FAIRTRADE

DO IT FAIR

YERFISSON VALDERRAMA,
BANANA WORKER AT
AGRÍCOLA IBIZA, COLOMBIA



BANANAS: AN ENDANGERED STAPLE?

Why we need fairer purchasing practices in banana supply chains

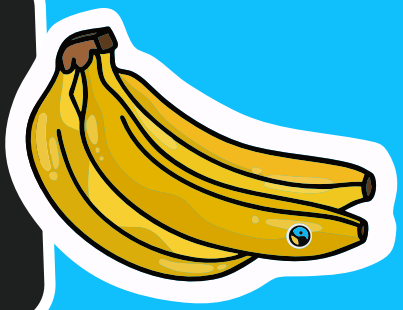
FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION
NOVEMBER 2026

THE BANANA SECTOR



BANANAS ARE THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR FRUIT.

EACH OF US IN THE UK EATS ABOUT 12 KG OF BANANAS – OR 100 BANANAS – PER YEAR.





70 MILLION PEOPLE IN AFRICA ALONE RELY ON BANANAS FOR THEIR LIVELIHOOD. BUT THEY ARE BEING LEFT TO FACE CLIMATE CHANGE ALONE.

FAIRER BUSINESS PRACTICES CAN MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE. READ THIS REPORT TO FIND OUT HOW.

CONTENTS



Foreword 4

Executive summary 5
A fairer food system benefits everyone

Introduction: 7
The future of bananas – and the people who grow them – is at risk

Chapter 1: 11
Under the skin of the banana crisis
- The case of bananas 12
- How climate change is harming harvests 15
- Climate change and UTPs: the unfair cycle 16
- The impact of El Niño on banana farmers and workers 18

Chapter 2: 20
The humble banana needs radical solutions
- Climate resilience is key 20
- Why current responses aren't working 22

Chapter 3: 24
How to build a fairer future for everyone
- Fairtrade's recommendations 24

Conclusion: 26
The people who grow our bananas should not be left to face climate change alone

FOREWORD

> **PRICE AND UNIFORMITY TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER EVERYTHING ELSE.**

The humble banana. It's one of the world's most popular fruits, enjoyed every day by millions of people. Yet most of us know very little about the remarkable journey bananas make to reach our supermarket shelves, the skill and hard work required to grow them, or the challenges faced by the people who produce them.

Another reason bananas remain a shopping basket favourite is their price. In the midst of a global cost of living crisis, who wouldn't welcome paying less than 15p for a banana?

Growing up in Kenya, bananas were a staple of everyday life. But bananas are far from a one-size-fits-all fruit. Across the country, different varieties are grown and enjoyed in different ways: some are eaten fresh, while others are cooked, fried or used in traditional dishes. The small, sweet Lady Finger – or Sukari banana – for example, is often given to babies during weaning, while matoke – a cooking banana – is used to prepare delicious beef stews popular in western Kenya.

When I first came to the UK, I was struck by the contrast. Supermarket shelves were dominated by a single variety: the Cavendish. Having grown up surrounded by such a rich diversity of bananas, I found it remarkable that UK consumers had so little choice. It was a reminder of the diversity of food, farming and traditions that we risk overlooking when price and uniformity take precedence over everything else.

> **THE COSTS FACING BANANA GROWERS HAVE SOARED.**

But there's another striking feature of the UK banana market: its price. It's remarkable how little the retail price of a banana has changed over the past few decades. Few products can make the same claim.

While improvements in transportation and production have undoubtedly delivered some efficiencies, the reality is that the costs facing banana growers have soared. Fertiliser, fuel and labour costs have all risen, while climate change is bringing more frequent and severe challenges, from extreme weather to the spread of pests and diseases.

The race to the bottom on banana prices has been a win for consumers – and for retailers who use it to demonstrate the competitiveness of their shopping baskets. But it's come at a cost. Behind one of the cheapest items in our supermarkets is a supply chain shaped by persistent inequality, where too many farmers and workers struggle to earn a decent living and invest in a sustainable future.

This report shines a light on the unfair trading practices that help drive this injustice. I hope it encourages you to continue shopping at Co-op, Sainsbury's or Waitrose, where all their bananas are Fairtrade. But I also hope it spurs more businesses to join us and others in calling for legislation that tackles unfair trading practices and creates a fairer, more sustainable banana industry for everyone.

If you ever have the opportunity to try a banana variety other than a Cavendish, please do. By doing so, you'll discover a little of the diversity and richness we desperately need to push for a more resilient food system.



Dr Nyagoy Nyong'o

Chair of Board of Trustees, Fairtrade Foundation

Executive summary:

A FAIRER FOOD SYSTEM BENEFITS EVERYONE

Bananas are one of the UK's favourite fruits, yet the true costs of production for the people who grow them are often hidden from consumers.

For decades, smallholder farmers and plantation workers have been facing increasing pressure from the combined impacts of harmful business purchasing practices, unfair trading practices (UTPs), and climate change. A handful of large retailers dominate the market. Some of them do the right thing and implement responsible purchasing practices, but many do not. As a result, farmers and workers often have limited ability to negotiate fairer terms in their contracts, creating the conditions for UTPs to persist.

Persistent downward pressure on prices, late payments, heavy discounting, and business practices and models that transfer risk down the supply chain make it more difficult for banana farmers and workers to earn sustainable livelihoods, or for farmers and plantation managers to invest in resilience measures to cope with worsening climate change. And so the downward spiral continues.

With extreme weather, crop disease and rising costs intensifying the pressure on banana production, adequate incomes are vital for farmers and workers to support their families and prepare for what lies ahead. While voluntary business commitments to living wages and Fairtrade pricing mechanisms provide vital support, their success depends on the volume of bananas that receive a living wage top-up and are sold on Fairtrade terms.

This report makes the case for systemic change – with Government, business and consumers all playing a vital role in building a fairer future for bananas and those who grow them. The introduction of stronger laws that encourage fairer business practices and better support for farming communities offers a practical way forward. This is why Fairtrade is calling on the UK government to make Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD) mandatory for all businesses, so they are in turn obliged to audit their own purchasing behaviours as part of their statutory due diligence. We are also asking businesses to ensure the prices they pay to the people growing our bananas cover the full costs of sustainable production and enable progress towards the payment of living wages and living incomes, better working conditions, climate resilience and more stable, thriving communities.

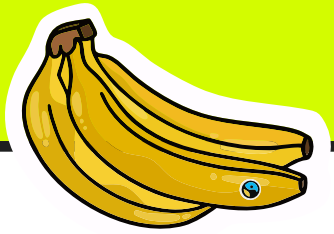
70 million people in Africa alone rely on bananas for their livelihood, meaning the UK banana sector holds great potential to positively and negatively change livelihoods and lives[1]. Realising this potential starts with fair prices, and that means covering the true cost of sustainable production.

> **CLIMATE CHANGE... IS NOT AN ABSTRACT THREAT FOR THE FUTURE, BUT A FACTOR ALREADY ALTERING PRODUCTION CYCLES, INCREASING THE VULNERABILITY OF PLANTATIONS AND REQUIRING GREATER INVESTMENT TO PRODUCE EFFICIENTLY. ADAPTATION REQUIRES TECHNOLOGY, INFRASTRUCTURE, KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES. YET, WHEN MARGINS TIGHTEN, THE CAPACITY TO ADAPT IS PRECISELY WHAT IS COMPROMISED FIRST.**
>
> **Emerson Aguirre Medina,** executive president of Colombian banana association Augura.



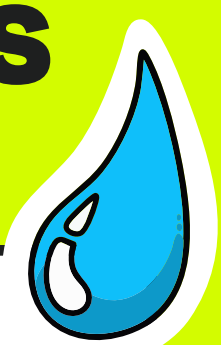
[1] Voora, V., Larrea, C. and Bermudez, S. (2020) Global Market Report: Bananas. Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/ssi-global-market-report-banana.pdf

THE BANANA INDUSTRY IN NUMBERS



The UK sector

- In the UK, each of us eats about 12 kg of bananas – or 100 bananas – per year.
- Most of the British public are unaware of the issues affecting the future of bananas, including the threat of diseases[2].
- 70 million people in Africa alone rely on bananas for their livelihood, meaning the UK banana sector holds great potential to positively and negatively change livelihoods and lives[3].
- 67% of British adults say they would pay a few pence more for bananas if it helped farmers protect future supplies from climate change and disease[4].



Climate impacts

- Suitable land area for banana cultivation by 2050 could shrink by 37% in Ecuador, 55.1% in Colombia, 57% in the Dominican Republic, and 84.7% in Costa Rica, with an average decrease of 61% across Latin America and the Caribbean[9].
- Heavy rainfall, extreme heat, flooding, storms and drought are significantly affecting banana production.
- Left uncontrolled, Black sigatoka – a highly virulent and lethal fungal disease – can cause up to a 100% loss of marketable bananas[10].



Unfair trading practices (UTPs) and producer challenges

- In 2026, 32% of suppliers in UK supply chains reported experiencing at least one issue with large supermarkets, up from 30% in 2025, including 14% experiencing payment delays, and 20% experiencing inadequate processes / procedures to enable prompt resolution of payment discrepancies[5].
- In 2026, 18% of suppliers incurred significant costs due to inaccurate forecasting by UK retailers[6].
- In 2026, retail prices paid to the people growing our bananas failed to cover profit margins for 83.3% of banana retailers or basic production costs for 66.7% of them[7].
- Between the late 1990s and 2015, the average cost of agricultural inputs across key global export commodities rose by over 70%[8].



[2] Kantar research for the Fairtrade Foundation, Total sample 1231 (GB 16+), Fieldwork dates 18-20 August 2026
[3] Voora, V., Larrea, C. and Bermudez, S. (2020) Global Market Report: Bananas. Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/ssi-global-market-report-banana.pdf
[4] Kantar, Total sample 1231 (GB 16+), Fieldwork dates 18-20 August 2026.
[5] Adjudicator, G. C. Groceries Code Adjudicator Annual Report and Accounts 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. Improving Fairness for Suppliers. (2026).
[6] Adjudicator, G. C. Groceries Code Adjudicator Annual Report and Accounts 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. Improving Fairness for Suppliers. (2026).
[7] Ethical Trading Initiative. Banana Supply Chain: How Purchasing Practices Influence Outcomes for Producers, Exporters, and Workers. https://www.ethicaltrade.org/resources/guidance-and-reports/banana-supply-chain-how-purchasing-practices-influence-outcomes (2026).
[8] Robin Willoughby & Tim Gore. Ripe for Change: Ending Human Suffering in Supermarket Supply Chains. (2018) doi:10.21201/2017.1787
[9] Steven Prager, Ana R. Rios, Benjamin Schiek, Juliana Almeida, & Carlos E. Gonzalez. (2020). Vulnerability to Climate Change and Economic Impacts in the Agriculture Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean. Inter-American Development Bank. https://doi.org/10.18235/0002580
[10] Guzmán Quesada, M.; García, R.P. (2020): Black Sigatoka (Mycosphaerella Fijiensis): the fungus that destroys banana plantations. San José: Crop Life Latin America.

Definitions
- Direct suppliers: Overseas and UK-based businesses selling directly to the 14 designated UK grocery retailers.
- Indirect suppliers: Upstream producers, growers, or manufacturers selling through intermediaries or brokers.
- Trade associations: Representative bodies submitting evidence on behalf of their member suppliers.

Introduction:

THE FUTURE OF BANANAS – AND THE PEOPLE WHO GROW THEM – IS AT RISK

In the UK we eat about 12 kg of bananas per person each year, importing between 800,000 and 900,000 tonnes of bananas annually. 93% of these imports come from Latin America and West Africa[11]. But today, banana farmers and workers are in crisis.

This report examines the dual role of unfair trading practices (UTPs) and climate change in undermining resilience for the people growing the bananas we enjoy here in the UK, especially in the context of an unprecedented El Niño climate event. It summarises why banana supply chains urgently need a joined-up approach to sustainability. This means recognising that problems like climate change, poverty, human rights abuses and low farm incomes and wages are systemic and interconnected. It looks at the current response landscape, before concluding with policy, business and UK public recommendations for alleviating these issues through responsible purchasing practices.

> **WE ARE IN QUITE A PRECARIOUS SITUATION WHEN IT COMES TO OUR WORK AND FOOD. PRICES HAVE RISEN FAR TOO MUCH... THINGS ARE FAR TOO EXPENSIVE.**
>
> **Hilda Ayala,** former Banana Worker for twenty years at COOBANA, Panama.



CLAUDIA PATRICIA LONDOÑO, BANANA WORKER AT AGRÍCOLA LUISA FERNANDA, COLOMBIA

Bananas are a "known value item", which means that supermarkets use the price of bananas to signal overall competitive pricing to consumers[12]. Supermarket chains have kept the price of bananas artificially low since 1987[13,14]. Time series data shows how banana prices have stayed almost exactly the same throughout the past four decades – in some cases even decreasing (Figure 1).

This differs from trends across other fruit, including those grown domestically such as apples, which have increased in price steadily over time. Yet recent research commissioned by the Fairtrade Foundation found that – even during a cost-of-living crisis – over two thirds (67%) of British adults say they would pay a few pence more for bananas if it helped farmers protect future supplies from climate change and disease[15].

[11] Colombia (31.8% 5-year average share), Costa Rica (23.5%), Ecuador (10.2%), the Dominican Republic (7.9%), Nicaragua (5.7%), Guatemala (4.5%), Panama (3.6%), Côte d'Ivoire (3.4%), and Ghana (1.8%). Source: Food and Agriculture Organization. FAOSTAT: Crops and Livestock Products. (2026).
[12] Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. Fairness in the food supply chain inquiry: evidence summary. (2025).
[13] Banana Link. Wage and Contractual Conditions Among Banana Worker on Banana Farms and Plantations in the Province of El Oro, Ecuador. (2024, updated January 2026)
[14] Bureau for Appraisal of Social Impacts for Citizen Information. Banana Value Chain in Europe and the Consequences of Unfair Trading Practices. (2015)
[15] Kantar, Total sample 1231 (GB 16+), Fieldwork dates 18-20 August 2026.

BANANAS SEEM CONDEMNED TO A PECULIAR ECONOMIC EXCEPTION: THE SECTOR IS EXPECTED TO MEET EVER MORE DEMANDING REQUIREMENTS, TAKE ON GREATER RISKS AND MAKE NEW INVESTMENTS, WHILE ITS PRICES REMAIN VIRTUALLY UNCHANGED. FEW INDUSTRIES COULD SUSTAIN SUCH AN EQUATION INDEFINITELY.

Emerson Aguirre Medina, executive president of Colombian banana association Augura.

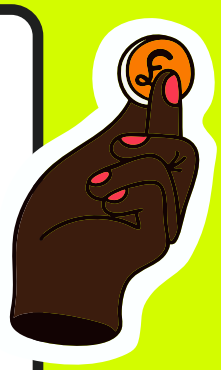
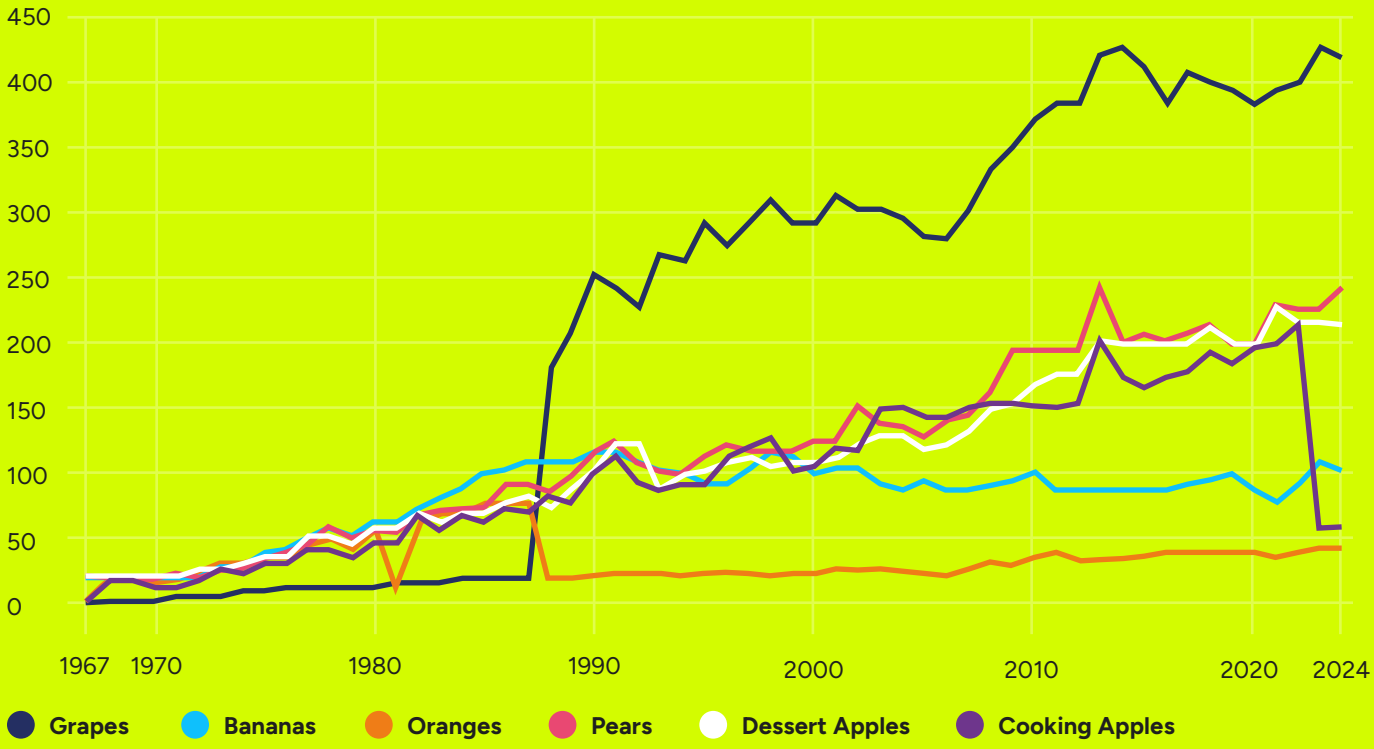


Figure 1: Retail Price Index time series for major UK fruits



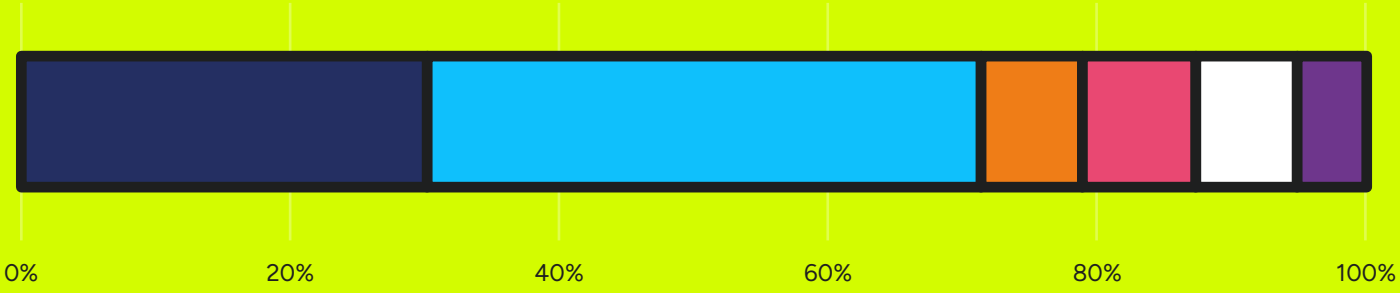
Data Source: Office for National Statistics RPI All Items Index[16]. Note for oranges: data post-1988 is per individual orange, not per kg.

This artificial depression has in part been made possible by the pervasive use of unfair trading practices (UTPs) – harmful business models that put pressure on suppliers and lead to poor working conditions and low pay for farmers and workers. While some retailers do implement responsible purchasing practices (see Box 1), including paying farmers and workers fair prices, many other retailers do not. In addition, there is a persistent tension between the low price strategies of retailers (i.e. the price at which bananas are sold in the UK) and the rising costs of labour, inputs, and compliance for the people growing those bananas[17].

[16] Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 16 September 2026, ONS website, time series dataset, RPI All Items Index: Jan 1987=100, series ID CHAW, accessed 13 October 2026, https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/chaw/mm23.

[17] Alliot, C., Ly, S., Cortin, M., Segré, H., & Feige-Muller, M. (2017). Distribution of value & power in food value chains.

Figure 2: How profits are distributed across the Ecuador–UK banana supply chain



UK retailers
Traders and fruit companies (including shipping, import and ripening)
Exporters
Smallholders
Plantation workers
Agricultural input costs

Data Source: BASIC, 2017[18]

In addition to the pressure created by widespread use of UTPs, banana farmers and workers today face increasing climate-related risks, including accelerating temperatures, shifting rainfall regimes, and expanding fungal pathogen pressure (see Box 1). Acute climate shocks such as this year's "super El Niño" are compounding other pervasive challenges, such as the rising cost of fertiliser, shipping, packaging and the low incomes of banana farmers and workers[19,20].

There are, however, several major UK retailers leading the way in building sustainability into their global supply chains, including Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Co-op working with banana traders Fyffes and Primafruit (Box 2). These organisations have committed to participating in voluntary sourcing pledges including the IDH UK Retailer Living Wage Commitment, seeking to close the living wage gap for banana workers across their supply chains by the end of 2027.



SANDRA LUZ RIVAS HERRERA, BANANA FARMER, AGROSIETE, COLOMBIA

BOX 1

Key challenges facing banana farmers and workers

Smallholder farmers:

- Low incomes
- Lack of negotiating power over buyers
- Climate change, increased diseases and El Niño
- Rising production costs
- Low smallholder productivity/ competition from plantations

Hired labour workers (on plantations):

- Low wages and poor working conditions
- Lack of negotiating power over management
- Gender disparities and discrimination
- Informal employment and lack of contracts
- Suppression of freedom of association

Plantation management:

- Climate change, increased diseases and El Niño
- Rising production costs

[18] Alliot, C., Ly, S., Cortin, M., Segré, H., & Feige-Muller, M. (2017). Distribution of value & power in food value chains.
[19] FAO. Agricultural production risks associated with El Niño conditions and shipping disruptions linked to the Middle East conflict. (2026)
[20] Risilience (2026) El Niño 2026–2027: The Agricultural Shock and What it Means for Business. Cambridge: Risilience. Available at: https://risilience com

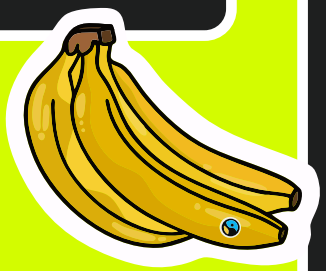
BOX 2

Retailers committed to fairness and resilience for banana farmers and workers

Individual retailers that have made significant commitments towards workers and smallholder farmers in their banana supply chains earning a fair living wage, including via a 100% Fairtrade sourcing commitment:

Sainsbury's

- Has sourced 100% Fairtrade bananas since 2007, one of the first to market generating the largest Fairtrade Premium contribution of any UK and global grocery retailer. In 2025, Sainsbury's contributed over £4.9 million in Fairtrade Premium to banana groups.
- Buys from both smallholders and hired labour set-ups for their bananas, therefore supporting both banana farmers and banana workers.
- Contributes an additional payment as part of its IDH living wage commitment ahead of the 2027 industry target. Through partnering with Fairtrade and Fyffes, Sainsbury's pays an additional contribution – paid to workers as a Fairtrade Banana Bonus – on top of the Fairtrade Minimum Price and Premium to achieve this.
- Established a new collaborative initiative bringing together banana farmers and workers, Fairtrade Producer Networks, suppliers and Sainsbury's to identify and better understand risks, and to support producers to develop plans to address them.
- Supports the Sustainable Banana Programme, which aims to further strengthen the resilience and long-term viability of smallholder banana farmers and plantation workers.



Waitrose

- Has sourced 100% Fairtrade bananas since 2010.
- Buys from both smallholders and hired labour set-ups for their bananas, therefore supporting both banana farmers and banana workers.
- Supports the Sustainable Banana Programme, which aims to further strengthen the resilience and long-term viability of smallholder banana farmers and plantation workers, through the Waitrose Foundation initiative. The Waitrose Foundation aims for 2% of the retail value for bananas to be directly reinvested in the communities that produce them.
- Reached its IDH living wage contribution three years ahead of the 2027 industry target. Through partnering with Fairtrade, Waitrose pays a supply chain-based additional price contribution – called the Banana Bonus – on top of the Fairtrade Minimum Price and Premium to achieve this in hired labour settings.

Co-op

- Has sourced 100% Fairtrade bananas since 2012, one of the first to market, and has a long-standing commitment to smallholder farms, requiring at least 50% of their banana sourcing to come from smallholder co-operatives.
- Buys from both smallholders and hired labour set-ups for their bananas, therefore supporting both banana farmers and banana workers.
- Within their hired labour banana supply chains, Co-op is working to close the living wage gap in countries where the Fairtrade Minimum Price and Premium cannot do it alone. In 2026, Co-op committed to the Fairtrade Living Wage Reference Price which includes the Banana Bonus, an additional voluntary contribution paid to workers, to close the living wage gap across its whole hired labour banana supply chain. These payments will be backdated to 2024.
- Funded the Banana Productivity Improvement Programme (PIP), which laid the foundation for the current Sustainable Banana Programme. The PIP project worked with over 1,000 banana producers in Small Producer Organisations (SPOs) in Colombia and the Dominican Republic. Over a three-year period, productivity was significantly improved with producers initially achieving around 35-45 boxes per hectare, then producing 80 boxes per hectare – or even 100 boxes per hectare at certain times of the year – thanks to the programme.

Chapter 1:

UNDER THE SKIN OF THE BANANA CRISIS

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF UNFAIR PRICES

> **WE MIGHT HAVE A REALLY LARGE BUNCH, BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN CONDITIONS WHICH AFFECT THE GRADE OF THE [BANANAS]. IF THE BUNCH HASN'T GOT THE RIGHT GRADE FOR TRANSPORT, THEN WE'RE GOING TO LOSE OUT.**
>
> **Ever Antonio Flores Muños,** AGROSIETE, Colombia

Concentrated market power and unfair trading practices

Global food systems are becoming increasingly concentrated. Today, just 1% of the farms in the world control 65% of the world's agricultural land[21]. Most bananas imported to the UK are grown on large plantations,[22] which means that workers in Hired Labour Organisations (HLOs) – as well as smallholder farmers outside of HLOs[23] – have a profound lack of market power. Consequently, farmers and workers are acutely vulnerable to exploitation through unfair trading practices (UTPs – see Box 3). This power imbalance exists in agriculture worldwide. Just four companies account for 70% of global agricultural trade, 50 food manufacturers account for half of all global food sales, and ten supermarket chains control over half of all food retail sales[24]. This extreme power and pricing asymmetry is what creates the conditions for UTPs, which are experienced by farmers and workers.

BOX 3

What are unfair trading practices (UTPs)?

The UK government considers these commercial purchasing practices to be unfair[25] on workers:

- Aggressive pricing that does not consider sustainable production costs
- Short lead times
- Late high-volume orders
- Inaccurate forecasting
- Late or extended payments
- Withdrawing from contracts at the last minute
- Unfair penalties for not meeting orders despite last minute changes
- Accuracy of technical specifications
- Order cancellations

Evidence suggests that UTPs are widespread across global supply chains in the UK. UK retailers routinely over-order to ensure filled shelves, cancelling excess volumes at the last minute or making arbitrary cosmetic rejections, such as the size of bananas not being "right". The Groceries Code Adjudicator Annual Report cites that 18% of suppliers incurred significant costs due to inaccurate forecasting by retailers in 2026[26]. More broadly, 32% reported experiencing at least one issue with large supermarkets, up from 30% in 2025, including 14% experiencing payment delays, and 20% experiencing inadequate processes / procedures to enable prompt resolution of payment discrepancies. At a global scale, an International Labour Organization (ILO) survey of supply chain suppliers found that 40% of them accepted purchase orders where the price offered by lead buyers failed to cover their basic production costs[27].

[21] Lowder, S. K., Skoet, J. & Raney, T. The Number, Size, and Distribution of Farms, Smallholder Farms, and Family Farms Worldwide. World Dev. 87, 16–29 (2016).
[22] Alliot, C., Ly, S., Cortin, M., Segré, H., & Feige-Muller, M. (2017). Distribution of value & power in food value chains.
[23] Hendrik Hänke & Rachel Wadham. (2023, March). Exploring the benefits of the Fairtrade Premium in the context of living wages. Fairtrade Foundation.
[24] Heinrich Böll Stiftung, IPES Food, Association of Ethical Stakeholders, & Friends of the Earth Europe. Agribusiness Atlas: Facts and Figures about the Corporations That Control What We Eat. (2026).
[25] Home Office. Transparency in Supply Chains: A Practical Guide (Accessible). https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transparency-in-supply-chains-a-practical-guide/transparency-in-supply-chains-a-practical-guide-accessible (2025).
[26] Adjudicator, G. C. Groceries Code Adjudicator Annual Report and Accounts 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. Improving Fairness for Suppliers. (2026).
[27] Pinedo, L. & Vaughan-Whitehead, D. Purchasing practices and working conditions in global supply chains: Global Survey results. (2017).

Agricultural supply chains under pressure

The cost of fertilisers, shipping and packaging in global agricultural supply chains has been rising over the last two decades. Between the late 1990s and 2015, the average cost of agricultural inputs across key global export commodities rose by over 70%[28]. More recent geopolitical shocks, including maritime disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and broader geopolitical instability, have triggered additional fertiliser price spikes of up to 60% in 2026, reaching up to 90% in specific regional spot markets[29].

In addition, while international shipping costs grew by 233% between 2001 and 2015[30], global container freight rates experienced extreme short-term volatility, surging by over 400% during the 2021–2022 logistics crisis to peak at more than five times pre-pandemic baselines. This was followed by a further 149% spot-rate spike during the 2024 Red Sea disruptions[31]. Packaging costs have similarly escalated. Cardboard box expenses grew by 150% between 2001 and 2015, while producer price indices for corrugated paper and shipping containers inflated by an additional 65%–80% between 2015 and 2025, pushing packaging outlays to historical highs[32].

This cumulative pressure cascades directly onto plantation workforces, making businesses more likely to cut labour costs, freeze base wages, and rely heavily on short-term or informal piece-rate workers (when employers pay workers a fixed amount for each task they perform, rather than an hourly wage)[33]. Ultimately, the current system leads to undesirable outcomes such as the need to maximise immediate physical yields with synthetic fertilisers, rather than supporting a shift to sustainable farming methods that restore soil and ecosystem resilience[34,35].

> **IF I WANTED TO HAVE BREAKFAST, SOMETIMES IT MEANT I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO HAVE LUNCH OR DINNER. I DON'T WANT MY CHILDREN TO GO THROUGH THE SAME HARDSHIPS I'VE EXPERIENCED.**
>
> **Albeiro "Foncho" Cantillo,** Banana Farmer at COOBAFRIO, Colombia

[28] Robin Willoughby & Tim Gore. Ripe for Change: Ending Human Suffering in Supermarket Supply Chains. (2018) :10.21201/2017.1787
[29] FAO. Agricultural production risks associated with El Niño conditions and shipping disruptions linked to the Middle East conflict. (2026).
[30] Banana Link. Wage and Contractual Conditions Among Banana Worker on Banana Farms and Plantations in the Province of El Oro, Ecuador. (2024, updated January 2026).

THE CASE OF BANANAS

The banana industry provides a stark illustration of how the pressure to keep consumer prices artificially low is depriving farmers and workers of earning a fair income or wage to live well.

Similarly, a 2018 study by Oxfam showed that smallholder Ecuadorian banana farmers were forced to accept unsustainable prices and a reduced share of the final consumer price (from 6% in 1992 down to just 3% by 2015). Table 1 shows how banana prices in the UK have remained roughly the same over the past 40 years (even when adjusting for inflation). This trend is not reflected for farmers and workers, for whom costs have continued to increase, putting pressure on farmers' margins and workers' pockets, with smallholder farmers particularly vulnerable to price squeezes[36].

Workers at banana producer organisations in Costa Rica, for example, cite that the financial stresses put on them by UTPs leave them having to work "miracles" to find enough money for electricity, water, internet, gas, and still have enough left to feed their families. This in turn can end up locking some workers into a cycle of debt, dispelling aspirations of a decent life[37]. Some farmers have sought to push back on this, giving bananas away locally or using them as fertiliser for subsequent crops, rather than accept UTPs in international markets[38].

[31] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Review of Maritime Transport: Freight Rates and Transport Costs. in UNCTAD Maritime Review (Geneva, 2025).
[32] FAO. Banana Market Review 2025. (2026).
[33] European Commission. Joint Research Centre. Unfair Trading Practices in the Dairy Farm Sector: Evidence from Selected EU Regions. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/747043 (2018) doi:10.2760/747043.
[34] Bureau for Appraisal of Social Impacts for Citizen Information. Banana Value Chain in Europe and the Consequences of Unfair Trading Practices. (2015).
[35] Heinrich Böll Foundation, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, & Friends of the Earth Europe. Agrifood Atlas: Facts and Figures about the Corporations That Control What We Eat. (2017).
[36] Coral, C., & Mithöfer, D. (2023). Contemporary narratives about asymmetries in responsibility in global agri-food value chains: The case of the Ecuadorian stakeholders in the banana value chain. Agriculture and Human Values, 40(3), 1019–1038. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-022-10405-3
[37] Tim Zahn. (2026). Paid Up? Living Wage Efforts In Banana Supply Chains Of Dutch and German Supermarkets. Oxfam International (pp.19-22).
[38] Coral, C., & Mithöfer, D. (2023). Contemporary narratives about asymmetries in responsibility in global agri-food value chains: The case of the Ecuadorian stakeholders in the banana value chain. Agriculture and Human Values, 40(3), 1019–1038.



Table 1: Publicly available banana prices across major UK retailers*

Supermarket	Lowest price point	Upper price point	Loose price (per Kg)
Tesco	£0.75 (6-pack small, ~12p/each)	£1.60 (5-pack Organic Fairtrade, 32p/each)	£0.90 / kg
Sainsbury's	£0.78 (5-pack standard, ~16p/each)	£1.90 (6-pack SO Organic Fairtrade, 32p/each)	£0.90 / kg (Fairtrade)
Asda	£0.88 (7-pack small, ~13p/each)	£1.47 (5-pack Organic Fairtrade, ~29p/each)	~£0.90 / kg
Aldi UK	£0.78 (5-pack standard, ~16p/each)	£1.49 (6-pack Organic Fairtrade, ~25p/each)	~£0.90 / kg
Morrisons	£0.78 (5-pack standard, ~16p/each)	£1.90 (6-pack Fyffes Organic Fairtrade, ~32p/each)	£0.90 / kg
Waitrose	£0.95 (5-pack small Fairtrade, ~19p/each)	£1.95 (6-pack Duchy Organic Fairtrade, ~33p/each)	£1.10 / kg (Fairtrade)
Co-op	£1.15 (6-pack small Fairtrade, ~19p/each)	£1.80 (5-pack Organic Fairtrade, 36p/each)	~£1.38 / kg (Fairtrade)
Lidl UK	£0.78 (5-pack standard, ~16p/each)	£1.49 (6-pack Organic Fairtrade, ~24p/each)	£0.90 / kg

*All retailer prices as of 21st October 2026 except Lidl UK which was 30th October 2026

SUPPLIERS CONSISTENTLY HIGHLIGHTED THE IMBALANCE OF POWER... THAT THE COMMERCIAL DECISIONS MADE BY RETAILERS STRONGLY SHAPE CONDITIONS THROUGHOUT THE SUPPLY CHAIN (INCLUDING FOR WORKERS)... ALTHOUGH THEY CAN THEORETICALLY REFUSE LOW PRICES OR UNFAVOURABLE TERMS, THIS IS RARELY FEASIBLE IN PRACTICE GIVEN THE NEED TO SECURE SUFFICIENT BUSINESS.

Ethical Trade Initiative supplier survey[39]

In countries such as Ecuador, UTPs can manifest through lack of adequate law enforcement, particularly in relation to contracts. Workers cite informal elastic pricing from both producer management (normally large scale) and international buyers, respectively inflating and shrinking prices as suits supply and demand dynamics. This undermines workers' pay. For Fairtrade certified producers, the Fairtrade Minimum Price, and to some extent the Fairtrade Premium (see Box 4), can play a crucial role in addressing these volatile costs.

In both Ghana and Colombia, cost of living increases are putting additional pressure on wages for workers, with over 66% reporting that they used cash payments from the Fairtrade Premium towards basic needs such as food or running costs[40]. However, not all farmers and workers are Fairtrade-certified, and Premiums cannot be relied upon to plug the gaps created by systemic failures, not least because Fairtrade certification does not guarantee they can sell all their produce at or above the Fairtrade Minimum Price and receive the corresponding Premium. Ultimately, it is the workers who suffer via job cuts and layoffs, health and safety concerns, and not receiving full pay[41].



THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES WHEN THE RESOURCES JUST WEREN'T ENOUGH FOR US. WHAT WE RECEIVED WAS OFTEN ONLY ENOUGH TO COVER THE BARE MINIMUM WORK ON THE FARM. THAT MADE LIFE REALLY DIFFICULT.

Albeiro "Foncho" Cantillo, Banana Farmer at COOBAFRIO, Colombia

These issues have been a growing cause for concern amongst leading wholesalers, who have stated that the expectation of the banana industry to absorb rising costs (mostly via farmers and workers) is unsustainable, and puts the long-term future of the industry, and those who work in it, at risk[42]. Origin exporters are aware of how UTPs trickle down to the farmers and workers, but are unable to act.

BOX 4

Fairtrade Minimum Price and Fairtrade Premium

The Fairtrade Minimum Price is the minimum price a buyer must pay a producer. It acts as a safety net to ensure producers don't have to sell their product too cheaply. The Fairtrade Premium is an additional sum of money paid to producer communities on top of the Fairtrade minimum price, used to fund projects that improve social, economic and environmental conditions. However, receiving the Fairtrade Minimum Price and Premium depends on producers being able to sell their products on Fairtrade terms. Without demand, there is no income or Premium generated.



[39] Ibid, pg 22
[40] Hendrik Hänke & Rachel Wadham. (2023, March). Exploring the benefits of the Fairtrade Premium in the context of living wages. Fairtrade Foundation.
[41] Ethical Trading Initiative. Banana Supply Chain: How Purchasing Practices Influence Outcomes for Producers, Exporters, and Workers. https://www.ethicaltrade.org/resources/guidance-and-reports/banana-supply-chain-how-purchasing-practices-influence-outcomes (2026).
[42] Banana Industry under 'Significant Pressure' as Costs Soar | News | The Grocer, n.d.; Ethical Trading Initiative, 2026.

HOW CLIMATE CHANGE IS HARMING HARVESTS

In addition to the impacts of UTPs, climate change is compounding risks to banana farmers' and workers' livelihoods and employment stability.

> **[DUE TO EXTREME WEATHER], FARMS HAVE SUFFERED HUGE LOSSES AND A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF BANANA PLANTS WERE DESTROYED. ... MANY FAMILIES ARE LEFT WITHOUT THEIR DAILY LIVELIHOOD.**
>
> **Yon Jairo Hachito,** Banana Worker at Agricola Indira, Colombia

Climate events such as heavy rainfall, extreme heat, flooding, storms and drought are significantly affecting banana production. These severe weather events can cause temporary production crashes across many regions, with some farmers and workers experiencing total loss of production during events such as floods[43].

UTPs exacerbate this effect, as they deplete farms of operating capital, leading to serious cascading risks for farmers and workers, including cash reserve depletion, wage suppression, debt accumulation and degraded labour standards. Together, these environmental and economic pressures on workers undermines the resilience of banana supply chains significantly, and in several ways.



YON JAIRO HACHITO, BANANA WORKER AT AGRICOLA INDIRA, COLOMBIA.

[43] Noleppa, S., Gornott, C., Lüttringhaus, S., Hackenberg, I. & Gleixner, S. Climate change and its effects on banana production in Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador. (2020)

CLIMATE CHANGE AND UTPS: THE UNFAIR CYCLE



1

Deteriorating working conditions and worker health

Export banana production is heavily reliant on manual labour, accounting for nearly 10% to 20% of the national agricultural workforce and up to 7% to 9% of national GDP in key Latin American producing states (e.g. 19.5% workforce / 8.9% GDP in Ecuador, and 10.1% workforce / 6.7% GDP in Colombia). As weather becomes more extreme, workers are subjected to warmer temperatures (projected to reach average maximum temperatures of 33.4°C). This will lead to increased health risks and reduced working hours, which in turn lower productivity.

For the workers themselves, UTPs can end up making these impacts worse. In empirical surveys across Ecuadorian export plantations, 49% of workers reported that their employer provided no Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and 55% felt unsafe handling agrochemicals due to severe toxicity risks[44]. This lack of protection once again stemmed from a lack of adequate funds and an emphasis on rate and scale of production. When suppliers are pressurised by UTPs, they can end up passing this on to workers by eroding worker conditions, for example, by using more short-term contracts and switching away from hourly pay to piece-rate pay, where workers are paid a fixed amount for each task completed[45]. This race to the bottom encourages workers to work longer hours in increasingly extreme conditions brought on by climate change, putting them at risk of dehydration and other heat-related health issues.

KEEPING THE PLANTATION HEALTHY IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FOR ME AND MY FAMILY, BECAUSE IT MEANS KEEPING OUR LIVELIHOOD. IT MEANS SUSTAINABILITY – BOTH ENVIRONMENTALLY, AND ECONOMICALLY.... WORKERS ARE NOW LABOURING UNDER INTENSE HEAT... OUR HEALTH IS BECOMING DETERIORATED.

Yon Jairo Hachito, father of two and Banana Worker at Agricola Indira, Colombia

2

Heat damage to crops

Bananas grow best in a narrow temperature range, usually between 26.7 - 27°C[46]. Severe droughts and increasingly higher temperatures mean that bananas are now increasingly prone to crop evapotranspiration – the combined process of water moving from the land surface to the atmosphere through direct evaporation from soil and water bodies, and transpiration from the plants.

Temperature rises reduce plant productivity, leading to lower crop yields. It is estimated that suitable land area for banana cultivation by 2050 could shrink by 55.1% in Colombia, 37% in Ecuador, 57% in the Dominican Republic, and 84.7% in Costa Rica, with an average decrease of 61% across Latin America and the Caribbean[47]. And shifting the location of banana production comes with added complications, such as overlap with existing production regions of other crops[48]. Farmers and workers therefore need even greater support to help them navigate the financial uncertainties this is likely to bring, but their capacity to do so is often undercut by UTPs and their exacerbating financial impacts.

[44] Banana Link. Wage and Contractual Conditions Among Banana Worker on Banana Farms and Plantations in the Province of El Oro, Ecuador (2024, updated January 2026).
[45] European Commission. Joint Research Centre. (2018). Unfair trading practices in the dairy farm sector: Evidence from selected EU regions. Publications Office. https://doi.org/10.2760/747043
[46] Varma, V. & Bebber, D. P. Climate change impacts on banana yields around the world. Nat. Clim. Change 9, 752–757 (2019).
[47] Steven Prager, Ana R. Rios, Benjamin Schiek, Juliana Almeida, & Carlos E. Gonzalez. (2020). Vulnerability to Climate Change and Economic Impacts in the Agriculture Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean. Inter-American Development Bank. https://doi.org/10.18235/0002580
[48] Anderson, R., Bayer, P. E. & Edwards, D. Climate change and the need for agricultural adaptation. Curr. Opin. Plant Biol. 56, 197–202 (2020).

IF WE DON'T PROTECT OUR NATURAL RESOURCES NOW, FUTURE GENERATIONS WILL BE VERY AFFECTED.

Yuleima Acosta, banana worker and environmental engineering student at AGROSIETE, Colombia

3 Water shortages

Bananas require a lot of water to grow (1,200–2,000 mm of well-distributed annual rainfall)[49] and are highly sensitive to water shortages[50]. As global warming increases, it is expected that droughts will increase in frequency and intensity and precipitation will drop in key banana-growing regions. The atmospheric water demand of bananas is expected to rise by 10%–18% under a 2°C by 2050 warming scenario across Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador[51].

If farmers are unable to access the equipment and build the infrastructure needed to artificially irrigate their crops, banana farmers and workers could be forced to accept the lower yields that come with this. This was seen during the 2014 drought in Magdalena and La Guajira in Colombia, which triggered actual yield drops of up to 30%[52].

4 Weakened crop health

The fact that nearly all of the banana export market uses the Cavendish variety makes banana crops incredibly vulnerable to climate-sensitive pests, diseases and fungal pathogens that flourish under shifting humidity and thermal stress[53].

Black sigatoka (Pseudocercospora fijiensis) – a fungal disease which is highly virulent and lethal – has resulted in a median 44.2% increased risk of infection across Latin America and the Caribbean since the 1960s[54]. Left uncontrolled, the disease can cause up to a 100% loss of marketable fruit[55]. Even with optimal management, yield losses average ~5% annually, while fungicide sprays (applied up to 70 times per year) are estimated to comprise 10–15% of total production costs in some locations[56], increasing the financial burden on farmers.

Emerging threats, such as Fusarium wilt Tropical Race 4 (TR4), present an additional obstacle for farmers and workers to overcome. The pathogen was originally found in Asia in the 1970s, then in Africa in 2013, and most recently in Colombia in 2019. It blocks the vascular system of banana roots, causing plant wilting and death. It can be transferred by infected plant material or soil, as well as typhoons and other storm types, which are likely to increase in magnitude under climate change and stronger El Niños. Studies indicate that TR4 is already having a significant impact on banana supply chains[57].

All of this comes amid a backdrop of consumer unawareness. Consumer research conducted for the Fairtrade Foundation shows that most of the British public are unaware of the issues affecting the future of bananas, including the threat of diseases[58].

THE IMPACT THE CLIMATE HAS IS [LOWER GRADE FRUIT] THAT WE CAN'T EXPORT, AND WE GET LEFT BEHIND... WE CAN'T EXPORT ANY MORE BANANAS.

Silvana Morales, banana worker, COOBANA, Panama

[49] Noleppa, S., Gornott, C., Lüttringhaus, S., Hackenberg, I. & Gleixner, S. Climate change and its effects on banana production in Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador. (2020)
[50] Carr, M. K. V. The water relations and irrigation requirements of banana (Musa spp.) Exp. Agric. 45, 333–371 (2009).
[51] Noleppa, S., Gornott, C., Lüttringhaus, S., Hackenberg, I. & Gleixner, S. Climate change and its effects on banana production in Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador. (2020)
[52] Noleppa, S., Gornott, C., Lüttringhaus, S., Hackenberg, I. & Gleixner, S. Climate change and its effects on banana production in Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador. (2020)
[53] Varma, V., Mosedale, J. R., Alvarez, J. A. G. & Bebber, D. P. Socio-economic factors constrain climate change adaptation in a tropical export crop. Nat. Food 6, 343–352 (2025).
[54] Bebber, D. P. Climate change effects on Black Sigatoka disease of banana. Philos. Trans. R. Soc. B Biol. Sci. 374, 20180269 (2019).
[55] Guzmán Quesada, M.; García, R.P. (2020): Black Sigatoka (Mycosphaerella Fijiensis): the fungus that destroys banana plantations. San José: Crop Life Latin America.
[56] Noar, R. D., Thomas, E., & Daub, M. E. (2022). Genetic Characteristics and Metabolic Interactions between Pseudocercospora fijiensis and Banana: Progress toward Controlling Black Sigatoka. Plants, 11(7), 948. https://doi.org/10.3390/plants11070948
[57] FAO. Banana Market Review - Preliminary Results 2025. (2026).
[58] Kantar research for the Fairtrade Foundation, Total sample 1231 (GB 16+), Fieldwork dates 18-20 August 2026

THE IMPACT OF EL NIÑO ON BANANA FARMERS AND WORKERS

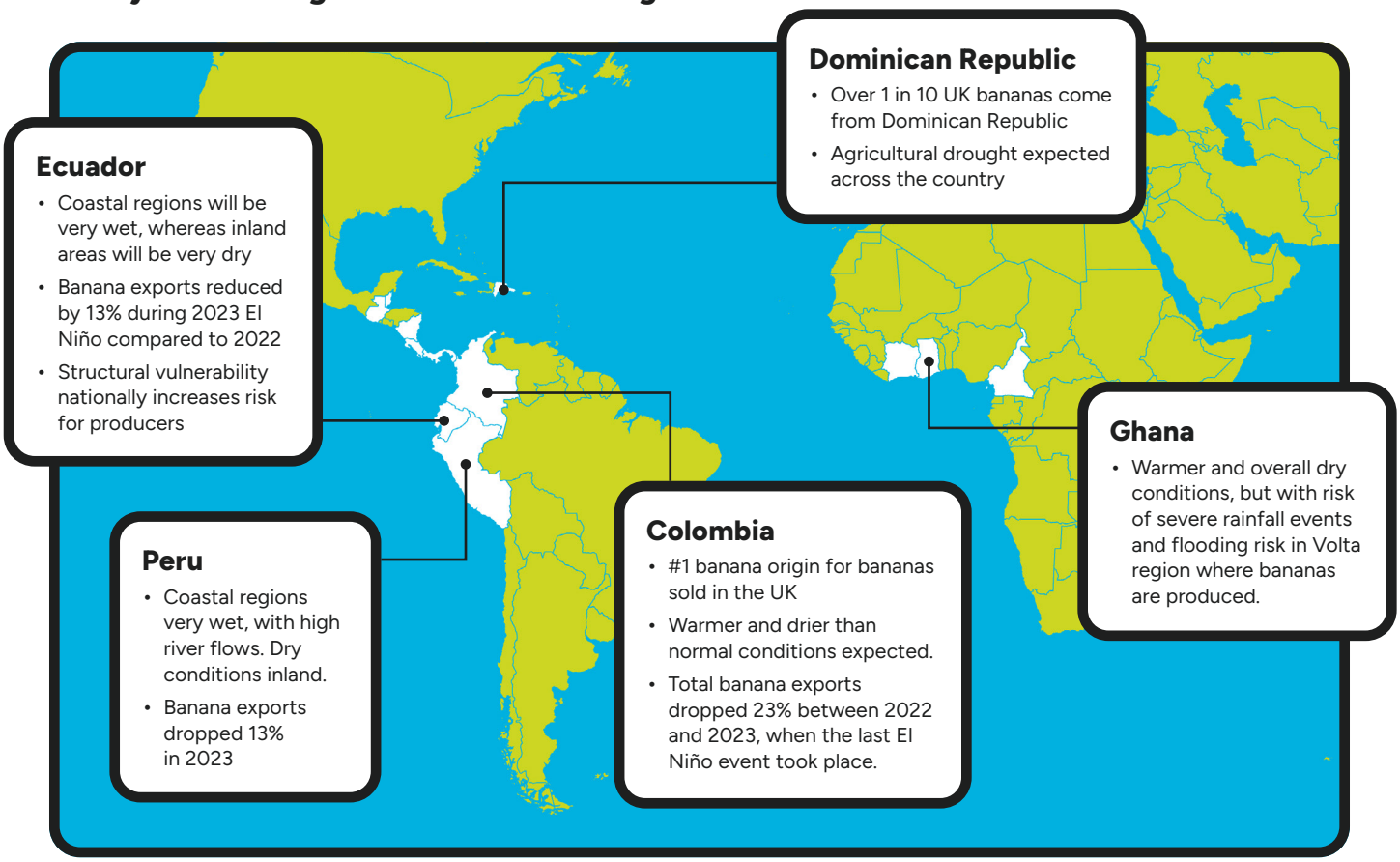
Against a backdrop of record-high global temperatures, banana farmers and workers now face the 2026–2027 El Niño cycle[59]. El Niño is a naturally occurring and recurring climate pattern that occurs in the tropical Pacific Ocean as part of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation cycle. During an El Niño event, the trade winds in the Pacific weaken, which leads warm ocean surface waters to shift towards South America.

El Niño traditionally brings warmer and drier weather to some key banana production regions in Latin America and Western Africa, whereas other farmers and workers will experience extremely wet conditions – particularly those on the coast of Latin America, such as in Ecuador and Peru.

These warmer conditions are in addition to the already-increasing temperatures related to climate change, with some climate scientists suggesting that increasing global temperatures could be strengthening El Niño events[60].

Analysis conducted by the Fairtrade Foundation estimates that, in the previous El Niño cycle (2023–2024), average banana productivity across Fairtrade-certified farmers and workers dropped by 13% in Dominican Republic, 22% in Ecuador, and 6% in Peru, compared to the year before. These impacts have occurred historically as well: for example, the 1983 El Niño event affected 15% of total planted banana area in Ecuador, with a reduction in exports of 36%[61].

Figure 3: Past and forecasted impacts of El Niño on key banana origins for the United Kingdom[62]



[59] World Meteorological Organization. WMO confirms 2025 was one of the warmest years on record. (2026).
[60] Cole, J. E., Thompson, D. M., Dyez, K. A., Tripp, C. J., Tudhope, A. W., Lofverstrom, M., Stevenson, S., Okun, J. M., Lawman, A. E., Conroy, J. L., Overpeck, J. T., Jimenez, G., & Edwards, R. L. (2026). Recent strengthening of eastern Pacific ENSO in the last millennium paleorecord. Science, 394(6820), 192–196. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.ady2660
[61] Pulso banano, 2026. "History of Climate impacts on banana plantations in Latin America, 1980-2025" Presentación de PowerPoint

[62] Fairtrade International (2025). Global Monitoring Data, 2014–2024. Fairtrade International; Ghana Meteorological Agency (2026). Northern Ghana Seasonal Forecast: August–September–October 2026. August 2026; Joint Research Centre (JRC) (2026). From forecast to risk: an anticipatory analysis of the 2026–27 El Niño. Publications Office of the European Union; Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) (2026). International trade data: bananas. Observatory of Economic Complexity; United Nations Statistics Division (2023). UN Comtrade Database. United Nations.

The El Niño event of 2026–2027 began in June 2026 and has a high likelihood of becoming the strongest El Niño on record[63]. The impacts of this El Niño cycle are expected to hit banana production hard in key producing countries[64]. All regions where bananas are produced are expected to see warmer temperatures, but the most challenging impacts for banana farmers and workers are expected to be from changes in precipitation patterns. For example, in Colombia, banana farmers and workers in the Urabá and Santa Marta regions will experience warmer and drier conditions. Cropland drought is forecasted as a medium to high probability by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in many areas of the country[65], and the European Commission identified Colombia as an agricultural anomaly hotspot in August 2026 due to lower-than-average rainfall over the previous three months, and the effects of the Colombian earthquake on 10 August 2026.

In Ecuador and Peru, coastal regions where bananas are produced are forecasted to be significantly more wet than usual, with warmer than usual temperatures. There is a risk of floods and impacts on production that could be similar to those experienced in the 1983 El Niño. Inland, where there is a smaller number of banana producer organisations, there will be drier than average conditions. In the Dominican Republic, an agricultural drought is expected across the country, with drier and warmer than usual conditions forecasted.



SILVANA MORALES, BANANA WORKER AT COOBANA, PANAMA

> **THERE WAS SO MUCH RAIN THAT PART OF THE CROP WAS AFFECTED. OUR EXPORTS DROPPED A LOT BECAUSE WHEN BANANA PLANTS SPEND TOO MANY DAYS IN WATER THEY START TO DETERIORATE, AND THEN THEY CAN NO LONGER BE HARVESTED. THAT REDUCED BOTH THE NUMBER OF EXPORTS, AND OUR SALARIES.**
>
> **Enadis López,** banana worker, AGRÍCOLA IBIZA, Colombia

El Niño weather patterns are also projected to increase the prevalence of human diseases (such as dengue, malaria, rift valley fever and cholera) across many banana producing countries[66]. The resulting increased mortality rate will be in addition to the increased number of excess heat-related deaths that are expected in several key banana exporting countries that supply the UK[67].

These acute impacts will once again be exacerbated by UTPs and their ability to undercut overall farmers' and workers' resilience through capital depletion, wage suppression and the degradation of labour standards. The same impacts from lack of capital to invest in mitigation measures of climate change is likely to manifest in the case of El Niño adaptation, with farmers and workers suffering the hardest.

[63] State of the climate: Rapidly developing El Niño raises chance of record-warm 2026 - Carbon Brief
[64] European Commission. Joint Research Centre, Arcadia SIT, Engineering Ingegneria Informatica S.p.A., European Dynamics Belgium S.A., Fincons SpA, Acosta Navarro, J. C., Toreti, A., Bavera, D., Barantiev, D., Carioli, A., Ceglar, A., Collivignarelli, F., Corbane, C., De Groeve, T., De Jager, A., Dentener, F., Deuster, C., Galmarini, S., Kemper, T., ... Talò, T. (2026). From forecast to risk. Publications Office of the European Union. https://doi.org/10.2760/8279279
[65] Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2026. Global hotspots of agricultural drought probability during El Niño. Interactive dataset. FAO Hand-in-Hand
[66] Acaps. Global el niño overview: Countries to Watch. https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/archives/detail/global-el-nino-overview-countries-to-watch (2026).
[67] Michael Greenstone, Tamma Carleton, Genevieve Maricle, & Emily Grover-Kopec. 451,000 at Risk: Where Action Can Save Lives During the Super El Niño. (2026).

Chapter 2:

THE HUMBLE BANANA NEEDS RADICAL SOLUTIONS

CLIMATE RESILIENCE IS KEY

Clearly, mitigation measures are needed to compensate for the growing compounded threats to banana supply chains and the farmers and workers within it who are most vulnerable. To mitigate the yield disruption caused by climate-related extreme weather, and to maintain their operational capacity, there are several investment opportunities for farms and plantations[68,69,70]:

- The introduction of biological inputs to improve productivity, soil health and resistance to disease.
- Field drainage networks, retention basins, and dikes for flooding.
- Drip irrigation, fertigation, and micro-sprinklers for drought.
- Solar-powered pumping infrastructure and farm reservoirs for dry spells.
- Foliar anti-transpirant sprays to apply during dry spells to reduce leaf water loss.
- Deep replacement suckers to access subsoil moisture reserves.
- Mulching to prevent excess soil moisture loss.
- Cover cropping and agroforestry.
- Rope reinforcements and the planting of wind-break borders to protect against storm gusts.
- New and integrated ways to manage emerging pests and diseases.
- Genetic diversity and drought and disease resistant banana varieties to diversify away from vulnerable Cavendish monocultures.



JOSHUA TETTEY, BANANA WORKER AT GOLDEN EXOTICS LIMITED, GHANA

However, buyer prices are failing to cover the basic costs of production for most banana growers, let alone any of these climate mitigation measures. Supporting the above interventions requires technology, infrastructure and a wide range of inputs, which many farmers and workers cannot afford. Inflation in operational costs and weather volatility are leaving banana farmers with minimal or negative profit margins. With no capital or contractual stability, most farmers and workers are unable to invest effectively in long-term climate resilience[71].

If farmers cannot afford to invest in sustainable agriculture, everyone ultimately loses: environmental risks remain unaddressed, and responsibly sourced bananas are less viable to produce, leading to a negative impact on price.

[68] Abdoussalami, A., Hu, Z., Islam, A. R. Md. T. & Wu, Z. Climate change and its impacts on banana production: a systematic analysis. Environ. Dev. Sustain. 25, 12217–12246 (2023).
[69] Varma, V., Mosedale, J. R., Alvarez, J. A. G. & Bebber, D. P. Socio-economic factors constrain climate change adaptation in a tropical export crop. Nat. Food 6, 343–352 (2025).
[70] Ecuador's Banana Sector under Climate Change. (2016)
[71] Ethical Trading Initiative. Banana Supply Chain: How Purchasing Practices Influence Outcomes for Producers, Exporters, and Workers. https://www.ethicaltrade.org/resources/guidance-and-reports/banana-supply-chain-how-purchasing-practices-influence-outcomes (2026).

BOX 5

How Fairtrade supports banana farmers and workers to build climate resilience on their farms

Fairtrade holistically supports banana farmers and workers to build climate resilience through the Fairtrade Minimum Price, which acts as a safety net when the market drops, providing the additional funds necessary for farmers to focus on their own climate resilience investments through the Fairtrade Premium. More generally, Fairtrade standards are rooted in the ethos of preserving and enhancing our environment. And Fairtrade Premium alongside targeted programmes aim to improve productivity and protect farmer incomes, build soil health and biodiversity, and increase the resilience of banana farms.

These programmes, including the Productivity Improvement Programme (PIP) between 2019 and 2024, and the Sustainable Banana Programme, promote sustainable practices on banana farms. These practices, such as the development of biological input facilities and training on effective use of biological inputs, increase soil health and fertility, which support productivity and disease resistance on banana farms. Since inception, PIP saw demonstrable success. After four years, we saw examples of producers who went from producing 40 boxes per week to producing over 75 boxes per week, representing an increase of more than 85%, with PIP farms generating a gross income 15% higher than non-PIP farms, resulting in increases in smallholder farmer incomes when combined with reduced production costs from utilising organic methods. Farmers and workers participating in the PIP programme in Colombia demonstrated 19% higher average yield compared with non-PIP farmers and workers. Improvements in soil health alongside training in efficient water use also helped to reduce water used for irrigation by 15%, compared to farms not participating in the PIP programme.

The Sustainable Banana Programme (SBP) is building on the results obtained by PIP to strengthen the sustainability and resilience of banana farmers and workers in Latin America and the Caribbean, contributing to the development of a more responsible, inclusive and resilient supply chain capable of addressing the social, environmental and economic challenges facing the banana sector. The SBP does this by supporting farmers and workers across more farms to adopt sustainable practices and promote biodiversity, develop bio-input facilities, improve disease biosecurity and prevention, and implement climate adaptation plans. Between January 2025 and July 2026, there has been an average productivity increase of 4.9% on SBP plots across both smallholder and hired labour farms when compared with the traditionally managed plots. This translates to 1,920.12 boxes per hectare compared to an average yield of 1,830.29 boxes per hectare.



ON AVERAGE, WORKERS IN THE COLOMBIAN PLANTATIONS IN THIS STUDY RECEIVED ADDITIONAL BENEFITS THAT ARE EQUAL TO $88.60 PER WORKER PER MONTH THROUGH FAIRTRADE PREMIUM... THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE BENEFITS IS CLEAR WHEN COMPARED TO THE LIVING WAGE BENCHMARK OF $433 FOR THIS REGION[72].

SINCE THE PROGRAMMES STARTED, WE'VE GOT LARGER BANANA PLANTS WITH MORE VIGOUR, WHICH ALLOWS US TO SUSTAIN OUR LIVELIHOODS... WE HAVE BETTER PRODUCTION COMPARED TO OTHER FARMS.

Ever Antonio, banana worker, AGROSIETE, Colombia

[72] Hendrik Hänke & Rachel Wadham. (2023, March). Exploring the benefits of the Fairtrade Premium in the context of living wages. Fairtrade Foundation.

WHY CURRENT RESPONSES AREN'T WORKING

Unfair to responsible retailers

There are already a number of major UK retailers leading the way in building sustainability into their global supply chains, including Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Co-op (Box 1). These organisations have committed to participating in voluntary sourcing pledges including the IDH UK Retailer Living Wage Commitment, seeking to close the living wage gap for banana workers across their supply chains by the end of 2027[73]. They do this through the use of the IDH Salary matrix and Fairtrade's reference price wage data tool[74], adjusting their purchasing practices by making additional voluntary contributions direct to workers earning below a living wage.

Fairtrade is committed to changing the underlying wage structure and bargaining power of banana workers – for example, by supporting workers in building capacities to strengthen social dialogue, improve work conditions and increase salaries through collective bargaining. Another route to do this is through the Fairtrade Premium, which is democratically governed to ensure it leads to better outcomes for both farmers and workers.



EVER ANTONIO FLORES MUÑOS, BANANA WORKER AT AGROSIETE, COLOMBIA

However, UTPs are pervasive in the banana sector, making it hard for retailers aspiring for progress in sustainability to also remain competitive in the UK market. Meaningful commitments by responsible retailers are not a substitute for mandatory responsible business models across the industry.

Insufficient regulation

Guidance and voluntary action have so far proven insufficient: environmental degradation and human rights abuses remain widespread in global supply chains. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights[75] (UNGPs) and OECD Guidelines[76] provide a global consensus on corporate responsibilities, but binding laws are needed to ensure all companies meet these norms.

In the UK, serious labour exploitation and environmental harm costs around £4.4bn a year. Measures to prevent that harm are estimated to cost around £0.42bn a year – roughly a tenth as much.

The policy measures relating to all purchasing practices in supply chains in the UK are not considered effective for overseas agricultural supply chains. The Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) enforces the Groceries Supply Code of Practice (GSCOP)[77] to prevent major UK supermarkets (£1bn+ turnover) from abusing supply agreements with designated direct suppliers. The problem is that it can only act on breaches between retailers and their direct suppliers, i.e. Tier 1 contract holders, meaning that smallholder farmers and workers overseas are often left out of scope as they are classified as Tier 2 or 3.

[73] DH. UK Retailer Commitment on Living Wages in Banana Supply Chains (2023)
[74] Fairtrade International. "Fairtrade launches new reference price tool." Fairtrade International. September 5, 2024. https://www.fairtrade.net/en/get-involved/news/fairtrade-launches-new-reference-price-tool.html
[75] United Nations (Ed.). (2011). Guiding principles on business and human rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
[76] OECD. (2023). OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct. OECD. https://doi.org/10.1787/81f92357-en
[77] Groceries Code Adjudicator. Statutory Guidance on How the Groceries Code Adjudicator Will Carry Out Investigations and Enforcement Powers. (2023).

Another example is the Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator (ASCA), which was established under the Agriculture Act 2020 to enforce fair dealing regulations (such as written contracts and transparent pricing). However, its provision to hear complaints is strictly focused on UK domestic farming sectors or overseas suppliers that sell directly to UK buyers. This does not cover commodities like bananas. NGOs, trade justice groups, and supply chain advocates have frequently urged government officials to apply fair-contracting principles universally, including in international supply chains[78,79,80,81]. But there is no active government timeline to legally include overseas banana growers under DEFRA statutory codes.

In the meantime, the UK government relies on official statutory guidance that explains how commercial organisations must comply with Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015[82] to encourage businesses to behave responsibly. This guidance was updated in March 2025 to raise reporting standards and incorporate a decade of lessons learned, but this has not gone far enough to tackle UTPs in the banana sector and beyond. The UK government has been reviewing its approach to Responsible Business Conduct since its 2025 UK Trade Strategy. It has been over a year since it set out to do so, and Fairtrade is one of many stakeholders pushing for the introduction of a well-designed Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD) law, similar to what is being implemented across Europe and several countries in Asia-Pacific and the Americas.

67%

of British adults support the UK Government introducing legislation to make HREDD mandatory for UK businesses[83].

Such a law would establish consistent rules for responsible business conduct. It can strengthen rightsholder influence on business practices, build wellbeing among farmers and workers, help address environmental degradation and climate change, and enhance consumer trust. It can also benefit Fairtrade-certified organisations, who already meet key due diligence requirements and may therefore gain competitive advantages.



JULMER CONSTANT
BANANA WORKER AT TOPFRUIT, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

BANANA LINK

Banana Link works closely with trade unions in African and Latin American banana-producing countries. Their experience tells us that unfair trading practices – particularly unsustainably low prices – have had a direct impact on working conditions on banana plantations. Beyond wage suppression, they include a shift to more precarious contractual conditions and payment through piece rate systems with increasingly demanding production quotas, driving excessive working hours and intensity. Long hours of intense physical work in tropical conditions has serious occupational health implications, but workers hired on temporary contracts or through third party agencies often face barriers in accessing healthcare. The most vulnerable workers – such as women and migrants – are often more acutely affected.

[78] DH. UK Retailer Commitment on Living Wages in Banana Supply Chains (2023)
[79] Fairtrade International. "Fairtrade launches new reference price tool." Fairtrade International. September 5, 2024. https://www.fairtrade.net/en/get-involved/news/fairtrade-launches-new-reference-price-tool.html
[80] United Nations (Ed.). (2011). Guiding principles on business and human rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
[81] OECD. (2023). OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct. OECD. https://doi.org/10.1787/81f92357-en
[82] Groceries Code Adjudicator. Statutory Guidance on How the Groceries Code Adjudicator Will Carry Out Investigations and Enforcement Powers. (2023).
[83] Groceries Code Adjudicator. Statutory Guidance on How the Groceries Code Adjudicator Will Carry Out Investigations and Enforcement Powers. (2023).

Chapter 3:

HOW TO BUILD A FAIRER FUTURE FOR EVERYONE

Fairtrade's recommendations

As detailed earlier in this report, the issues in the banana sector are structural, and require a system-wide approach with the government, businesses and consumers all playing a part.

Building climate resilience in the banana industry requires sustained capital expenditure and long-term planning. But the commercial environment created by dominant retail buyers actively undermines this capacity at smallholders and plantations.

Fairtrade strongly believes that – if everyone paid prices that covered the true costs of production (see Box 6) – farmers and workers would be able to build climate resilience more effectively in the banana sector and beyond.

> **"IT IS ABOUT RECOGNISING THAT THE SUSTAINABILITY ASPIRATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETS COME AT A COST, AND THAT CONCENTRATING THAT COST AT THE FIRST LINK IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN DOES NOT MAKE ECONOMIC SENSE."**
>
> **Emerson Aguirre Medina,** executive president of Colombian banana association Augura

Our recommendations for the government: fairer policies

1. Legislate to make human rights and environmental due diligence (HREDD) mandatory. Asking retailers to refrain from using abusive practices does not result in an end to these practices from all retailers, which is why legislation is required. As the government reviews the policy options for promoting Responsible Business Conduct in the UK, it must conclude that the single most effective way to level the playing field for businesses and drive sustainability in global supply chains is to make it obligatory for all businesses to conduct comprehensive due diligence. This means identifying risks of human rights abuses and environmental harms before they happen, and taking effective steps to prevent them from occurring via investment, meaningful stakeholder engagement and sharing the responsibility for compliance proportionately across the supply chain.
2. Embed purchasing practices directly into the legal definition of supply chain risk in HREDD law. Requiring large UK corporations to audit their own purchasing behaviours as part of their statutory due diligence could help improve worker livelihoods. For example, if a retailer's purchasing price falls below the verified local cost of living wage compliance, the retailer would face statutory fines or civil liability for creating the conditions that drove the breach. It is estimated that compliance costs for businesses and the funding required for an independent regulator to enforce these standards would cost around £400 million[84].

We know these recommendations are feasible because similar initiatives are being adopted by the European Commission. In 2019, it introduced the UTP directive to cover agricultural and food supply chains[85]. In 2024, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) was adopted, requiring companies in scope to address the impact of their purchasing practices as part of their HREDD process. All suppliers that are selling to the EU and are smaller than their buyer are protected by it. The UTP doesn't manage risk, but simply bans a set number of practices, making it easier to implement. The intention is to target the consequences of harmful practices by defining a list of black and grey UTPs.

[84] Fabian Society Report: Just values: Promoting human rights through Britain's value chains at home and abroad, October 2026

[85] Directive (EU) 2019/633 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain. Official Journal of the European Union, L 111, 25 April, pp. 59–72. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019L0633

Our recommendations for retailers: fairer business practices

We know that stronger regulation on UTPs is needed, but businesses can also play an important role in building banana farmers' and workers' climate resilience – and building resilience in banana supply chains – by:

- Committing to sustainable banana pricing by using a transparent methodology to **ensure prices cover the full costs of sustainable production** and enable progress towards the payment of living wages and living incomes.
- Ensuring smallholder banana farms remain a meaningful part of banana sourcing portfolios alongside hired labour through clear volume commitments, fair prices and long-term contracts that **enable smallholder banana farmers to earn a living income and invest in climate resilience.**
- Committing to supporting decent work outcomes, including the achievement of living wages, through both short-term solutions and by endorsing national level processes and dialogue.
- **Proactively meeting future HREDD legislation** by offering fair contracts and stable sourcing commitments to provide greater financial security and investment opportunities for farmers and workers.
- **Committing to supporting farmers and workers to adapt to climate change** and invest in practices that build farm-level disease resistance.

Our recommendations for consumers: support and buy Fairtrade

Small actions by consumers can have a huge impact on the lives of banana workers and farmers. In particular, consumers can support a transition away from UTPs by:

- Call on the UK government to introduce a HREDD law and ensure the people growing the UK's bananas can plan for their futures and are protected from the impacts of climate change.
- Buy Fairtrade bananas and help ensure the people behind our bananas receive a fair price for what they produce.



BOX 6

Is this likely to raise costs for consumers?

Although the costs of specific policy recommendations are not within the scope of this report, we can still consider the existing evidence of whether a general increase in farmer and worker living standards would result in passing the costs on to consumers. Looking at the trends in retailer vs farmer wages over time, we can see that the key lies in redistributing supermarket profit.

Between 2001 and 2015, the amount supermarkets retained from every kilogram of bananas sold increased by 38%, from $0.34 to $0.47 per kg. Closing the living wage gap in 2015 would have required just $0.02 per kg; even if supermarkets had absorbed this cost, they would still have retained 32% more per kilogram than in 2001. By contrast, in Ecuador, smallholder banana farmers' share of the final consumer price over a similar period halved from 6% in 1992 to just 3% of the value in 2015[86,87].

Even if retailers were to raise costs slightly, there is evidence that this would have the support of consumers. Research by Kantar on behalf of the Fairtrade Foundation found that over two-thirds (67%) of British adults said they would be willing to pay a few pence more for bananas if the additional amount helped farmers protect future supplies from climate change and disease[88].

The public support is there – action needs to follow.

[86] Robin Willoughby & Tim Gore. Ripe for Change: Ending Human Suffering in Supermarket Supply Chains. (2018) pp. 76 doi:10.21201/2017.1787
[87] Ethical Trading Initiative. Banana Supply Chain: How Purchasing Practices Influence Outcomes for Producers, Exporters, and Workers. https://www.ethicaltrade.org/resources/guidance-and-reports/banana-supply-chain-how-purchasing-practices-influence-outcomes (2026).
[88] Kantar research for the Fairtrade Foundation, Total sample 1231 (GB 16+), Fieldwork dates 18-20 August 2026.

CONCLUSION

The people who grow our bananas should not be left to face climate change alone

Without greater support for farmers and workers in UK supply chains, multiple interacting risks threaten to undermine the stable production of bananas. The historical approach of market players absorbing costs to promote bananas as loss-leaders, and passing this on through UTPs to banana farmers and workers, presents **an existential risk to the industry.**

Farmers and workers cannot be expected to continue shouldering this burden, and with climate shocks today being a fundamental part of how our food system works, the issue is only going to get worse. That's why we are asking both the government and business to make the necessary changes to support banana producers to become more climate resilient and secure the sustainability of the banana industry. If the UK Government makes HREDD mandatory in supply chains, and regulates purchasing practices, it could create the conditions for all businesses to cover the full cost of sustainable production – including prices that support fair pay and investments in climate resilience at farm level.

Businesses, too, can offer fair payments that will enable farms to invest in climate resilience, protect future yields and remain economically viable. Without this, increasing climate and commercial pressures will be passed on to workers and farmers through lower wages and incomes, insecure employment and poorer working conditions. Fair prices, climate resilience and decent work go hand in hand.

LET'S DO IT FAIR.



YULEIMA ACOSTA TANO, BANANA WORKER AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING STUDENT AT AGROSIETE, COLOMBIA

> **"EVERY SINGLE FAIRTRADE BANANA YOU BUY DOES NOT ONLY SUPPORT A BANANA FARMER, IT SUPPORTS AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY WHOSE LIVES DEPEND ON BANANAS."**
>
> **Albeiro "Foncho" Cantillo,** Banana Farmer at COOBAFRIO, Colombia

ANNEX: METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This report synthesizes evidence gathered through a targeted, rapid literature review conducted in October 2026. Given the project's operational timelines, a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) approach was adopted to balance analytical rigor with timely delivery. The review incorporated both peer-reviewed academic literature and relevant grey literature. Searches were designed around core thematic questions addressing the consequences of climate change, El Niño and unfair trading practices in UK banana supply chains, and how they interact. No new primary research was conducted in the production of this report.

To ensure analytical objectivity, factual accuracy, and balanced interpretation, the report underwent a two-tier review:

1. Internal Review: An internal peer review from 3Keel Group Ltd. evaluated structural coherence, evidence alignment, and technical accuracy.
2. External Review: Independent subject-matter experts from the Fairtrade Foundation reviewed the draft to evaluate the completeness of findings, validate interpretations, and identify potential evidence gaps.

Limitations to the methodology and outputs include:

1. Time-Constrained Scope: Due to the rapid nature of the review, the search was targeted rather than exhaustive; some relevant studies (e.g., niche regional reports or non-indexed publications) may not have been captured.
2. Publication and Language Bias: The assessment prioritized English-language material and accessible open-source reporting, which may underrepresent perspectives from non-indexed or non-English contexts.
3. Secondary Synthesis: Findings reflect the methodological strengths and constraints of the underlying secondary sources without independent primary data verification.



ENADIS LÓPEZ,
BANANA WORKER AT AGRÍCOLA IBIZA,
COLOMBIA, ALONGSIDE HER HUSBAND

FAIRTRADE

DO IT FAIR

Fairtrade Foundation, 5.7 The Loom, 14 Gower's Walk,
London E1 8PY
Tel +44 (0)20 7405 5942
Email: mail@fairtrade.org.uk

Registered charity **no. 1043886**
A company limited by guarantee,
registered in England and Wales

Photography by: **Zamira Ramírez Angulo, Nicolás Becerra, Sergio Calderón, Daniel Pražák / Fairtrade Česko a Slovensko, Denny Peralta.**

This report was researched, written and edited by Fairtrade Foundation, 3Keel and Nice & Serious.

Illustrations by: **Ayomitide (Tide) Adesanya**

Cover image: **Nicolás Becerra**

For more information please contact:
media@fairtrade.org.uk

Design and copyediting: **Nice and Serious**