



### Long may the party continue!

For the moment, everything is going well. Consumption for early 2017 is on a rather positive trend. The climate vagaries are doing their job of undermining the world supply, while import prices have finally recovered somewhat after 14 flat weeks. So long may the party continue, and let's hope for brighter days still to come!





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While we might characterise 2016 as a transitional year in price terms (**FruiTrop** no.246), it is best described as a year with no overall trend in terms of market volumes. The world's various markets began the year 2016 in disarray. On the one hand, the vast zone comprising the EU-28 and Russia was characterised by a very considerable increase in consumption. On the other hand, the United States, Canada and Japan registered a very mixed performance for 2016, with net imports at best stagnating, and net consumption per capita flagging.

These are two pieces of the same international market estimated at more than 18 million tonnes, which has seen its supply steadily rise for the past several decades. For the moment, everything is going well. The Community market and the Russian market (a nice surprise for 2016) are absorbing bigger quantities than ever. As proof, the EU-28 consumed more than 6.1 million tonnes in 2016, i.e. an annual growth rate of 4.5 %! More than an additional 260 000 t found its way into European's already well-filled stomachs. If we add to that the Customs declaration errors (with some even talking of Customs duty fraud), relating to 45 000 t of bananas reclassified as plantains (see inset), the EU imported nearly 300 000 t more in 2016; achieving the biggest rise since 2014 on a constant area basis (28 Member States). Since 2012, the additional volume has climbed to nearly 900 000 t! There can be no more talk for this sector of a featureless, listless, flat or amorphous market. Indeed consumption per capita in 2016 hit the unexpected mark of 12 kg!



### **Plantain: scrapping in Customs**

Trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear is nothing new. In every case, it is the lure of bigger profits which leads to someone crossing the line. In view of the sums at stake, we might well query the case of the plantain banana in the United Kingdom in 2016. Indeed, analysis of the flows tallied up by Eurostat shows a record British craving for these cooking bananas.

European plantain imports have been relatively stable for years. Since 2012, the EU-28 have imported between 73 000 and 86 000 t of this vegetable-cum-fruit. So it was quite a surprise in 2016 when this amount leapt up by 53 % to 131 000 t! And it was Colombia, which shares the market with Ecuador, which was on fire. The Latin American origin actually doubled its plantain exports to the EU. Which really is bizarre, since at the same time, Colombian Customs remained impassive, announcing a figure comparable to those of previous years.

Upon closer examination, it turns out that it was the United Kingdom which imported this surplus of plantain banana, during the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2016: dessert banana and plantain banana, much of a muchness really. Why split hairs over a few thousand tonnes? Well, because in the eyes of Customs regulations, things are very different. In 2016, the dessert banana from Colombia was subject to a Customs duty of 103 euros/tonne, whereas the plantain banana is duty-free.

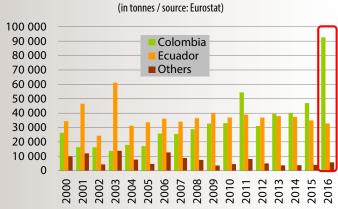
Ultimately, this is an expensive bill, amounting to 4.7 million euros. It was doubtless just a Customs declaration error. We can't ask every Customs agent to be able to distinguish a dessert banana from a cooking banana. So to facilitate the job of the importers, forwarding agents and Her Majesty's services, we will reiterate the Customs codes, for no charge:

• Dessert banana: 08 03 90 10

• Plantain banana: 08 03 10 10

As for the 4.7 million euros, the Chief Negotiator for Brexit need only add it to the 40 to 60 billion euros bill that the EU wants to charge the United Kingdom.

#### Plantain - European Union - Imports



















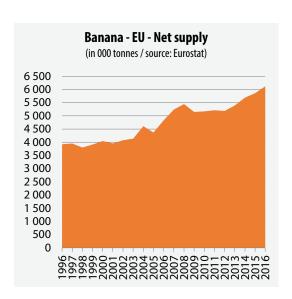
#### Thanks to the NMS

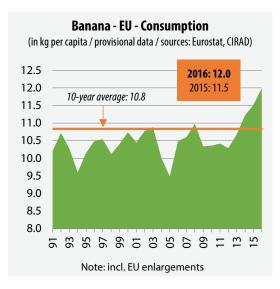
If we switch from a macro analysis to a micro analysis, the elation falls flat. Since while everything is going well for the EU-28, we cannot see the woods for the trees. If we switch our lens, things look much more complex and less rosy. While there is a massive increase, it is above all due to the process of the New Member States (NMS) playing consumption catch-up. Starting well below the European average, the majority of these countries are gaining hundreds of grams per capita every year. For some, the margin is still substantial, with consumption levels 3 to 4 times less than the European average. It is hard to be very precise, given how tricky it is to identify and analyse intra-Community flows, but we can assert that the orders of magnitude are at least correct.

By way of example, we might take the Czech Republic which went from 8.3 to 12.4 kg per capita between 2012 and 2016, or the Baltic States, where consumption gained 4 kg to go from 6.9 to 11 kg. The poor performance by Poland, the number one market by volume in the Eastern EU (270 000 t in 2016), which saw its consumption decrease by nearly 1 kg, is worrying. However, it doubtless arose due to the effects of the Russian embargo on European fruits and vegetables, catastrophic for Poland, a big apple producer and traditional exporter to Russia. In 2013, 676 000 t were exported to Russia, as opposed to only 116 t in 2015 and 156 t in 2016! While the banana remains an ultra-competitive product in the retail sector, and despite proven episodes of bypassing the embargo via Belarus, competition from the apple is inevitably tougher under these circumstances. Furthermore, in 2016 import prices remained firm, at least until September, which doubtless curbed enthusiasm to some extent. In addition, the Polish zloty was devalued slightly against the euro, dropping to its lowest level since 2011, thereby raising the value of imports.

Despite this hiccup, the annual consumption per capita in the NMS went from 5.3 to 7.6 kg, throughout the current growth cycle which began in 2012. There are still considerable gaps between the mature markets such as France or Germany and the boomers, but they are narrowing year on year. This is a good thing for the balance of the banana market, since the quantities taken in are by definition produced and supposedly placed on the market in any case, and in Europe in particular. Indeed the European market is characterised by multiple operators, which favours sometimes economically unreasonable behaviour, and the tariff and non-tariff barriers are scant deterrent as long as the Customs duty is paid.

The overly mechanistic and theoretical view that the supply and demand curves can be instantly adjusted by the price does not apply to the banana sector. In any event, the adjustment is a long and often very painful process. Especially since there are numerous players, their individual strategies can be highly contradictory, they split their risks by diversifying their outlets, the intermediate links do not necessarily take all the market risks, the relative competitiveness of each origin and each operator differ (cost structure, exchange rate, productivity, etc.). In addition, certain origins are in the midst of replanting following climate damage, regardless of the supply level upon returning to the market. In short, the world banana ship, once up to full speed as is the case at present, has a momentum which prevents any excessively sudden or significant changes of heading.











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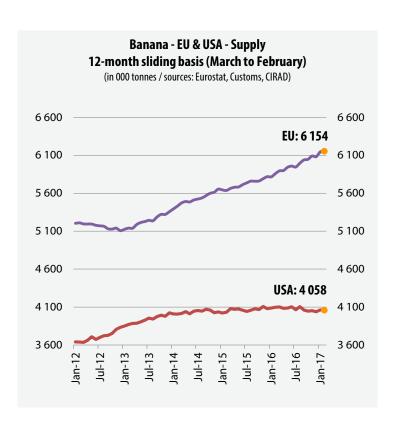


# Leap in consumption in early 2017

So to prevent a shipwreck, or more prosaically a price collapse, world demand must continue to grow at a high tempo. This of course means a headlong rush, but there are no other apparent solutions, apart from a brutal price revision. It is only the EU and Russia that have driven the growth, with the United States and Canada stalled, as is Japan. Russia has seen an abrupt but essential increase: + 10 % in one year to 1 356 000 t. This set an absolute record (see Russia inset). Consumption per capita is nearing 10 kg, as opposed to 6 kg in the mid-2000s. This is particularly satisfying since this country continues to procure exclusively from Ecuador, a country with the greatest scope for growth. However, it is difficult to believe that the Russian market could continue to grow at this tempo, unless the country's monetary reserves improve when the oil price starts to recover, but this is far from certain.

Which leaves the EU: will it continue to drive world demand? The opening months of 2017 undoubtedly prove that this may still be the case. Indeed imports climbed by 11 % over the first 2 months of 2017, with Ecuador (+ 15 %) and Costa Rica (+ 37 %) leading the way. As for the ACPs, Côte d'Ivoire (+ 12 %), Belize (+ 30 %) and Ghana (+ 25 %) are exhibiting an excellent trend. The no.1 ACP origin, the Dominican Republic, registered a cyclical shortfall of 16 %, though this will very rapidly be made up, such is the strength of the replanting trend after the massive floods of late 2017. If we add the bananas produced on European soil to the imports, the gain is more modest, though it is still substantial, in excess of 7 %. As a reminder, throughout 2016, everyone lauded a spectacular increase of 4.5 % (excluding the "plantain" effect).

Things also got off to a good start on the US market, the first two months registering a solid + 3 %; though this is misleading with an exceptional January (+ 8 %) distorting the trend. However, let's not spoil our satisfaction at seeing the world's top two importers absorb more volumes, especially since Russia seems to be in on the trend. According to the figures of the CIRAD Market News Service, it imported 3 % more in Q1 2017 than over the same period of 2016, and actually + 14 % on the three-year average.







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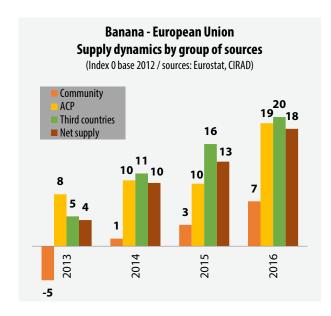
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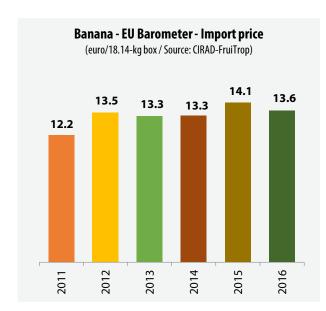
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### 14 weeks of patience

So everything is perfectly peachy on planet banana. Imports are on the increase across the board, although we cannot yet talk about a significant trend, except for the EU. Yet is there total satisfaction? No, given the drop in prices over Q1. Indeed, it took 14 weeks for certain European markets to get back to their 2015 or 2016 levels, though these were highly satisfactory. Over the first two months of the year, it is easy to compare volume and value. In January, imports leapt up by 16 % from one year to the next, causing a 32 % fall in green banana prices in the EU (CIRAD-FruiTrop EU barometer reference). The same occurred in February, with a shallower price fall (-11 %), probably reflecting a smaller increase in imports (+6 %).

Two points on a curve in no way make a trend, but at this early stage of 2017, there is no need for econometrics to establish the negative relationship between volume and price. This relationship can also be verified on other markets such as France or Spain; starting with Spain, where 2016 was for operators an annus horribilis. We actually need to go back to 2010, or even 2004, to find an annual average import price of 14 euros/box (Canarias Super Extra platano category). That is over 2 euros less than in 2015, and indeed 3 euros less than in 2014. Unsurprisingly, Canaries production in 2016 set a new record of 417 000 t. The last two years when production was as high were, curiously enough, 2004 and 2010. It is true that Spain is not Europe. Its market is anachronistic in that it reserves a preferential place for its domestic produce (the Canaries platano). Consumer chauvinism means that they pay 50 % more than for the common banano (all other origins, including Community origins).





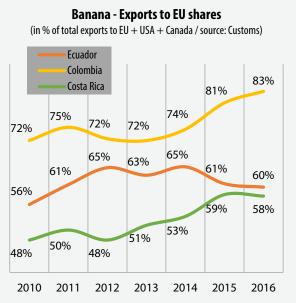
### France: playing possum

Let's now look at France, which though it consumes some of its domestic produce like Spain, is also largely open to ACP and dollar bananas from all origins. It has no Iberian-style favouritism. Price is what counts above all, despite the successful attempt, though recent and limited in terms of volume, to distinguish the Guadeloupe and Martinique banana ("Francité" initiative, see FruiTrop no.237). So what can we observe? Volumes consumed in 2016 fell (- 2 %), yet import prices remained the same as in 2016, at a level regarded by all as decent. It was in Q4 that things began to slip, when pressure from volumes intensified without there being a good demand dynamic to match - QED. The first two months of 2017 in France confirm this antagonistic relationship between volume and price, such a classic in economics and perfectly verifiable.

It is clear that the banana market is not isolated from the rest of the economy. So it is influenced by the supply of competing produce, just as it influences other markets. It is affected by other really classic factors. The exchange rate for example, which favours imports from the franc zone (Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire) or Colombia. Its effects are powerful for the latter supplier, which is free to choose between selling to the near-neighbouring United States or to Europe. It seems to have made its choice, earmarking 83 % of its total exports for the EU in 2016. This figure was just 72 % in 2013. We can of course find a variety of explanatory factors, but it does seem that the exchange rate effect wins out in this trade-off.

Below we will set out the supply dynamic for the world's major markets by origin. In general terms and in the long run, we can draw some lessons from studying banana flows, especially to the EU. While the European market has gained more than 900 000 t since 2013, it is the dollar origins which have mostly benefitted, as well as the ACPs. Due to their weight on the market (70 % market share), the dollar bananas have seized the bulk of the increase with 700 000 t. The ACPs have taken a large part of the remainder (190 000 t). European produce has had to settle for the scraps (45 000 t). By relative share, things are completely different. ACP suppliers are neck-and-neck with the dollar origins. As proof, if we start with an index of 100 across the board in 2012, in 2016 it had climbed to 120 for the dollar origins and to 119 for the ACP origins. Only European production has confirmed its marginalisation, though with an index of 107, it remained in the black despite its structural handicaps.







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# Added value against productivity gains and inflation

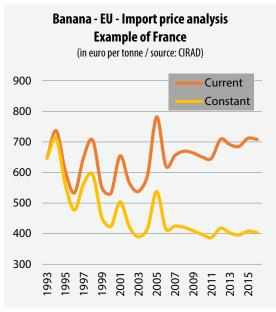
Let's finish this overview, which appears rather positive in tone, on a slightly more pessimistic note. Five years of relatively good and above all stable prices have acted as a powerful anaesthetic on intermediate operators. It would very much seem that Maat, the Egyptian goddess of order and balance, is looking kindly over the European banana market, and that Isphet, her antithesis, is no more than a distant bad memory of the time when the market was indifferently managed through quotas and customs duty, or even national rules.

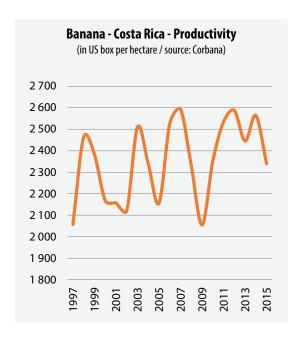
Yet it would be a grave error to think too positively. Isphet can be found in the details. While in the European economies, which have been on the brink of deflation for years, we can refrain from looking at prices on a constant basis over a short period, it would be rash to disregard inflation over the long run (several years). It is gnawing away at both household and operator purchasing power; and all the more so since the product's value chain is globalised. Hence, at least for the downstream part of the industry, analysis on a constant euro basis is a must. In order to take the analysis by origin a bit further, we could even consider using the purchasing power parity method. This would make it possible to compare the product value between countries. Yet if we settle for simply factoring in inflation, even this modest calculation provides powerful lessons.

We should reiterate again that since 1993, the import price of the banana on a current euro basis has constantly declined. Whether on a constant euro basis from 1993 or from 2006, there is no denying the added value loss trend. In the long run (24 years), the constant import price has lost nearly 40 % of its value, going from 650 to 400 euros/tonne. As in any industry, we can assume that the production systems have not remained isolated from productivity gains. All other things being equal (energy prices, labour cost, treatments cost, breakdown of added value, exchange rate, etc.), a proportion of this 40% fall was absorbed by the favourable trend of the export yield per hectare, for example. This is not the only figure telling us about productivity, but it is one of the only ones for which we have historic series. For Costa Rica, over a period of just 20 years, productivity rose by less than 8 %, going from 2 300 boxes/ha in the late 1990s to 2 500 boxes/ha in 2015. True, there is no doubt that along with Guatemala it is the world's highest producing country. The situation is definitely different in Colombia or Ecuador, and the gains more substantial since their productivity is lower. However, this does not fully explain the constant-basis price fall.

If we cannot fully explain the fall in value by productivity, it would seem that added value has been destroyed in the industry. That remains to be evaluated. The consumer is of course one of the big winners in this impoverishment of the production and trading industries. So one of the objectives of the European policy has been successful, with producers in particular left to pay the price.









#### Banana — European Union — Evolution of supply – Tonnes

Year	Banana type or source			Cub total	Evnoute	Not sumply
	Community	ACP	Others (\$)	Sub-total	Exports	Net supply
1996	684 605	798 109	2 471 263	3 953 977	30 598	3 923 379
1997	810 537	692 731	2 464 412	3 967 680	16 571	3 951 109
1998	786 232	614 459	2 426 419	3 827 110	26 448	3 800 662
1999	729 303	688 170	2 522 455	3 939 928	27 359	3 912 569
2000	782 176	770 095	2 528 170	4 080 441	35 327	4 045 114
2001	767 268	747 131	2 474 665	3 989 064	34 284	3 954 780
2002	790 622	738 439	2 554 508	4 083 569	8 011	4 075 558
2003	765 416	797 269	2 578 827	4 141 512	6 020	4 135 492
2004	758 206	782 979	3 077 361	4 618 546	11 029	4 607 517
2005	648 375	763 974	2 959 463	4 371 812	4 970	4 366 842
2006	641 559	889 176	3 306 538	4 837 273	8 386	4 828 887
2007	554 734	842 959	3 848 266	5 245 959	9 270	5 236 689
2008	567 560	918 923	3 968 269	5 454 752	10 002	5 444 750
2009	608 048	958 326	3 587 737	5 154 111	7 840	5 146 271
2010	659 525	1 023 661	3 492 406	5 175 592	7 437	5 168 155
2011	611 841	978 537	3 628 113	5 218 491	8 169	5 210 322
2012	648 459	982 336	3 559 785	5 190 580	5 237	5 185 343
2013	614 564	1 060 467	3 722 253	5 397 284	5 274	5 392 010
2014	655 980	1 081 268	3 956 190	5 693 438	6 427	5 687 011
2015	669 673	1 076 315	4 116 432	5 862 420	6 556	5 855 864
2016	692 954	1 167 203	4 263 535	6 123 692	6 556	6 117 136
	(1)	(2)	(2)		(3)	

<sup>(1) 1988</sup> to 1993 inclusive: Eurostat + European Commission data for Madeira and Greece. From 1994 onwards: supplementary aid data or POSEI.

General note: before 1994: dessert bananas + plantains / From 1994 onwards: dessert bananas. Before 1995: EU-12 / From 1995 to 2003: EU-15 / From 2004 to 2006: EU-25 / From 2007 to 2013: EU-27 / From 2014: EU-28. The study concerns extra-Community import data for ACP and dollar bananas and re-exports. The rules of the Common Market Organisation of Banana (1993 version) have been applied to the date from 1988 onwards in order to give comparable results.

Source: Eurostat, European Commission / Processed by CIRAD Market News Service



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<sup>(2)</sup> Eurostat data.

 $<sup>(3) \</sup> Duty-paid \ bananas \ (released for free \ circulation) in one of the EU-28 \ member \ countries \ and \ then \ exported \ outside \ EU-28.$ 



## Trade agreements: Act II Scene 1

This is one of challenges of the long period of discussions getting underway, which will lead to scrutiny of European banana policy. The issues of pegging customs duty at 75 euros/t and of tailoring support policies to European producers, or of compensation for ACP producers, are on the table. For their part, Central and South American producers are aiming to completely dismantle tariff barriers. A new legal battle is beginning; a golden age for law firms and lobbies which have not forgotten the highly prosperous period of the banana CMO, which for them extended from the early 1990s, before its implementation, until the major reform in 2006.

And there is no lack of regulatory challenges. Between negotiations of new trade or association agreements and modernisation of old ones, the EU is constantly opening up a host of fronts. So vigilance is the watchword with whichever country discussions are opened, for two reasons. The first relates to the production and export potential of the dessert banana in the countries in question, and to its status in terms of agreements already in place with nine partners, all Latin American. For Mexico, for instance, a big banana country, it would be inconceivable, as part of modernisation of the agreement, to expand the duty-free quota the country enjoys in the EU. It would be even more dangerous for the market balance to lower the customs duty (122 euros/t above 70 000 t) currently applied to below that negotiated with Colombia, for example. Since the most advantageous duty level would immediately and automatically apply to all the agreement signatories, i.e. practically 100 % of the EU's dollar imports. While the risk is evident in the case of Mexico, it is latent for countries with currently few or no exporters, such as Vietnam or the Mercosur countries. The second point to be wary of relates to the rule of origin. World trade routes are often counter-intuitive, incorporating transits and transhipments. Hence Ecuadorian bananas could, after passing through a Canadian or US port, be re-exported to the EU, losing all traces of their producer country. To counter this bias, the rule of origin is conventionally applied in the agreements, as was the case with Canada.

# The suicide jumper is doing fine... for now

In the shorter term, the calming effects of the climate vagaries, exchange rate or increasing energy costs will do their work. It is now impossible to predict a difficult year, so seldom are the predictions borne out. If we look at the sector as a whole, this is rather a good thing. If we look at



benefits from the agreement since 15c/anitally 2017 / 110ccssed by Chad Trumby

the individual situation of each country, it is sometimes dramatic. The cyclone in Martinique and the floods in the Dominican Republic from late 2016, or the El Niño Costero (late 2016 and early 2017) in Peru and in Ecuador, hit the production capacities of some zones more or less hard. As this spring begins, late frosts (or black frosts) on fruit trees e.g. apples in some European countries could hold back the competition. European strawberry campaigns, late and moderate, have not destabilised the banana market either. The ongoing cold weather has favoured banana consumption.

Nonetheless we will monitor the return to production of zones hard hit in late 2016, against the backdrop of the start to the stone fruits seasons (cherry, apricot, peach and nectarine). As for the exchange rate and energy, there is no change for the moment, with analysts awaiting the results of major elections in Europe and announcements of economy boosting measures in the United States.

In summary, like the suicide jumper falling from a sky-scraper, everything is going fine... for the moment; since we do not know how high the tower is, and therefore how long it will take to reach the ground. Like the jumper, we are betting on the operators not fully applying their famous slogan: "Carpe diem quam minimum credula postero". And it is true, they should seize the present day, but above all handle the following days, sure to bring disillusionment

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Source: Eurostat

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