Banana Review of the EU supply in 2020

Completely dollar dependent

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Banana consumption in the EU27+UK has hit new heights. After a hiatus in 2019, European banana consumption took an upturn to reach 6.7 million tonnes, up by 3 %. Consumption per capita climbed in the same proportions, hoisting itself up to 13 kg (+ 300 g). 2020 confirmed the ongoing dollarization of the supply, with a record market share of 75.5 %. For their part, EC production and European imports from the ACP origins were down in worrying proportions. But what is even more worrying is the combination of all these events with a fall in prices, particularly at the import stage, since dollarization is for many synonymous with impoverishment of the market.



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he European market saw an upturn in 2020... in terms of volumes, at least. We already know (see FruiTrop 273 from January 2021) that as regards import prices, it was a disastrous year. We will come back to that later.

So the developments observed in 2019, when for the first time since 2012 the European market shrank by 0.6 %, should be regarded as a blip in the recent history of this market. And 2020 did not just wipe out this under-performance. It brought unparalleled vitality, with a supply growth of 2.8 % and 3.6 % for imports alone (excluding European production). Maintaining a like-for-like basis (EU27+UK), the market consumption touched on the 6.7-million tonnes mark, i.e. precisely 1 million tonnes more than in 2014. For the analysis, we will retain the EU27+UK basis, since the UK's departure from the EU came with the year underway, and there is massive trade between the two economic areas, but above all because the access rules to the UK have for the moment remained the same as those governing the EU27.

Consumption per capita actually made a big leap, reaching the 13-kg per year mark for the first time. The gain was more than 300 g, i.e. just over two additional bananas per European per year. This average covers very different consumption levels. There is a huge gap between the Swedish intake of 17 kg, and the 7 to 8 kg consumed in the Baltic countries. We will return later in the report to consumption by country, which is very hard to decode, so tricky is intra-European trade to pinpoint (see next article). We will only underline at this point that the New Member States (NMS), mainly situated in the eastern EU, confirmed an excellent dynamic, with a record level of 1.1 million tonnes, and consumption reaching 11 kg per capita, double the 2012 level.









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More and more dollar-dependent

We will return later in the report to the breakdown of the origins supplying the European market. At this point we will limit ourselves to decoding the main trends. Overall, we can say that once again, in 2020 the European market became a little more dollarized. With a 75.5 % market share, the Latin American origins set a new record, improving their position by 1.9 base points year-on-year.

Across all origins, including EC production, the market was up by 2.8 %. This increase was due solely to the dollar origins, which actually easily surpassed the trend with a leap of 5.4 %! While the dollar origins had a fine old time, the rest were suffering. The ACPs and European production saw huge reverses, with falls of 4.5 % and 4.8 % respectively in volumes placed on the European markets. The dollar origins shipped 261 000 tonnes more to Europe in 2020, while the ACPs scaled back their volumes by 50 000 tonnes, and European suppliers by 30 000 tonnes. For each kilo lost by the ACPs or European producers, the dollar zone gained 3 kg.

Inevitably, the consequence for European production was its market share dropping, to below 9 % for the first time (8.9 %). The penalty was the same for the ACPs, which registered their worst result in terms of market share, with 15.6 %. Later in the report we will look in detail at the positions of each of the origins, since within the same group, the destinations are very different.

So 2020 began with a string of new records:

- record consumption in terms of volume and per capita,
- new market share high for the dollar zone,
- new market share low point for the ACPs and European production,
- new European price low point.

There is no need to pull out complex economic models to understand that these record levels are linked, and that the variation in the annual price is systematically indexed to the dollar supply. This confirms a working rule of this market: it is the dollar banana supply which makes the consumption level, and absolutely not the reverse. Proof of this was provided in the last two years. In 2019, the dollar supply slipped, the Asian markets were heavily sought after, and the European market lost 0.6 %. In 2020, the dollar supply was in full flow, Asia was once again fully supplied by the Philippines, and the European market was up by 2.8 %.

Another well-known lesson is the absolute fluidity of dollar volumes. In France, the fall between 2019 and 2020 in national production (- 17 000 t) and ACP shipments (- 40 000 t) was more than offset, and immediately at that, by an influx of dollar bananas (+ 55 000 t), as well as volumes from other Member States (+ 12 000 t), which we can assume largely comprised Latin American bananas.

Banana – Exports for some origins

in million										2020/	2019
boxes	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	in million boxes	in %
Total of which,	489	517	553	567	627	656	679	692	719	+ 28	+4%
Ecuador	242	256	296	318	315	323	345	356	371	+ 15	+4%
Colombia	89	97	83	77	93	98	97	98	106	+ 8	+8%
Guatemala	55	61	65	71	100	107	113	117	113	- 4	- 3 %
Costa Rica	102	103	110	100	120	128	125	121	129	+ 8	+7%

Professional sources, CIRAD-FruiTrop

Supply stronger than demand

So we should make no mistake. The constant increase in dollar volumes in Europe is due less to a strong affinity felt by the European market for this group of origins than to a massive and continually growing supply. The equation is as follows: the dollar supply swells, the markets absorb it and prices are gradually eroded.

The third component of this equation is very familiar to the operators. Cirad has been documenting it for years through its European barometer, drawn up at the import stage. Between 2015 and 2020, the EU import price lost 20 % of its value, slumping in 2020 to \leq 11.7/box, its first time below the 12-euros mark. The additional one million tonnes taken in by the EU confirms the second component of the equation. Which takes us naturally to the first component, which is ultimately the cause of the European market's malfunction: the increase in the dollar supply.

A quick glance at the evolution of world exports by the four big exporters in the Latin American zone closes down any discussion on how the market works. Between 2013 and 2020, total exports across all destinations from Ecuador, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Colombia went from 517 to 719 million boxes, i.e. a 39% increase in their export capacity!

For the more sceptical, let's take it even further, by analysing the export structure of the four above-mentioned origins. For the past decade, Ecuador, Colombia and Costa Rica have applied trade-offs in favour of the EU. The clearest example is the situation of Colombia, which for the past five years, has dedicated 83 to 85 % of its exports to the EC market. The figure was 72 % in 2012-2013. Ecuador has seen a less drastic development, but even so the EU took 71 % of its bananas in 2020, as opposed to 60 % in 2016. Over the past decade, Costa Rica has only strengthened its appetite for the European market, to which it now dedicates 60 % of its fruit, as opposed to 48 % in 2012. Finally, the story has only just begun for Guatemala, which is increasingly eyeing up the other side of the Atlantic. For now, the volumes are "only" 200 000 tonnes (2019 and 2020), but the figure was still zero in 2012. Moreover, we can assume that the origin was hampered by the transit of two cyclones in November 2020 (Eta and lota).

It would also be interesting for the public inquiry opened by the European Commission on the impacts of the Trade Agreement between the EU, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, to highlight the way the European banana market works, singling out the relationship between increasing dollar volumes and falling prices for all parties.







America first!

Yet why are exporters casting admiring glances at Europe? There are several reasons for that. Firstly, the North American zone controls the size of their markets to the tonne. As we will see in the next part of the report, in 2020 the US + Canada market imported, to within 5 000 tonnes, exactly the same quantity of bananas as the previous year. This is also the case, for example, with the Russian market, which depends on the Ecuadorian supply: it remained stable in 2020, and has risen by just 30 000 tonnes since 2017.

Another reason is due to the exchange rate effect on local currency revenue for exporters. Colombia enjoys a huge boost from the exchange rate. The Colombian peso has fallen a long way against the euro since 2014. For an index 100 in 2014, the revenue for a Colombian exporter had reached 191 in 2020. For dollarized economies such as Ecuador, this has resulted in a price per box sold in Europe of €11.7 (2020 level), which converts into a price of \$14/box.

For complete and definitive proof that the European market has over the years become a mass market, where business is conducted on an opportunistic basis (exchange rate, winning market share, volume-oriented and lower-value market, etc.), and where anything is possible in terms of price drops, we can look at the supply profile of the European and US markets since the transit of cyclones Eta and lota in 2020. Cirad's Markets and Innovations News Service has done the sums. The cyclones left a desolated landscape in their wake. The banana sector was hard hit, especially in Honduras and Guatemala. The cumulative losses, estimated from the fall in imports by the USA + Canada zone from Honduras and Guatemala to below the three-year average, reached 425 000 boxes/week between November 2020 and February 2021. Ecuador, Costa Rica and Colombia stepped in to make up the shortfall with 350 000 boxes/ week. Costa Rica, where the big multinationals are well-established, supplied the bulk of this quota, i.e. 200 000 boxes. Hence the US market received a smooth supply, just the way the operators like. Especially since we need to recall that every last one of them, albeit a few days apart (doubtless to keep up appearances), had unilaterally triggered an Act of God clause permitting them to increase contract prices to the distribution sector within a range of \$1.76 to \$2.00 per box (see FruiTrop no.273, January-February 2021, page 43).

Hence the world's most lucrative market, thanks to its cosy, none too liberal system, has ripped away some produce from the European market; which is regarded as peripheral, not for the volumes it absorbs (world number 1 market), but for the value it yields. Other analysts go further, making a close connection between high margins in the USA – the private preserve of a few "big players" – and falling prices in Europe. The idea being to maintain their market share in Europe at all costs, which is being disputed by new operators, in the East for example.



Dumping or not dumping, that is the question

In this context it is tempting in some circles to accuse certain operators of dumping. The fact remains that this trading practice is very difficult to prove, especially because it is impossible to compare the sale price on the European market with a so-called normal price on the domestic market, in Ecuador for example. In addition, to do so, we need to reconstruct production and marketing costs (https://eur-lex. europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:r11005), a particularly tricky topic to address because of a thick veil over the subject, but also because of the phenomenal variation in these costs arising from the very high degree of heterogeneity of industry organisations: from the smallholder selling their produce at the field side, to multinationals whose activity extends to ripening. We can well imagine that the Commission's services are well-versed in this type of difficulty, but the task is nonetheless immense. And above all, someone would need to be requesting it. There are some complaints from operators and other who have lost out ... though not yet any plaintiffs.

The contract system: Stockholm syndrome

Except that the danger is there: nothing seems to be about to stop the lose-lose machine. Let's return to the losses caused by cyclones Eta and lota. Since November 2020 brought a shortage of 450 000 boxes/week and production cannot get going again immediately - far from it - some had to go short so that others could be well-provisioned. True, the shortfalls from Honduras and Guatemala, and also Mexico, did not make themselves felt immediately in Europe, since it is not a priority catchment area for these origins. The fact remains that, by a domino effect, trade-offs in favour of the North American markets were revealed in the 1st two months of 2021, with a level estimated at between 250 000 and 300 000 boxes/week below the three-year average. The initial data for March 2021 confirmed this trough, with imports from the dollar zones down by at least 10 % (low range).

Since the dollar banana shortfall was not offset by additional volumes of ACP or EC bananas, the market was light, even in a context of great disruption by the health crisis. Fewer dollar bananas normally means an increasing import price, as we saw to a more modest degree in 2019 when China mopped up some of the production potential. Well, it was certainly not the case this time! But what does all this theory have to do with the fact that the European market is dollar dependent, and that it is supply pressure which is generating price decreases on the European market and vice-versa?

No, it is no software bug. The golden rule still applies – to such an extent that its impacts persist even as the dollar tide is on the ebb. The Cirad barometer, which evaluates the import price into Europe, fell in Q1 2021 to ≤ 12.3 /box, as opposed to ≤ 13.2 in 2020, or even ≤ 12.6 in 2019. There are several reasons for that, but one explains the majority of the lifelessness of the price in the midst of an abrupt slump in the supply: the contract system. As we covered in our January-February edition (no.273), the negotiations between the upstream and downstream segments were long and rough. Only the Central American cyclones calmed things down, though without reversing the trend. Ultimately, the 2021 contracts, signed well below the ≤ 12 /box mark, are weighing down on the market, regardless of its state at a given moment. The contract system is turning into a glass ceiling.

This is nothing new, as FruiTrop lamented back in April 2015 (no.231, page 56). In this article, we held out economic theory as if it were a soothing mantra. The Nash equilibrium, derived from game theory, referred to as a perfect equilibrium, holds that no player (the industry stakeholders) has an advantage in deviating on their own from the equilibrium obtained. It was believed that the contract system played a stabilising role, and reassured all the stakeholders, by removing much of the uncertainty. Except that the analysis conducted in these blessed years involved a European price of between \in 13.3 and \in 14.1/box, the euro and dollar were at near-parity, energy prices were at rock bottom and European consumption quickly made good any shortfalls, taking in additional volumes without any adverse effect on the price. Hence, it was not in anyone's interest to break this equilibrium, which was indeed perfect.

Banana without a conscience nothing but the ruin of the industry

Economic theory sometimes struggles to cope with the rules of real life: where operators of all kinds think that they can outdo their neighbours; where cost structures, market prices, and exchange rates are constantly shifting; and where you can put together an offensive strategy without having to worry about externalities on other people or the environment. But consumers seeking proof of sustainability and the revenge of the natural environments could spoil the party. Two recent examples signal this change of era. The first is Ecuadorian operators, at an online event on 21 April, demanding that the sustainability of the industries be factored into the pricing policies of the distribution sector. This is all too obvious for a country where minimum prices are not respected, and where the production and trade potential of the banana are bottomless; but that is how things are, it all has to start at least with words.

The second example is derived from Greek tragedy. The kingdom of intensive monoculture based on Cavendish alone is swaying. And it is not for lack of warnings: the system is neither durable nor rational, nor has it been for a long time. The collective self-hypnosis does however seem to be drawing to an end. It is Panama disease which will play the same part as the sun in the fall of Icarus. After Colombia in 2019, TR4 Panama disease was detected in Peru in April 2021 in two different locations: one spot in Chira valley (Sullana province), in the heart of the export banana production zone, and another further south. The first spot is located less than 100 km from the southern border of Ecuador, the world's breadbasket for export bananas. The concern is especially acute since Peru does not seem to be organised to contain the epidemic. The threat could also come from Venezuela, a country drifting off-course, which is worrying the Ecuadorian authorities.





As a reminder, the Cavendish varietal group is hyper-sensitive to this disease. TR4 is also regarded as a banana killer, the same as race 1 in the 1960s for the Gros Michel variety. We should also remember that there is no chemical solution for treating this soil fungus. So every effort must be made to prevent its arrival, which incurs biosecurity costs. Especially since there is a wide variety of propagation vectors: banana or other plant stock, agricultural substrates, tools, footwear, vehicle tyres, water system, etc. In every case, the dance only lasts for a while. Once the disease has arrived and settled in, additional costs need to be borne to prevent the spread of the fungus, but most of all the costs due to the fall in productivity and production, and ultimately from moving plantations, where this is possible.

There too, the sustainability of this weakened system is under question, and it is time for a comprehensive revamp. Introducing biodiversity, in particular varietal to get away from the all-Cavendish model, and combine with this varietal change some agro-ecological techniques, represent historic opportunities to secure the industry's long-term future, but also restore some added value, as has been done for all fruit crops.

This is a gamble on the future, and given the extension of the disease, time is getting short. We can understand the faint-heartedness among operators which for decades have built a globalised industry tailored to one varietal group. It is true that the varietal diversification route may appear too disruptive, but it has the main advantage of revamping a seriously unbalanced system

Veer	В	anana type or source		Cub datal	Furnanta	Netermula
rear	EC	АСР	Others (\$)	Sub-total	Exports	Net supply
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 01 1	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	11 583	4 606 963
2005	648 375	763 974	2 959 463	4 371 812	6 977	4 364 835
2006	641 559	889 176	3 306 538	4 837 273	7 839	4 829 434
2007	554 734	842 959	3 848 266	5 245 959	8 848	5 237 112
2008	567 560	918 923	3 968 269	5 454 752	9 636	5 445 115
2009	608 048	958 162	3 587 737	5 153 947	7 592	5 146 354
2010	659 525	1 023 664	3 492 406	5 175 595	7 195	5 168 400
2011	611 841	978 540	3 628 111	5 218 491	7 598	5 210 894
2012	648 459	982 336	3 559 785	5 190 580	5 284	5 185 296
2013	614 564	1 060 467	3 746 853	5 421 884	5 312	5 416 572
2014	655 980	1 081 268	3 956 439	5 693 688	6 505	5 687 183
2015	669 673	1 076 315	4 116 432	5 862 420	6 208	5 856 213
2016	692 954	1 167 516	4 263 540	6 124 010	6 106	6 117 904
2017	585 582	1 099 611	4 704 045	6 389 238	6 906	6 382 332
2018	593 786	1 039 599	4 919 944	6 553 329	5 609	6 547 720
2019	624 425	1 095 462	4 789 852	6 509 739	3 248	6 506 491
2020	594 198	1 045 838	5 050 755	6 690 791	3 766	6 687 025
	(1)	(2)	(2)		(3)	

Banana — European Union — Evolution of supply – Tonnes

(1) 1988 to 1993 inclusive: Eurostat + European Commission data for Madeira and Greece. From 1994 onwards: supplementary aid data or POSEI. (2) Eurostat data.

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

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 | Updated April 2021

											Bana	na – EU	27+UK		ports il	2020 ו												
in tonnes	AUT	BEL	Ň	GER	DEN	SPA	FIN	FRA	N	GRE	IRE	ITA	NET P	ы К	SWE	С П	P C C C C C C C C C C C C C	CZE	EST	HUN	LAT	5	MAL	Pol	ROM	SLO	SLK	Total
Intra-EU 1	52 567 101	682 64	851 693	3 063 66	5 160 11	18411	29 131	353 233	27 300	1 866	5 705 37	774 258	790 104 (073 21	882 143	90 3 65	8 40 913	178 730	19 165	53 758	41 444	21 343	1 305 26	56 825 1	62 591 14	1301 71	133 286	68 043
MS-15, incl. 1	51 693 101	682 6	851 680	0 826 64	6 159 11	18 410	29 079	350 098	27 286	1 555	5 705 35	991 255	477 104 (073 21	455 88	89 3 65	8 17 385	149 748 17 201	6 557	30 643	18 237	4 947	1 260 25	54 881 1	21 432 11	265 31	599 2 61	16 845
Beigium Matharlands	216 18	0	11 25	1 2 2 8 0	5 175 5 175	7 3 4 0	3/	110 112	3 2 2 9	7	3 028	314 1/2	4 4 4 4	11	200	11	7 5 077	282 CF	106	162	5 983 6 613	1 501	- 	31 150	11 525			144 / 94
Germany	18 215 27	456	<u>t 0</u>		8518	CC (3 075	196	1 237	-	1 209	740 58	946	1 -	262	-	2/6 C /	43 003	2	6 754	2 320	002	-	201 10	48 770	7 00001	20 CT2 0	078 021
France	5 316 2	677	105 2	1584		74 006		8	454		177	503 12	663	27	4			29 756		19315	3 145	1 310		4 918	10 903	1 703 5	344 19	96 947
Spain	m	: 127	0	3 644	41			16 443	43			179	550 102	726	206		2			176	178	19		65	1 353		12	28 752
Italy	155	13	0	2 6 0 2	15	16899		41 828	167	1 442			31	381	9		3 172	40		2			1 259	3 525	3 0 2 1	1 363	401 7	76 322
Greece									273				-		88	83 3 54	-								17749		е —	30 447
UK				374		137		24 995		90	470	21 1	284	59	21			601				119		1 935	61	59	199 3	30 427
Sweden		566		1 043 1.	2 408	173	95	9 579				62 2	400					78						354			2	26 758
Ireland				0	0				10961				16														-	10 977
Portugal			1			9 104		14					-		-													9 131
Finland													°.		0				6 45 1									6 454
Denmark				407		0		5 220					84		536									20	0			6 268
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Poland	234			8 9 4 4		0		20	m			-	880		427 1	57		22 118	57	3 495	9 410	9 091			18 669		3 564 7	78 070
Slovenia	491			1 1 7 8	0					186	-	782	14		-	65	22 686	1 168		8 0 2 1	38	147		580	18584		~	55 041
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Latvia				79								-	346						10358			7 141		145	5		-	19 069
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Slovakia	23			97	0								0					1 511		9 928							-	11 560
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Hungary	14				0								18				289	3 840						m	1 389	47	-	5 601
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Extra-EU	430 1 066	372	0 573	892 9	9 361 20	95 799	80 902	342 204	943 392 20	2 548	36 125 744	070 1 016	357 131 8	300 165	500 408	64 251	5 36 700	3	0	0	43	29 940	7 375 29	91 914	17 249 103	216	20 6 09	96 593
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Ecuador	20 189	111	20	3 890	5 165	8 940	8 770	2 192	114834 1	38 940	20 277	592 232	026 15	241 98	917 40 6	10 2 51	5 36 678				22	26 789	6 076 1	13 930	3 765 5	0511	20 1 62	27 375
Colombia	402 371	469	14	4 67 0	170 5	57 199	283	49 545	272 068	8 857	222 225	598 105	140 34	298 11	033 2	33					21	292	769 1	31 913	884 3	5 397	1 45	54 462
Costa Rica	167	652	6	2 899	230 12	21334	20 330	12 892	238 787	3 877	42 519 182	899 241	783 75	546 18	796							2 099	469	23 358	12 600 1	4 7 90	1 27	:72 960
Panama		284	_			548	38 317	142	23 7 37		9	866 204	474	130 10	359												28	84 857
Guatemala	7	428	ñ	5 630		1 589	3 522	7 163	22 594	185	297 27	977 64	475	_	_							196		21 182		1518	19	94 755
Peru	36	\$ 460	-	9 7 6 1		0	9 458	0	1 038		و	797 37	766	82	20	21											-	01 404
Nicaragua	6 1	385	4	5 7 4 1					20 667	690		20 2	749	-	475							82		1 351			~	75 167
Mexico	e	\$ 830	_	121		2 155			2 1 5 9		-	761 5	005	_	_							461	60				-	15 552
Brazil		333	_		21	4 984		0	4 7 95			340 4	160	-													-	14 634
Honduras		5	+	121					764		811		779	_	_	_	22					22						9 524
India	-										27		0															28
Argentina			+									_	+	24	_											-		24
ACP, incl.	0 287	615	m	3 052 3	3 775	9 050	222	270 271	241 944	-	t2 229 14	220 107	9000	379 24	006			ε						179			104	45 838
Africa	0 236	760	_	112	•	4 936		269 052	63 812		0 12	524	° S	174	•			S									23	93 378
Côte d'Ivoire	75	3 466	-	20		3 741		223 693	14 893		10	040	+												-	-	33	27 852
Cameroon	134	1 703	_	+				22 713	22 975			488	+	-												_	-18	80 879
Ghana	26	558	+	+	+	195		22 598	25 937		-	266	0	_		_							+				~	77 285
Angola			_			666						_	9	174											-	+		7 173
S. America	2	644	_			3 687		1 218	48 595		36 805																6	92 948
Belize	2	644	_			3 687			48 595		36 805		_													+	6	91 730
Suriname	-	-	-		+			1 218		+		_	+		+	_								+	+	+	+	1 218
Caribbean	48	211	ĥ	940	3 775	428	222	•	129 537		5 423 1	696 106	995	205 24	899									179		_	35	59 511
Dom. Rep.	48	3 211	<u>m</u>	7 940	3 775	428	222	0	125725	+	4 611 1	696 106	995	205 24	899	_	_				+	+	+	179		_	35	54 886
St Lucia									3812	-	_	_	_	_	_	_	_							_	_	_	_	3 812
Note: 0 stands f	or less than 500	u kg sour	ce: Euro	stat, up.	dated Ak	Dril 2021	_																					