

A development strategy to fight and contain a potentially deadly outbreak of the Tropical Race (TR4) strain of Panama Disease in Mozambique is being put together by a team of delegates who gathered in Africa last month to discuss a tactical approach to suppressing the banana disease so it doesn't spread elsewhere on the continent. At www.freshfruitportal.com we reveal details of the workshop program ahead of an in-depth report to be published later this year.

Over the last few weeks a delegation of banana experts has been involved in discussions centering on the spread of TR4 to the African continent.



Since the fungus was [discovered on a Matanuska banana plantation](#) 15 months ago, a team of experts has joined forces to set up educational programs, while it is understood that a 'continental action plan' is currently being drafted.

Key players include the South African research institute Stellenbosch University, the South African Development Community (SADC), the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The program is also being supported and part funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

"When symptoms of yellowing and wilting of Cavendish bananas that appeared to be spreading were observed in an export plantation in northern Mozambique in February 2013, few would have expected the immense challenges that the following 12 months would bring," the group has said in an initial report obtained by www.freshfruitportal.com.

"Once the cause of the symptoms was established, business became unusual for many on the continent, and indeed globally, as banana producers and their associated organizations started looking for answers to their questions and for measures to protect their crops.

"The development of a continental action plan to protect bananas in Africa became priority. Foc TR4 is not new to the banana world anymore. It has been ravaging Cavendish plantations and some local banana varieties in Asia for more than two decades."

The document highlighted that bananas were a staple food for millions of people in Africa, and therefore it was necessary to form not only a containment strategy for the affected farm, but to make the whole continent prepared against a spread and possible reintroduction.

"This is exactly what the African meeting on TR4 intends to achieve," the report adds.

It goes on to explain the considerable damage to Cavendish bananas and other locally-grown varieties in other countries around the world and how Mozambique needs to manage the disease outbreak.

"To prepare African countries reliant on banana for food and security and income generation, it is necessary to implement a series of informed interventions. The first priority is to contain the outbreak in northern Mozambique and prevent its spread across the region and to neighbouring countries.

"The second phase of activities is to prepare other countries dependent on banana against future incursions of this disease through enhanced plant bio-security frameworks and research capacity.

"Different types of banana germplasm, reflecting the diversity cultivated in Africa, require screening for resistance to Foc TR4, and the appropriate adoption and delivery pathways developed to provide resistant planting materials to hundreds of millions of Africans who depend on the crop for food security and income generation."

The full report will contain further information including scientific advances and research approaches to detect and manage TR4, the potential impact TR4 will have on food availability in Africa, trans-boundary plant pest management in Africa, a mapping of the risks of any potential spread, and an overall official strategy to manage its control which sets out clear roles and responsibilities for all the institutions involved.

"This is not a task that a single research group or country can achieve. The discovery of TR4

in Mozambique is not a company or country issue. It is a continental issue which needs to be addresses by research organizations, national plant protection organizations, universities and governments throughout Africa," the report goes on to say.

"The opportunity to develop a strategy and coordinate efforts on the continent has been made possible by much appreciated sponsorship and we thank the organizations for recognizing the importance of the outbreak and for enabling us to develop a combined strategy to deal with it."

Meanwhile there has been somewhat of a global focus on maintaining TR4 Panama Disease this year with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations hosting a forum in Rome recently to outline the threat it poses to the international banana industry, food security and economies.

Chiquita CEO Ed Lonergan has also praised the global banana industry for its efforts to deal with TR4 and [warned it would be prudent to prepare for life without the Cavendish](#).

www.freshfruitportal.com