

By the Ecuadorian Association of Banana Exporters

The XVIII International Banana Convention in Guayaquil, Ecuador, organized by the Association of Banana Exporters of Ecuador (AEBE), is getting closer and closer.

The event will be very different to last year. By then, on October 26, 2021, when the three days of conferences and debates begin, at least 80% of the population of this city will have been vaccinated with the two doses.

Restrictions will also have been lifted that will allow us to host a significant number of people at the venue, so we will be able to have an in-person trade fair in addition to a virtual one.

At the same time, Ecuador and Guayaquil will have entered into a process of economic recovery, coming out of the two previous phases - restriction and reactivation - meaning there will be a great opportunity to do business.

The executive director of the Ecuadorian Association of Banana Exporters (AEBE), José Antonio Hidalgo said: "The performance of the Government on the issue of vaccination is another motivator for this year's Convention to have a more face-to-face format, but maintaining the advantages of the virtual event with several mixed components: inauguration, exhibition, forum, business roundtable and launching of our first technical culinary guide of bananas."

"Today we are confident that we will have a large presence and that will be very good for the topics we have scheduled that are relevant to producers, exporters, importers and supermarket chains," he said.

He added emphasized: "We are making the best of the virtual format that 2020 gave us, which saw 2,000 registered participants from 54 countries. We want to have that reach again, but with the component of also being able to do it in person".

"The person-to-person meeting has to start recovering - it is in this way that trust and business relationships are strengthened," he said.

The three-day event will focus on one topic per day, which will be:

- Day One: "Let's Look East: Post pandemic and its impacts: Challenges and

Opportunities."

- Day two: "Challenges in general disease management in musaceae: What is the future of bananas in the face of the Fusarium Wilt TR4 threat?"
- Third day: "Shared responsibility for the "Farm to Fork" strategy: everyone's commitment".

In this format, the organization wanted to address each topic from all perspectives: from the side of the producer, the exporter, the logistics operation, the importer and the final consumer, so that the conclusions are specific to each sector and encompass the different scenarios that are occurring and will occur in the immediate future.

AEBE's executive director, José Antonio Hidalgo, said: "We want to communicate that in Ecuador we have the best bananas in the world, with a commitment to sustainability".

Development topics

During the first day, with the focus: "More Ecuador in the world and more world in Ecuador", the theme of insertion in international trade will be addressed, especially in the fastest growing market both in volume and foreign exchange: the Asian market and its main importing country, China.

This market has become Ecuador's second largest-market and in the medium-term may become the first, displacing the U.S.

On the same day, the topic of logistics will be analyzed and the problems that are arising with the current challenges in shipping, which is leading to an increase in the cost of products.

According to AEBE, "certainly the issue of the TR4 is an issue that is a priority for the sector and this will be discussed on the second day. In that sense, this topic has been qualified as a pandemic, which seeks to give it a wide space, where each conference and the forum will be presented from the perspective that time is pressing and that a relaxation of security measures may endanger the production of the Latin American region".

Leading researchers from the main research centers on the subject will be present and it is expected that, by that date, the sector together with the Ecuadorian government will have defined the measures for the renewal of plantations and the first steps are being taken towards a comprehensive solution to the issue.

This proposed topic reflects the current situation of the banana sector worldwide, where two factors are combined: the need for the sector's business to be sustainable in the immediate and medium term, contributing to the goal of zero hunger established by the United Nations and, on the other hand, the urgency that banana buyers and consumers also share the responsibility for this to happen, since there are thousands of families in Latin America, especially, whose only source of income is the production and export of bananas.

The third day will review the future of cargo shipments, especially perishable fruits, to the European Union, once its strategy "From farm to fork" comes into force and how this will impact the cost of production and how this will be distributed among the different actors in the business, since, to date, the banana producer is the only one who is bearing the burden, to which is added the over certification that is burdening us administratively and financially.

For more information please visit our website: <https://www.aebe.com.ec/bananatime2021>