



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**

**BUILDING RESPONSIBLE
GLOBAL VALUE CHAINS
FOR SUSTAINABLE
TROPICAL FRUITS**

Technical webinar series on avocado and pineapple value chains

Webinar #17: Occupational health and safety in tropical fruit value chains

Summary report

Friday, 25 January 2024, 16.30-18.00 Rome (UTC+2), on Zoom

Background

This webinar is part of a series of technical webinars organized by FAO's [Responsible Fruits Project](#) in response to the priorities and interests of participants from the private sector. The webinars provide an opportunity for peer learning on precompetitive issues and the identification and sharing of good practices. To facilitate open discussion, there is no webinar recording and the event's report follows the Chatham House Rule of not identifying individual speakers, except for the speakers identified in the agenda who have consented to share information in advance.

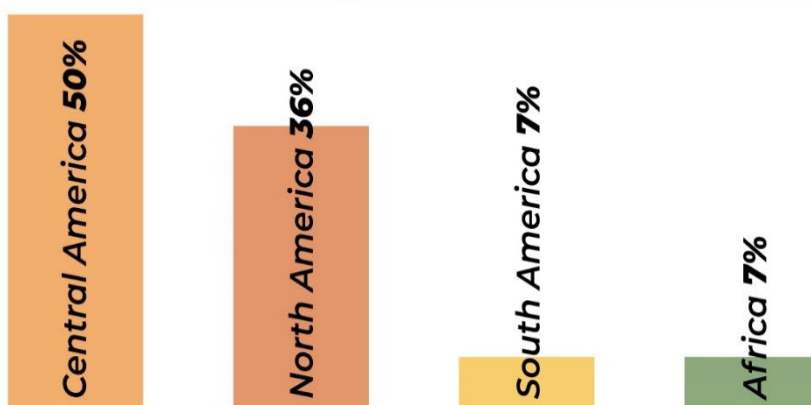
Participation

Fourteen participants based in the Americas and Africa, joined the webinar, representing producers and their organizations, packers, processors, exporters/importers, and distributors.

Gender



Geographic origins



Industry groupings

Producer associations 29%

Production and midstream* 7%

Midstream* and importers 21%

Vertically integrated 14%

Other 29%

**Companies active in the "middle" part of the value chain, including packers, processors, exporters, and transporters.*

Organizing this event online avoided the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that would normally be associated with travel for a face-to-face event. A preliminary estimate using the [ICAO Carbon Emissions Calculator](#) indicates that this event saved over 15 734-kg of CO₂ emissions.

Session objectives

The purpose of the webinar was to:

1. promote peer learning, sharing of good practices and encourage discussion about how companies and associations can strengthen occupational health and safety (OHS) in production, packaging, processing, and other segments of their value chains;
2. discuss how OHS can contribute to other objectives including productivity, access to markets and social sustainability in general; and
3. discuss how OHS protocols can be designed and how they can be applied in practice at various stages of tropical fruit value chains.

Summary

The webinar was opened by the FAO Responsible Fruits Project team. The event agenda is in the Annex and the presentation slides are available by sending a request to Responsible-Fruits@fao.org.

Participants were welcomed to the peer learning webinar on occupational health and safety (OHS), which is a fundamental component of guidelines and regulations on responsible business conduct. Work in avocado and pineapple value chains can be hazardous; developing and implementing plans to strengthen OHS helps to foster decent working conditions and the overall wellbeing of workers and their communities. Improved working conditions in turn help to enhance labor productivity, retain qualified workers (reducing turnover), reduce absenteeism at work and improve relationships with the workforce. It also supports companies in maintaining access to markets with high sustainability requirements and strengthening consumer confidence in brands and companies based on clear respect for labour rights.

It was highlighted during the webinar that:

- **Collaboration** is key in implementing OHS, especially tripartite collaboration between companies, workers, and governments.

- It is essential to include **gender perspectives** in OHS and to foster women’s participation in its different components by considering that, within the broad category of women, individual women and groups (such as those during pregnancy, lactation and menopause) face hazards and risks differently.
 - **Practical trainings and workshops** on OHS practices, including field implementation, and strong participation of different stakeholders, are key for the adoption of successful practices.
 - Successful OHS programs have virtuous results, including **increased productivity, lower costs related to fewer accidents**, and **better quality of life** for workers.
- **Part 1. Introduction to the topic of occupational health and safety and the experiences of the World Banana Forum in implementing OHS with banana industry stakeholders.**

Victor Prada, Secretary, and Camila Reinhardt Hurtado, Decent Work and Sustainable Global Value Chains Specialist, World Banana Forum Secretariat

The speakers introduced FAO’s efforts on OHS through the work of the World Banana Forum (WBF). The WBF has ten years of experience in working with OHS processes in the banana sector. The Banana Occupational Health and Safety Initiative (BOHESI) was launched in Ecuador in 2014. BOHESI has been working with major banana producers and exporters there, including more than 200 000 workers, which underlines the extent to which implementing OHS measures can have an impact.

The objectives of BOHESI are:

- improving OHS prevention, management and control mechanisms;
- enabling effective collaboration on OHS between companies, workers and government, through joint capacity development programs, and the establishment and strengthening of workplace and national tripartite OHS committees among industry actors, civil society organizations and relevant public entities;
- strengthening tripartite dialogue processes for OHS;
- supporting national and industry level progress on OHS through effective collaboration between government and private sector, agencies and institutions; and
- developing industry expertise on OHS and prevention and control, including psycho-social risks, gender issues and participatory education methods.

Varied materials have been produced under BOHESI since 2014, including the “[Manual for Occupational Health and Safety in the Banana industry](#)” in Ecuador, which is due to undergo an update following a multi-stakeholder consultation process held in the country in 2023. This manual has also been adapted to the Ghanaian context and used there since 2018.

The speakers explained that the COVID-19 pandemic generated changes in the implementation of OHS. They also highlighted the growing need and interest to ensure a gender perspective in OHS and the urgent need to address women’s health and safety issues. In Ghana, BOHESI progressed with the support of workers and the organization of practical trainings, ensuring women’s participation.

It was noted that OHS also requires a change at the institutional level through the coordination of actors and improved transparency to address important OHS hazards and risks, for instance the use of pesticides. As such, the development of the manual is the result of a tripartite dialogue, which involved the participation of trade unions and worker organizations, private sector companies and public sector representatives.

The outputs of BOHESI include trainings with field applications, videos on health and safety in the banana industry, COVID-19 videos for the banana industry, short videos on hazards and risks as well as risk control measures, and

guidelines for the healthy and safe employment of women workers. These materials are available on the [WBF webpage](#).

Finally, the speakers underlined that OHS is increasingly important as an element of the emerging legislation on due diligence. This includes, for example, the German Supply Chain Law, the Duty-Of-Vigilance law in France, a law proposed in the Netherlands, and the European Union's corporate sustainability due diligence directive (CS3D). OHS was also included as part of the fundamental rights in the 2022 International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organization.

- **Part 2: An avocado company's experiences with OHS and social sustainability in their orchards and packing houses**
Pablo Lázaro, Head of Human Development, and Saúl Medina Villanueva, President, Grupo Los Cerritos

Mr. Medina and Mr. Lázaro introduced Grupo Los Cerritos and reported that the company has been implementing initiatives contributing to the sustainability of its production activities in Mexico for 23 years. They reported that production reached 1 675 ha of avocado and berries in 2022, all under sustainable agriculture practices.

People are at the heart of the company's culture, with its objective to inspire change and to be an example for the implementation of good practices in the industry. As such, Grupo Los Cerritos works at the value chain level to reach a wider positive impact. To reach this objective, the company reports having established commitments to improve the environment, the communities, to foster human capital development and the responsible use of natural resources. Moreover, in 2018, Grupo Los Cerritos developed a new philosophy to foster sustainability through five pillars: loyalty, leadership, excellence, respect and innovation.

The speaker emphasized that personal wellbeing was a key objective of Grupo Los Cerritos. The company has developed an OHS programme that includes prevention and investigation of accidents, contingency actions, risks assessment, personal protective equipment, guidelines and capacity development for work at heights, dangerous energy sources and hazardous chemical substances. To ensure compliance with OHS practices and regulations, Grupo Los Cerritos reported having in place regular internal audits and mechanisms to guarantee compliance with legal requirements and with customers' regulatory frameworks, and working hand-in-hand with OHS verifying institutions.

To complement OHS, the group has a series of initiatives to promote personal wellbeing of workers, including disease prevention with medical controls and cancer screening; personal nutrition advice; physical activity promotion through sports clubs; mental health with arts and psychology resources; and family violence prevention.

Taken together, OHS and other initiatives reportedly have resulted in increased productivity and workers' loyalty, as well as a reduction in costs, turnover, health risks and accidents. Additionally, workers' quality of life has reportedly improved since the implementation of these measures.

During the discussion, a question about the drivers behind the positive changes in the group's strategy was raised. The speakers explained that these changes were the result of aiming to improve the company's focus on its workers, making work safer and less strenuous, and differentiating the company from others in the industry.

- **Part 3: A banana producer and exporter shares its experience in implementing BOHESI in its operations**
George Kporye, Sustainability Advisor, Golden Exotics Ltd.

The speaker introduced the Banana Producer's Association (BPA), whose objective is to provide a platform for banana industry promotion in Ghana. The speaker stated that introducing OHS in Ghana in the producer's association is key to improving the livelihoods of rural populations. For this to materialize, it was decided to adapt the BOHESI "Manual for occupational health and safety in the Banana Industry" to the laws and regulations of Ghana. The process was

made through a multistakeholder approach and partnerships.¹ The speaker shared information on OHS implementation activities in several BPA member companies, including two workshops held in 2019 for employees of the banana producing company Golden Exotics Ltd. Those activities facilitated awareness and implementation of health and safety practices in the banana industry.

The speaker mentioned that a key element to increase ownership of OHS in the industry was the involvement of the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of Ghana, with the presence of the Minister, Honorable Ignatius Baffour Awuah, as the guest speaker during the BOHESI manual launch event in February 2020. The participation from the Ministry constituted strong support for OHS in the banana industry. Additionally, the speaker pointed out the efforts made by the producer's association to foster the adoption of OHS through BOHESI training sessions and workshops organized in 2022 and 2023 for members of BPA. These capacity development sessions included training on health and safety, management, and trade unions, among other topics. The speaker also pointed out that regular monitoring and evaluation of how OHS practices are being implemented among BPA members and continuous advocacy for the enactment of an OHS bill in Ghana have been essential to positively influence the adoption of OHS in the banana industry.

During the discussion, the speaker mentioned that Golden Exotics Ltd. had been growing pineapple until April 2023 and aimed to apply the same OHS guidelines in their pineapple operations. Likewise, it was asserted that the BOHESI manual and practices are applicable to other commodities. The speaker underlined that the training can be tailored and the risk assessment framework can be used in other tropical fruit sectors, with some contextualization needed.

- **Closing comments and information about upcoming project activities**

- **Maria Hernández Lagana, Responsible Fruits Project, FAO**

The webinar wrapped up with a summary of the main points of the presentations, and feedback shared in the discussion session. Participants were encouraged to contact the Responsible Fruits Project team for further questions about OHS and BOHESI.

Participants were updated on the Responsible Fruits Project's upcoming work and publications, including:

- guides on responsible business conduct for avocado and pineapple value chains;
- technical guide on resilience, with focus on monitoring, evaluation and learning;
- technical guide on measuring water and carbon footprints in pineapple value chains; and
- Global Conference on the resilience and sustainability of tropical fruit value chains on 15 and 16 May in Rome, Italy.

As always, the project team welcomes suggestions or questions on the project's activities at any time. Please contact us at: Responsible-Fruits@fao.org

¹ BPA initiated the work on adapting BOHESI manual in collaboration with the World Banana Forum, the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) initiated by the Dutch Government, Banana Link, IUF (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association), Fair Trade, local trade unions and the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of Ghana.

Annex 1

Working languages

The online session was in English and Spanish with simultaneous interpretation.

Agenda

Section title	Speaker/Facilitator
Welcome and Introduction	Maria Hernández Lagana, Responsible Fruits Project, FAO
Par1: Introduction to the topic of occupational health and safety and the experiences of the World Banana Forum in implementing OHS with banana industry stakeholders	The World Banana Forum Secretariat, FAO Victor Prada, Secretary Camila Reinhardt Hurtado, Decent Work and Sustainable Global Value Chains Specialist
Q&A and discussion	Maria Hernández Lagana
Part 2: A Mexican avocado company's experiences of OHS and social sustainability in their orchards and packing house	Grupo Los Cerritos Pablo Lázaro, Head of Human Development Saúl Medina Villanueva, President
Part 3: A Ghana-based company that produces and exports bananas and pineapples will speak about their experiences in implementing BOHESI in their operations	Golden Exotics Ltd. George Kporye, Sustainability Advisor
Q&A and discussion	Maria Hernández Lagana
Closing comments and information about upcoming project activities	Maria Hernández Lagana

For more information about the project or the webinar series, please contact: Responsible-Fruits@fao.org