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My Commodity: Bananas

My commodity is bananas, the biggest company associated with the trade of this commodity is Dole, and the top exporters of these bananas are Ecuador, Philippines, Costa Rica, Honduras and Columbia. The US cannot grow bananas to the scale of these tropical regions, so whereas these three companies' headquarters are all in the US, they have control of the plantations they utilize in Central America. They can maintain profit and power, but eliminate certain risks of production.

Dole has 36,000 workers and their headquarters is in Westlake Village, California. Bananas are harvested throughout the year with plants at various stages of their growth. It takes twelve to thirteen weeks from the time the banana stem appears to the time they are harvested. Harvesting takes place six times a week on their plantations and is done by three workers a time and each banana bunch requires about nine and a half gallons of water a day, so a well-designed drainage system is important.

During early growth of the bananas, workers cut the tips of the banana 'fingers' so that the bananas grow outward and thus, bigger in size, then bags are placed in between the chunks of banana to avoid bruising or things like insect's contamination. Plants must be secured with rope because they can get to be 65-100 lbs., and crop protection specialists are on-call to assist when any threats of disease from insects comes up. They also help in dispersing chemicals across fields. Bananas are harvested while green so that they are ripe when they are sold, Dole packs the bananas and ships them in a plastic material that helps this process. The entire process from when the bananas are harvested to when they end up in the box is only 2/3 hours.

Dole mentions their packaging is mostly recycled material from their production processes. Some processes that allow the trade of bananas are the development of railroads and technological advances in refrigerated maritime transport. The bananas are sterile and cannot grow from seeds, making them free from variety or chance. This can also be a hindrance though because the bananas are vulnerable and if one plant is affected with disease they are all in

danger.

An innovation to prevent bruising and correct ripening uses ethylene which can trigger the ripening process in a timely manner. There are also some things that hinder the flow of bananas, like the use of expensive and harsh agrochemicals, companies are constantly trying to relocate in search of cheaper labor and weaker legislation in production and trade laws. The main people suffering in the banana industry are the plantation workers who work up to 14 hours a day in poor conditions.

Dole has great political power in Central American governments when they first started the plantations there, and they used this to their advantage. They receive large amounts of land at cheap costs, pay low export taxes, and immunity from local labor and environmental laws. Few regulations governing banana trade so Dole can sell as many bananas as they choose at a low price to maximize profits in the long run.

Banana Link is an organization that works for fair production and trade in bananas and pineapples based on environmental, social, and economic sustainability. They are always coming out with campaigns against unfair practices and conditions. Because of their popularity, they have a big voice with the banana industry and can make change. Bananas are advertised for their health benefits, very little do we see the poor conditions of the industry at all, this is commodity fetishism.

As consumers, our voice is in our money. If an industry is partaking in unethical or unhealthy practices, the way we can help is by not supporting them in an attempt that they will listen and change their practices accordingly. Supporting Banana Link in their effort to make the banana industry ethical is something we can take action through! This can be through donating, sharing their blog, and reading their newsletter. I spread this awareness through my social media.