

Banana Farming



Many people in the Windward Islands depend on banana farming to make a living. Meet the farmers.

In the the Windward Islands bananas are grown on small family-run farms. Banana farmers often spend more than half their earnings on pesticides, fertiliser, packaging and transporting their bananas from the farms to the docks.

In recent years it has become much harder for farmers to earn enough money to support their families. The price of bananas has fallen world-wide. In addition, changes in world trade rules mean farmers now face increased competition from multinational companies, which can grow bananas much more cheaply.



Some farmers now sell their bananas to the Fair Trade market. This ensures that they get a fair price for their bananas. They also get extra money – a Fair Trade 'social premium' which is spent on projects that benefit the whole community.

Fair Trade can't solve all the problems faced by banana farmers in the Windward Islands but it is helping some of them to earn enough to survive.

Meet people who grow bananas in the Windward Islands. Find out about the difficulties they face and the benefits that Fair Trade has brought them.

- **George**
- **Nioka**
- **Regina**
- **Deryck**

Banana Farming: George De Freitas



George works for the company that exports bananas from the Windward Islands as well as being a banana farmer himself.

"St. Vincent is completely dependent on bananas. Whereas other crops might only be harvested once or twice a year, bananas give people a weekly income. Farmers do plant other crops but these are usually used as food for the family.

There are still some younger people on the farms but lots have left. Farmers paint such a gloomy picture of what it's like that the youth don't want to get involved.

We depend heavily on being able to sell at a good price to a good market. If there was a growth in the market for bananas then more people would get involved in production again."



Fair Trade

"The benefits of Fair Trade for us have been reduction of chemicals on the environment. The social premium has also really made a difference. We're thinking about trying to open a nursery school and improve the roads around us. Anything we can do to make life better for the community, we'll try and do.

We'd like to see the Fair Trade market increase as we have many farmers who want to become involved in Fair Trade. They too want a fair price for a fairly produced banana."

Banana Farming: Nioka Abbott



Nioka has been a banana farmer on St Vincent for 15 years and is now the Chairperson of the local Fair Trade Group.

"There's been big changes since the 1970s. Now it's just more expensive to produce bananas. It's more work and less money.

I harvest every week or fortnight. Bananas are better than any other crops for regular harvesting. You get an income all through the year. That's why banana is so popular as a cash crop. It would be hard to find a replacement."

Fair Trade

"The good thing about being involved in Fair Trade is the social premium we get. Last year we bought chairs with ours. Before, when we held meetings everyone had to stand.

I ask people to buy more Fair Trade bananas and start putting pressure on supermarkets who don't buy Fair Trade. The market now is so small for Fair Trade that we need to get more supermarkets to buy them. If we could produce at a larger volume then we'd get a larger income in return."



Banana Farming: Regina Joseph



Regina is a 42-year-old banana farmer from Dominca. She has been involved in banana farming since she was 16.

"I spend the whole day on the farm. The farm isn't too far away. Mostly women do the tasks like washing and packing the bananas. Sometimes my daughter helps me pack, but I always do the selection of bananas to sell myself."

Fair Trade

"I started selling Fair Trade bananas last year. I find that with Fair Trade bananas I get a better income."



Banana Farming: Deryck Smart



Deryck is a 21-year-old banana farmer. He sells both fair trade and non fair trade bananas.

"The problem with the bananas you don't sell as Fair Trade is that the price always goes up and down.

I cut bananas on a fortnightly basis. My girlfriend washes and helps with the packing, and sometimes my dad might help out as well. Basically all the family is involved.

My mum and dad have noticed a lot of differences over the years. They say things have got much harder now."



Fair Trade

"I'd like to thank the people in the UK who buy Fair Trade. Please keep on buying and then hopefully the quotas will get bigger and maybe we can sell to places like America and Canada.

We've lost a lot here over the years. If things don't improve then banana farming will be a dead industry."