



Supermarkets and Rainforest Alliance (RA) Certification

THE NEW LABOUR REALITY IN LATIN AMERICA EXACERBATED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Latin American Coordination of Banana and Agro-industrial Unions COLSIBA considers that the problem of banana production and trade remains unresolved; the social, labour and environmental problems in the producing and exporting countries remain.

The "race to the bottom" continues, currently expressed in the threat to lower prices paid for the fruit.

We warned about this situation at the first and second International Banana Conferences held in Brussels in 1998 and 2005. The World Banana Forum, inaugurated in Rome in 2009, was created with the vision of promoting dialogue between different actors in the production and marketing chains.

In the last 25 years, retailers have competed by pushing down prices to the consumer, based on low purchase prices from suppliers, making it difficult to find solutions. Supermarkets have used social and environmental standards, such as Rainforest Alliance certification, which has functioned as a tool to demonstrate to the public that the fruit is produced in good social and environmental conditions. However, this certification system is totally insufficient in practice because of this certifier's bias and its close relationship with its 'contracting parties'.

It is regrettable to note that on farms across the continent RA certification is insufficient and inefficient in guaranteeing rights. COLSIBA considers that private/voluntary certification has meant a backwards step and represents unfair competition for trade unions. Such unfair competition is expressed in the many complaints and demands that organisations have made over the years to producer companies, supermarket chains, governments and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

It is of great concern that today, under the pretext of the pandemic and through the reduction of prices, there is over-exploitation of labour: excessive working hours, exposure to pesticides, pressure on workers designed to eliminate historic gains and rights negotiated by the organisations, increased intolerance by companies, and too little social dialogue. This puts the entire social and labour structure of the sector at risk.

What of the care, efficiency, effort, dedication and sacrifice of the men and women who labour day after day in their workplaces to produce and send to market the healthy fruit that the consumer desires?

We are human beings exposed to many risks on a daily basis. Furthermore, with the CoVid19 pandemic and hurricanes ETA and IOTA in countries like Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua, the social and labour situation in the banana sector is even more delicate and must be treated with seriousness and respect.

The last 25 years of banana trade based on certification no longer works. Legitimate and independent trade union organisations, committed to truth and transparency throughout the chain, are the only ones that can guarantee the full exercise and respect of labour, social, environmental and human rights in the plantations where the fruit is produced for export.

COLSIBA Executive Committee