices".

Producers noted that RA rules did not take into account the social and environmental regulations imposed by individual governments, and that "this inclination to regulate in parallel causes inconsistencies in the whole chain, not to mention that it is a sort of regulatory anomaly".

The sector also questioned the RA's decision to ban the use of drones in the absence of scientific arguments, noting it faced serious problems "if standards are inspired by unfounded dogma".

The meeting ended with RA committing to convene working groups between their representatives and Latin American producers.

Producers are calling for the RA to delay the enforcement of the new standards until January 2022.

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