



**Dole...**

**Behind the Smoke-screen...**

What is new since our report on the company's plantations in Latin America in 2006?



This document is based on the contributions and testimonies of plantation workers and trade unionists, as well as on studies and other documents produced by our organisations or from *Dole* itself.

ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING THE CAMPAIGN :

3F (Denmark) [www.3f.dk](http://www.3f.dk)

Banafair (Germany) [www.banafair.de](http://www.banafair.de)

Banana Link (Royaume Uni) [www.bananalink.org.uk](http://www.bananalink.org.uk)

COLSIBA (Latin America) [www.colsiba.org](http://www.colsiba.org)

US/LEAP (USA) [www.usleap.org](http://www.usleap.org)

IUF-UITA-IUL (Global Trade Union Federation) [www.iuf.org](http://www.iuf.org)

US/LEAP (USA) [www.usleap.org](http://www.usleap.org)

CGT (France) [www.cgt.org/ei](http://www.cgt.org/ei)

Peuples Solidaires in association  
with ActionAid (France) [www.peuples-solidaires.org](http://www.peuples-solidaires.org)

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# INTRODUCTION

**Revisiting  
the plantations  
three years on**



*In 2006, a group of civil society organisations published a report about Dole and their suppliers in Latin America: “Dole, behind the smoke screen... Investigation in the banana plantations of Latin America”, edited and coordinated by Maude Feral (Peuples Solidaires), Helge Fischer (BanaFair), Jesper Nielsen (3F) and Alistair Smith (Banana Link), with the help of Stephen Coats (US/LEAP) and financial support from the European Union.*

*With the support of case studies (in particular in Ecuador and Costa Rica) this report uncovered violations of trade union freedom and workers’ rights in the plantations that produce Dole bananas. The report also served as a basis for a public campaign appealing to the multinational, supported by numerous international organisations and led by: 3F General Workers’ Union (Denmark), Austrian Banana Campaign - Latin America Committee and International Fellowship of Reconciliation (Austria), BanaFair (Germany), Banana Link (United Kingdom), CGT- General Workers Confederation- (France), COLSIBA- Coordinating Body of Latin American Banana Workers Unions, Peuples Solidaires (France), IUF- International*

*Union of Food and Agricultural Workers - and US/LEAP (United States).*

**The *Dole* campaign has the following objectives:**

- To show that behind the ‘smoke screen’ of fine words and private certifications, the practices of *Dole* and their suppliers do not respect human rights at work;
- To encourage *Dole* to negotiate with the Latin America Banana Workers Unions (grouped in COLSIBA) and take concrete measures to support workers’ rights and trade union freedom.

Three years on, it is time to assess the progress made as a result of the campaign, but also to consider the numerous issues that remain unresolved and the road left to travel. This is the purpose of this document.

Like the first report, this document is based on contributions from plantation workers and their trade unions in banana producing countries.



# CHAPTER 1

## **Dole: still the world's biggest fruit company**



*Banana containers on a ship belonging to the Dole fleet.*

## ● An economic and social success story?

Three years after the publication of our report, *Dole* is still world leader in terms of the production and sale of fruit, vegetables and fresh cut flowers. The company sells more than 200 products in 90 countries, employ 36,000 permanent and 23,000 temporary workers. It also maintains its leadership in the international sale of bananas, just ahead of the multinational *Chiquita*. In 2008, *Dole* made a profit following two years of losses.

### ***Dole* - Current figures**

- Profits in 2008 : **121 million dollars**
- Turnover in 2008 : **7.6 billion dollars**  
(800 million dollars more than in 2007)
- Estimated percentage  
of turnover from banana sales : **35 %**

*Dole* is a clear example of a “success story”, a business founded in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which has become the world leader in the sale of fruit and vegetables. Bananas, the most traded fruit in the world, are at the heart of the company’s activity. Although *Dole* is reported to have the biggest share of the world banana market, it is number three in Europe, behind *Chiquita* and *Fyffes*.

But is this story also one of social and environmental success? *Dole* is proud of its high social and environmental standards. “*We have a policy of non-discrimination.*

*We respect the basic civil, social and economic rights of each individual who works for us”, says the company. “For a long time we have had an enviable reputation thanks to our ethical conduct in business, our respect for the environment and the fair treatment of our employees, whom we hold in high esteem. We respect and obey the laws and regulations of each country in which we work. Equally, we must continue trying to satisfy our consumers, our employees, our suppliers and the countries in which we work. These principles are integral to our business culture.”* declared President and CEO, David Murdock.

But this “enviable reputation” contrasts with the less enviable situation of those principally affected: the tens of thousands of families who work and live in and around the banana plantations which supply the multinational’s fruit. With the exception of the particular case of Honduras - the country that serves as the “model” - major violations of human rights continue in the supply chain of the world’s No. 1 fresh fruit and vegetable company. *Dole* even holds the record of having the lowest trade union presence in Latin America... Is this statistic the product of chance?

## ● *Dole* in West Africa

The research done in 2006 and its most recent updates focus on Latin American countries, the region where the majority of production is concentrated. However, *Dole* is also present – directly or indirectly – in various countries in West Africa, notably in Ghana, the Ivory Coast and Cameroon.



Since 1992, *Dole* has owned 40 % of *Compagnie Fruitière*, the leading French banana and pineapple company which exports bananas from Cameroon, the Ivory Coast and Ghana. *Dole/Compagnie Fruitière* has invested in this region in order to benefit from the tariff regime of the European Union, which gives bananas coming from A.C.P countries (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) duty-free access. But the company also makes the most of the "advantageous costs of production", another expression for low labour costs and weak worker protection.

During 2008-2009, a number of witnesses from Cameroon have raised doubts about *Compagnie Fruitière*. These complaints concerned the use of pesticides harmful to workers and neighbouring populations, workers'salaries, confiscations of property from local inhabitants, tax fraud and actions that led to the detention of the Mayor of Haut-Penja, who obtained an order for the company to pay unpaid corporation tax in 2007 and has remained in prison since February 2008.

## ● From plantation to retail

As we pointed out in 2006, *Dole* controls almost every stage in the supply chain : production, packaging, transportation, shipping, importation and the ripening process. This includes the service activities which are significant in adding value in consumer countries and far more profitable than production itself.

The multinational depends substantially on independent national producers in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Peru, Honduras and the Philippines, whilst around 30 % of bananas marketed by *Dole* come from its own plantations or subsidiaries. The company owns some 20 plantations in Ecuador (where costs of production are very "attractive" but also in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia and the Philippines. However, the multinational withdrew from Venezuela and Nicaragua and has now sold the majority of its plantations in Colombia.

The growing withdrawal of *Dole* from production activities has allowed the company to wash its hands of the direct social responsibility for workers on the plantations. This also reflects a change in terms of relative power in the supply chain, where the most profitable activities are those that are closest to the consumer. In the race for profits through lower prices and social and environmental "dumping" in which both the fruit companies and the retailers are engaged, it is the supermarkets which now take the lion's share.

## ● Dialogue or public relations ? The case of the SA 8000

We also pointed out in 2006 that *Dole* uses its SA 8000 social responsibility certification, issued by the NGO Social Accountability International (SAI), to give credibility to its public statements. The company publicises its membership of the SAI Advisory Board and has obtained SA 8000 certification in several countries. All of *Dole's* own plantations

in Costa Rica have been certified since 2006, and since 2007 in Colombia. This is, to say the least, surprising given that the criteria include respect for International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions on the Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining. We have to conclude that the inspections carried out by auditors checking compliance with SA 8000 standards leave a lot to be desired. There are several denunciations coming from our partners on the ground in relation to certified plantations.

### ● **Under pressure, Dole agrees to talk**

The 2006 report and the public campaign which accompanied it forced a reaction from the multinational. At first, *Dole* tried to refute the results of our investigation, even sending a report of over 70 pages to their major clients countering our arguments. The mobilisation did however bear fruit: the multinational agreed to enter into dialogue.

Over these last three years there have been various meetings and exchanges of correspondence between *Dole*, the Latin American trade unions and the other organisations in Europe and North America that support the campaign. The authors of this report welcome this opening of dialogue, but also point to its shortcomings. It should be remembered that the right to collective bargaining negotiations, for example, is not even mentioned in the code of conduct of the multinational. Above all, the dialogue has not yet translated into concrete results on the ground. The situation in the countries we investigated in 2006 has

progressed positively in some cases, but there remains a long journey ahead.

Today the social and environmental practices of the multinational are far from being sufficient. Only time will tell if the willingness shown by the company in its statements is just rhetoric to protect it from its critics, or whether it is sincere in its readiness to participate in the construction of a social and ecologically sustainable banana chain. Despite the meetings, only changes in the daily lives of plantation workers and their families can demonstrate a real will.



## CHAPTER 2

### **Costa Rica : an agreement, but no change on the ground**

*Demonstration led by women DBCP victims (top).  
Meeting of male and female DBCP victims in Costa Rica (bottom)*

Costa Rica is the third largest banana exporter in the world, an activity which represents around 40,000 directly linked jobs, and a further 60,000 or so indirect jobs. Dole's Costa Rican subsidiary, *Standard Fruit*, has around thirty of its own plantations, as well as a group of about thirty independent plantation suppliers.

In 2006, the writers of the original report exposed the deplorable working conditions in the Costa Rican banana industry: wages that do not cover basic needs; exceptionally long working days and unpaid overtime; job insecurity. Migrant workers, mainly Nicaraguan, were particularly exploited. In short, the anti-trade union policy of Standard Fruit and their suppliers jeopardised all hopes of improvement. The report also highlighted the close relation between the multinational and a paternalistic system unique to Costa Rica - "solidarismo" - created specifically to displace free and independent trade unions.

### **Solidarismo**

The solidarismo movement in Costa Rica was promoted during the Cold War period in order to eliminate independent trade unions, which were very active in the country's banana industry. Solidarismo associations, which offer sporting and leisure activities as well as some other advantages to workers, became the eyes and ears of the owners and managers. In contrast with collective bargaining negotiations initiated by independent trade unions, solidarismo associations do not negotiate with or conclude binding agreements with companies on fundamental matters relating to labour conditions. One of their main missions on the plantations is to keep an eye on every significant sign that could lead to the creation of independent trade unions, which are considered the ideological enemy, even the "work of the devil". Another of their fundamental missions is to make sure that none of the members of the Permanent Workers' Committees that sign so-called "Direct Settlements" with employers is a member of a trade union. The International Labour Organisation does not recognise the legitimacy of solidarismo associations as social dialogue partners, and Costa Rican law does not give them the right to represent workers.

## ● **March 2007 : a Framework Agreement... just on paper ?**

In response to our campaign, *Dole* showed encouraging signs with regards to Costa Rica : the multinational accepted the elaboration of a Framework Agreement which was signed on 27<sup>th</sup> march 2007 by *Standard Fruit* and *COSIBA-CR* - the Coordinating Body of Costa Rican Banana Workers Unions, which regroups the unions *SITRAP*, *SITAGAH*, *SITRACHIRI* and *UTRAL*. This agreement represented an important step forward, as the company assumed specific commitments and recognised its responsibilities for conditions in its suppliers.

### **The text of the agreement envisaged :**

- A framework for formal and continuous dialogue between *Standard Fruit* and *COSIBA-CR*.
- A mechanism for resolving conflicts.

The company also acknowledged the union's right to free access to the plantations and to use company premises for union meetings. With regards to independent suppliers, regular meetings between all parties were foreseen.

If the agreements in this document had been implemented, it would have allowed real progress on the ground for workers to freely join a trade union and it could have acted as a model for other similar agreements in other countries. But the agreement has simply not been implemented in practice.

In May 2008, *COSIBA-CR* organised a series of workshops to evaluate the Framework Agreement and to what extent it had been implemented up to that point. The general evaluation was that no tangible progress had taken place for workers. The findings from these workshops were presented to *Standard Fruit*, and the trade unions called on the company to convene a meeting with its main suppliers, but few responded positively to the invitation.

Meanwhile, the local management and the supervisors working for *Standard Fruit* continue with their anti-trade union attitudes and practices. They try to discourage workers from joining a trade union, or denounce them if they do decide to do so. This results in attempts to bribe, intimidate or and threaten workers. Employees are firstly invited to give up the union in return for economical benefits, and if they persist, they are threatened in a more direct manner. For this reason, the unions have described *Dole's* new message to its employees as essentially being : "You are free to join a trade union, but we don't recommend it" !

In 2008, a group of delegates from Britain's GMB trade union were able to witness at first hand the fear of banana

plantation workers when faced with the idea of joining a union, even though they were well aware that it was the only way of improving their working conditions and wages. In spite of the constant efforts of trade unions, the number of members in plantations belonging to *Dole* and their suppliers has not increased since 2006.

In short, *Standard Fruit* continues to support *solidarismo* and its associated mechanisms (see box on previous page). They also have recourse to the services of the John XXIII Social School, a Catholic church body that provides *solidarismo* “promoters” to come to the plantations, and those of their suppliers, and advise on how to deal with any signs that workers are joining a union.

### ● **The *Las Perlas*, *Carrandi* and *PiñaFruit* cases**

Two case studies in the banana plantations *Las Perlas* (owned by *Dole*) and *Carrandi* (owned by the *Acon Group*, an important supplier) in the report in 2006 exposed the bad practices of *Standard Fruit*. It also indicated various violations of workers' rights in Costa Rican pineapple plantations, in particular those of Collin Street Bakery (Texan company that produces fresh pineapple for *Dole*), *Piña Tica* and *PiñaFruit* (*Acon Group*). What has happened to the workers at these plantations ?

**In *Las Perlas***, several members of *SITRAP* (Union of plantation workers in the Siquirres region) had been dismissed in 2005. Others were forced to leave the trade union under threat of reprisals: labelling them as “enemies of the company”, a *solidarismo* promoter had threatened them with dismissal, with being blacklisted (and names passed on to other employers) or with wage cuts.

» Despite the Framework Agreement, this anti-trade union campaign continued and three more union members were dismissed. According to *Standard Fruit* on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2007, these dismissals were due to staff re-organisation during the low season. However, while other ex-employees were re-employed and new workers contracted, members of *SITRAP* were not.

It should also be noted that at the *Zurqui* plantations, which also belong to *Standard Fruit*, four members of *SITAGAH* were dismissed by a similar process to those at *Las Perlas*, again without reasonable justification from the multinational.

**In the *Carrandi* plantations**, *SITRAP* had secured an intervention from the Ministry of Labour in 2002, to acknowledge trade union freedom. While some forty workers got involved with the trade union, the *Acon Group* responded with an anti-trade union campaign based on bribery and blackmail: threats of dismissing relatives of union members, blacklisting, pressure and discrimination.

» In the context of the Framework Agreement between *Standard Fruit* and *COSIBA-CR*, the multinational agreed to facilitate dialogue between all involved parties including *Dole* suppliers, much to the satisfaction of the unions. However, violations of human rights continued, due to the constant refusal of *Acon Group* to talk with *SITRAP*. Even worse, the company proceeded to enact a mass redundancy of all workers, stating to trade union members that they would not be re-employed if they failed to give up their membership of the union. By November 2007, using this tactic, the company managed to eliminate the last union member. In 2008, *Acon* resorted to force using private guards to stop trade union members gaining access to the plantations. Finally, after one feeble attempt, *Standard Fruit* took no further serious steps in demanding that its supplier stop its unfair practices.

With regards to *PiñaFrut*, the situation barely improved, as testified in this extract of an open letter written by an employee, a Nicaraguan migrant worker, in 2008 :  
*“A proverb in the Bible says: “a poor man pleads for mercy, but a rich man answers harshly”. I have lived this harsh reality at the PiñaFrut plantation, particularly after joining the SITRAP trade union in June 2006. At this time, I didn’t think that my employer would be able to launch an anti-union campaign against me and my colleagues. In October of that year I had written a similar letter to this one about the situation on the plantation. That letter was widely read and I thank those who published it. Many of my colleagues*

*who signed it are no longer members of the trade union. They had been unable to bear the repeated pressures of the company any longer. Some left the trade union through fear that they would be blacklisted, others in exchange for an easier job. We consider these actions to be discriminatory. This company denies its workers the rights to a secure job, to union freedom, to a vital salary, to concrete working hours and reasonable treatment. For us, it’s time to seriously question Mr. Acon, since we are tired of listening to this rich man answering harshly when we make requests in a respectful manner. We are tired of seeing the big fish eating the little fish without any compassion”.*

### **Being “open to dialogue” is not enough**

Unfortunately the cases we have recalled in this report are not isolated cases. On other plantations owned by the *Acon Group* such as *Finca Boston*, *Bioban 2* and *Monte Bello*, there is a similar situation to that at the *Carrandi* plantations. However, faced with these clear violations of human rights, the only action *Dole* has taken is to send a letter to *Acon* containing *SITRAP*’s concerns.

In November 2008, *COLSIBA* and its partners wrote to *Dole* once again on a range of issues, including the lack of respect for trade union freedom in Costa Rica. This letter made precise references to situations that had been presented before. In a letter dated February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009, Sylvain Cuperlier - Vice President and Director of Corporate Social Responsibility - gave general and unsatisfactory answers

to the requests of civil society organisations. He stated, for example, that the cases recalled in the letter “cannot be treated in a global manner” and repeated that “problems related to certain independent suppliers in Costa Rica are discussed within the context of the Framework Agreement signed with *COSIBA-CR*”.

In conclusion, despite the continued efforts to create a climate of confidence, Costa Rican trade unions believe that the goodwill displayed by *Dole* is not actually being put into practice. Beyond the company’s rhetoric, when asked for answers to specific questions, the multinational usually turns a deaf ear, effectively washing their hands of any responsibility.





# CHAPTER 3

## **Ecuador: progress still fragile**



*Workers on strike in the El Zapote banana plantation (Ecuador – 2005).*

**E**cador is the world's largest banana exporter, partly thanks to having had the lowest production costs in Latin America. The production and export of bananas provides direct jobs for between 200,000 and 250,000 workers. *Dole* has recently become the largest exporting company in Ecuador. The company's subsidiary, *Dole-Ubesa*, owns 20 plantations and also buys from local producers, accounting in total for one third of *Dole's* Latin American banana supply.

In 2006, the authors of the report stated that the situation on the plantations was unacceptable, from a social and trade union point of view, even illegal in certain aspects. Very low monthly salaries for between 10 and 12 hours daily of work, subcontracting systems (which gave rise to a whole series of irregularities by employers), persecution of trade union members, degradation of the environment, legal conflicts, under-age workers, lack of healthcare cover, threats of dismissal, delays in paying wages, refusal to pay overtime, sexual harassment and other violations of human rights were daily occurrences in the industry.

Because of the repression, there were very few Ecuadorian trade unions in the independent plantations that supplied *Dole*, and trade unions were completely non-existent on plantations owned by the company. The report highlighted the many cases of trade union repression.

### ● **Humanitarian projects should not be a fig-leaf**

As the main representative of banana workers, *FENACLE* (National Federation of Agro-industrial Workers and Indigenous peoples of Ecuador) demonstrated its goodwill by building an atmosphere of trust with *Dole*. When invited to participate in a school building project, in which the company's private foundation – the Dale Foundation - was a stakeholder, *FENACLE* agreed to take part. Subsequently, in April 2008, at the time of the inauguration of the school, the company was able to acclaim its “unprecedented collaboration” with *FENACLE* over the project. Meanwhile, *FENACLE* continued pushing for improvements in working conditions through negotiations with workers organised in independent trade unions.

The authors of this report consider that this type of project – with its potential for good public relations - must not be orchestrated to give the impression that a serious dialogue with unions is in place; nor must it replace the respect for basic rights.

### ● **The cases of *Dole* supplier farms**

In the 2006 report, five cases of trade union repression were reported at the *El Zapote*, *Tara del Sur*, *Francia y Manuela*, *Josefa* and *Maria Elisa* plantations. Between trade union leaders and union members, more than one hundred workers were dismissed between 2005 and 2006 for their

trade union activities, or simply for joining a union. In 2009, we have been able to get information on four of the five plantations concerned, showing that the repressive actions of the companies in question continued until employers succeeded in completely undermining the attempts to establish independent trade unions. Since 2007, there no longer exists a single representative organisation for workers on these plantations.

In July 2009, 38 workers at two *Dole* suppliers, *SOFOCA* and *Primobanano*, were sacked for forming new trade unions in the two plantations. *FENACLE* negotiated a redundancy package with the companies and signed an agreement – lodged with the labour authorities - that the remaining workers would not be harassed for their union membership. A week later another 12 union committee members and 4 ordinary members were sacked from the two farms and the management threatened to sack the remaining union members.

## ● Progress mainly down to political changes

Despite the challenges, the general situation in Ecuador has changed for the better since the election of Rafael Correa as the country's President in late 2006. Thanks to the involvement of organisations like *FENACLE*, labour subcontracting was made illegal in 2008. This important victory has opened new prospects with regards to the defence of workers' rights, as most workers have been taken

on as direct permanent employers of the banana companies. The Labour Ministry has also taken on a more active role in protecting the freedom of association for workers and in ensuring that workers are properly registered in the healthcare system.

*FENACLE* has been able to run training programmes and offer its support for those creating trade unions on several plantations, including some of those belonging to *Dole*, such as Siembra Nueva (pineapple plantation) and María José and Banaloli 1 and 2 (banana plantations).

Although these changes are positive, it must be pointed out that they are principally due to a change in the political context rather than thanks to the goodwill of the world's N<sup>o</sup>.1 producer of fresh fruits and vegetables.

At a national level, *FENACLE* has been trying for many years to establish dialogue with the company, and to open negotiations towards a Framework Agreement (as in Costa Rica). On two occasions already - August 2007 and January 2008 - the trade union wrote to *Dole-Ubesa*, but received no reply. In 2009, discussions finally started taking place. The authors of the current report hope that these discussions will lead to tangible and sustainable outcomes for plantation worker's rights.

# CHAPTER 4

## Guatemala: the violence continues



*Demonstration led by workers from the Splendor flower plantation in Colombia.*

## ● A climate of terror

In Guatemala, the 2006 report stated that trade union repression was particularly violent. On the Pacific coast, *Dole* buys large volumes of bananas from plantations where there are reports of systematic non-payment of the minimum wage, very poor housing and education... and where not even the police dare to enter, let alone trade unions. The area is in practice controlled by paramilitary groups working for some of the large landowners.

On September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007, Marco Tulio Ramirez - trade union leader of *COLSIBA*-affiliated union *SITRABI* (Banana Workers Union of Izabal) - was assassinated. He worked for an affiliate of *Del Monte*, a rival of *Dole*. The fact that *Dole* co-signed a letter condemning the assassination is positive. However, apart from this reaction, the multinational has not taken any other concrete measures to improve the situation, nor has it maintained the commitments it had accepted.

On March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008, the co-founder of the new *SITRABANSUR* union in the Pacific coast was killed, after another co-founder's daughter had been raped by armed men a few weeks earlier. This was a clear message that any union organisation, regardless of the exporting company buying the bananas, would not be tolerated.

The country urgently needs all the three major multinational companies to behave responsibly to help put an end to the spiraling violence and impunity, particularly present in the banana sector.

## ● Broken promises

**In July 2006, during a meeting with *COLSIBA*, *Dole* had promised:**

- To prepare a report on its supplier plantations, in particular those on the Pacific coast. The findings of this report would form a basis for a meeting between *Dole*, its suppliers and trade unions, with the aim of analysing the situation of insecurity on the plantations in this region.
- To organise a meeting in Guatemala between trade unions and suppliers, with the aim of informing the latter about the commitments accepted by the company with regards to respecting trade union rights.

### **Three years later:**

- *Dole* said it had finally carried out an internal study amongst its suppliers in Guatemala, which did not show any violation of trade union rights... This study was not published, nor was it communicated to trade union members. Nevertheless, *Dole* recognised privately that the Pacific coastal zone with its large numbers of banana plantations is "out of control", and that it does not consider itself capable of putting pressure on its suppliers.
- *Dole* has not held any meetings involving trade unions, although a meeting with suppliers did take place without the unions being invited.



## CHAPTER 5

**Peru : organic  
bananas... yes, but...**



In a short space of time Peru has become the largest supplier of organic bananas. Its exports in this sector have more than quadrupled in five years, reaching 78,000 tonnes in 2008, a significant amount of these bearing the Fairtrade mark. 60 % of these exports are destined for the European market. These bananas are produced by associations of small producers, but the harvest, packing, and exporting are controlled by exporting companies like *Dole-Copdeban*.

### ● **The SERAGRO case : Dole shows flexibility**

Since 2003, *Dole* has sub-contracted workers to harvest and package bananas that it bought from small producers' associations. It was a company called *SERAGRO* that took charge of harvesting and packaging bananas for *Dole*. However, the company refused to pay the weekly rest day at the rate to which the workers were legally entitled. Founded in 2006, SITAG – Union of Agricultural Workers of Peru - mobilised to put an end to this situation and obtain the unpaid wages of several hundred workers. Faced with refusal by *SERAGRO*, a strike took place in January 2008 and the workers presented a legal appeal to the Labour Ministry.

With the support of *COLSIBA* and other organisations involved in the campaign, SITAG's actions finally bore fruit: *Dole-Copdeban* finally accepted its responsibility and agreed to pay back outstanding wages to 359 employees (a total of \$230,000) - three quarters of *SERAGRO*'s employees according to the Labour Ministry. Several months later, after

continuing pressure on *Dole*, the remaining workers received what was due to them.

Following this successful negotiation, responsibility for employing the harvesting and packing workers was shifted to the small farmers' associations selling to *Dole* (and *SERAGRO* effectively disappeared), but *SITAG* has asked the multinational that workers be directly contracted.

The whole mobilisation and dialogue that surrounded this case provides a positive example of collaboration. The role played by *COLSIBA* and *Dole* in looking for solutions to the conflict with a labour sub-contracting company is particularly noteworthy. It remains to be seen, however, whether *Dole* will take on full responsibility for employing those who harvest the bananas that carry its brand.



# CONCLUSION

**The networks  
remain on alert**



The organisations that have written this, and the 2006 report, remain active and alert. COLSIBA, EUROBAN and its members, US-LEAP, but also new African partners such as GAWU (General Agricultural Workers' Union of Ghana) advocate the need for greater effort and more regular exchanges and meetings involving all concerned, if we are to move towards a socially and environmentally sustainable banana trade.

New networks are being established, such as those between the banana and pineapple sectors, which hold many similarities with regards to their countries of production, the issues and the actors involved. The role played by the food retailing companies has been given particular importance because of the major impacts they have on all the other players through their buying practices.

The authors of this report are pleased with the positive steps taken on various levels as a result of meetings and correspondence with Dole. Nonetheless, despite the opening of this multilateral dialogue and the achievement of advances in some cases, progress is too fragile to be able to state that Dole's public image as a responsible corporate citizen is justified. On too many occasions, the multinational's words have not been translated into actions on the ground.

We believe that sustainable improvements will only be achieved through full and total acknowledgement of the role that independent plantation workers' unions must

play. Voluntary codes of conduct, audits and the various private certification schemes are insufficient to ensure real and sustained progress on the ground. Are not the workers themselves best suited to play the role of verifying that their rights are being respected?

Hundreds of thousands of workers who produce the fruits that we consume on a daily basis live in shocking conditions; their rights, their dignity and their health are ignored. This is why action is urgent and our collective actions will continue.



USLEAP

BananaLink



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an association with actionaid



Fondation des Droits de l'Homme au Travail

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