

Ecuador is taking steps to prevent the entry of Panama disease tropical race 4 (TR4) and also establishing emergency plans for if the fungus were to one day be detected in the country.



Both public and private enterprises are working to make sure the devastating disease doesn't enter the country, according to Agrocalidad's Dr. Carlos Muentes.

During Acorbat's upcoming 2018 International Congress, which will take place in the U.S. city of Miami from May 2 -4 and be attended by key banana industry actors, Muentes will discuss what is being done to prevent the entry of the disease in the world's top exporter.

Speaking to *Fresh Fruit Portal*, he said that one of the measures is banning the entry of in vitro materials from countries where TR4 is present.

"We are creating a guideline establishing a process of certification of the laboratories that are interested in sending in vitro plants to Ecuador. Under this context, we are currently only importing from countries from the continent, such as Costa Rica, Honduras and Mexico," he said.

Muentes says the potential arrival of TR4 - known scientifically as *Fusarium Oxysporum* - is a constant worry for the sector.

One of the measures Agrocalidad has enacted involves tighter regulations on the transport of cargo and passengers. This consists of fumigating all the cargo containers that enter the country by sea, as well as requiring that all passengers at airports disinfect their footwear on arrival.

"We think that the entry of containers through ports is a key issue since they travel all around the world and it is difficult to trace them," he said.

He clarified that these regulations apply to all maritime cargo, not just containers with bananas. Air cargo is also being tightly controlled, he said.

Efforts to ensure TR4 doesn't enter the country have also led to the creation of the Fusarium Group, a committee involving public and private institutions, universities, the producing and exporting sectors, agrichemicals companies and research centers.

"This group was created so that rather than it being just Agrocalidad that is tasked with how we can prevent the entry of the disease, we have various entities working together," he said.

As well as efforts being taken to ensure TR4 doesn't enter the country, the industry is also preparing a response plan for if an incursion were to occur.

"Due to this level of risk, Ecuador has a ministerial agreement which establishes a national contingency plan," he said, but added that the large number of growers in the country would make implementing any such plan a major challenge.

The Fusarium Group has looked into possible biosafety regulations in banana plantations if a positive detection were made on a farm. In addition, it has also carried out emergency drills and is preparing a continent-wide simulation to find out just how prepared the region is.

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