

The pineapple in Costa Rica: absolute record

For the past two decades, Costa Rica has reigned supreme over the worldwide fresh pineapple trade. The country's production extended over more than 43 000 ha in 2016, as opposed to 37 000 ha in the national agricultural survey of 2014, official figures which might be underestimating the scale of the production, possibly by now in excess of 50 000 ha. The overproduction crisis of 2014, which drove numerous producers into bankruptcy and led to a rapid fall in production in 2015 and 2016, already seems a long way off. Hence with these growing surface areas and improved yields, the 2016-17 campaign (September to August) marked a new export record for the lord of the fresh pineapple. More than 2 086 200 tonnes were exported, across all destinations, between September 2016 and August 2017, beating the record from 2014 and up 10 % on last campaign. The main outlets remain the United States, absorbing 51 % of shipments, and Europe (44 %), with growth identical (+ 9 %) on both markets to 2016. Though representing only 5 % of export volumes, other destinations (including Russia) registered very good performances, with an increase of 36 %, a level higher than the overall exports growth rate.

The seasonality of exports remains unchanged: two large peaks fall in the spring, and then in autumn in preparation for the end-of-year holidays. However, in 2017, the spring peak (March, April and May) seemed more intense, actually extending into June. Furthermore, an abnormal rise in volumes was observed in August 2017. Is this a sign of a season ahead of schedule, or the initial effects of the overall growth in production with the new planted surface areas? Costa Rica should remain at its full potential over the end of the year and throughout 2018. A phytosanitary moratorium, initially imposed in the north of the country by the national animal health body (SENASA), aimed at limiting the proliferation of the stable fly (*Stomoxys calcitrans*) which affects cattle, had to be lifted under pressure from producers, refusing to accept this production loss.

In spite of the growing quantities observed since the beginning of the year, the export values in Customs have never been as high: 451 euros/tonne in 2017, i.e. 1 % more than in 2016.

Undeniably, the Costa Rican pineapple remains a major source of jobs and wealth creation for the country, yet controversies persist on working conditions on the plantations and management of the impacts of this crop on the environment.

