

PRESS RELEASE

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Agreement To Control Leafspot Disease

St. Lucia exported 42,326 tonnes of bananas in 2004. This was a twenty-four point five (24.5) percent increase over 2003 when 33,971 tonnes were exported. The 2004 exports were achieved despite the effects of hurricane Ivan which damaged an average of twenty-three (23) percent of banana fields throughout the country while major areas such as Roseau sustained losses as high as forty-five (45) percent.

With continuing efforts by the BERU at establishing high yielding disease resistant tissue culture varieties, exports for the year 2005 was forecast at 52,000 tonnes. However, hurricane Ivan coupled with leaf spot disease contributed to the lower exports in the first quarter of 2005 compared to 2004. Exports are expected to increase in the second half of the year when new plantings as well as fields which were rehabilitated following the ravages of hurricane Ivan come into production.

The disease of most economic importance – leaf spot which has affected exports for the second consecutive year is being universally controlled by Pest Services Management Limited (PSML), a subsidiary of the three banana companies comprising St. Lucia Banana Corporation (SLBC), Tropical Quality Fruit Company (TQFC) and Commercial Farmers Organization (CFO). PSML had been having difficulty controlling the disease because of inadequate funding. Funds collected from farmers' cess deductions for leaf spot control had been insufficient to finance the programme; hence the flaring of the disease for the second time in two years towards the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005.

Recognizing the negative impact which leaf spot has had on exports of bananas, the Windward Islands Banana Development and Exporting Company (WIBDECO) came up with a proposal to procure all the material inputs required for at least three spray cycles to ensure the proper control of the disease. An Agreement has since been signed by the three banana companies and WIBDECO to that effect. The new Agreement paves the way for the proper and consistent control of leaf spot thereby allowing for increase exports of bananas in the future.