

Costa Rican banana grower Platanera Río Sixaola met 98% of the criteria for a sustainability audit carried out by Rainforest Alliance in February this year.

Platanera first received Rainforest Alliance certification in 1993, when the award was known as ECO-OK.

The recent audit utilized criteria established in the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN)-2010 standards.

In conversation with www.freshfruitportal.com, Platanera Río Sixaola sustainability and certification executive Álvaro Alvarado discussed the company's sustainability strategy and its operation in general.

"Platanera Río Sixaola applied and adapted the 10 Forest Certification Principles to our social and environmental management system," Alvarado said.

"During this process we carried out two internal audits to identify areas which needed adjusting in order to meet the criteria for each principle."

The company produces 300,000 20-kilogram boxes of bananas each year.

Of this total, Platanera grows environmentally-friendly bananas (without nematicides or herbicides) on 145 hectares of land. It also grows organic *Dátil* bananas on an additional ten hectares, and *Gross Michel* organic bananas are produced on another 20 hectares.



Employees from Platanera Río Sixaola

"We also grow Gmelina Arborea (43 hectares) to help decrease our carbon footprint, among other reasons. So far we have captured 138 tons of CO₂ through this method," Alvarado said.

"We also have 200 square meters of vermicompost to produce compost for the crop, and we produce 180,000 liters of bio-fermented ingredients each month which we put on the soil to improve its microbiology.

"And, in partnership with the Talamanca-Caribbean Biological Corridor project (CBTC), we carried out a study to measure the farm's biodiversity and compare this to neighboring

areas. We received shocking results, seeing an area quite rich in biodiversity."

Social sustainability

The company has also focused much of its attention on employee training and developing a safe working environment.

"So far we have trained 35% of our employees on employment and labor regulation with the aim of ensuring each employee is aware of their labor rights," Alvarado said.

"We have already trained 100% of the standing committee on employment and labor law to help them improve their performance and success at the company.

"And we have completed a training on fair treatment and good working conditions for 100% of our employees, and another on environmental social policy," he said.

Alvarado said the company had created excellent working conditions which fostered strong employee performance.

"We have invested to improve workplace health and safety conditions, infrastructure and team structure, as well as to install more eco-friendly and safer equipment to reduce workplace hazards significantly.

"Employees' meals are subsidized, and we've put together team building events such as group hikes, sports competitions, and more."

Banana exports

"100% of our banana production is exported to Germany. Fruit which does not meet the country's standards is distributed throughout the local market," said Alvarado.

The company has so far not been affected by drug smuggling in banana ships, such as other banana growers like Del Monte.

"The shipping company Seatrade transports the fruit from Costa Rica to Germany. This company has very high security standards, utilizing the BASC security system, which has been categorized as one of the best systems globally.

"And internally we carry out preventative measures which significantly reduce undesirable risks such as this," he said.

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