

Costa Rica's phytosanitary watchdog has complained about its inclusion in new measures announced by the U.S. last week to prevent the spread of the banana disease Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race IV (TR4).

The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced on Thursday that it was prohibiting imports of certain plant parts of all banana and plantain species from countries where the devastating and highly contagious soil-borne fungus is known to occur.

The countries included are Australia, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mayotte, Mozambique, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey and Viet Nam.

However, Colombia and Peru are the only two Latin American countries where officials have confirmed the detection on TR4. It was found in Colombia in 2019, and then in Peru earlier this year.

The Federal Order applies plant parts including rooted plants, rooted and unrooted cuttings, roots, and rhizomes known to carry Foc TR4 from the identified countries where the pathogen is known to occur, APHIS said. The measures do not apply to seeds, leaves, cut flowers, fruits, and plants grown only in tissue culture or in-vitro since these are not significant pathways for TR4, it added.

On Friday, Costa Rica's State Phytosanitary Service (SFE) released a statement saying it had requested that APHIS "correct" its communication in which Costa Rica is "mistakenly included as one of the countries with the presence of [TR4]".

Fernando Araya Alpízar, Executive Director of SFE, said: "We currently have phytosanitary measures in place to prevent the introduction of Foc R4T, which were established as a result of the pest risk analysis and notified through the WTO [...] In addition, there is diagnostic capacity to detect Foc R4T and field specialists in symptom recognition."

"The fact of having made a massive communication, listing the presence of Foc R4T in Costa Rica, can cause us serious problems with our trading partners, who can apply prohibitions and additional import requirements. In addition, Costa Rica also exports plant products of the Musaceae family to the United States of America," said Araya.

The official requested that APHIS issue a correction as soon as possible due to the lack of scientific evidence for the presence of TR4 in the country, and that "this correction be communicated in the same manner as the original one".

In its Thursday announcement, APHIS explained that TR4 is a fungal quarantine pathogen that causes vascular wilting and death in bananas and plantains.

"The pathogen enters through the roots of its host, settles within the tissues of the vessels, and blocks the flow of water causing plant wilting and death," it said.

"Foc TR4 can also establish in the soil where it can survive for decades without its host, and spread long-distance through movement of infested soil, contaminated equipment, and infected plant parts. A similar strain of *Fusarium oxysporum* was responsible for the near-extinction of the 'Cadenvish' cultivar in the 1930s.

"APHIS has determined that it is necessary to establish prohibitions on the importation of specific regulated articles as listed in the attached Federal Order to prevent the introduction and dissemination of *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *cubense* Tropical Race 4 into the United States and territories because it poses a threat to the U.S. banana and plantain industry. For Puerto Rico alone, the estimated total monetary loss and long-term economic effect is valued over three billion dollars."