

Australian

BANANAS



Volume 20
JUNE 2005

Australian Banana Growers' Council Inc



**We should all help
carry the weight.**

To ensure the on-going success of our industry, make sure you contribute your 25 cent levy. We shouldn't just rely on the goodwill of others either, we all need to contribute.

These levies fund a number of activities to build and support our industry for the long-term. Promotion activities receive 15 cents, five cents goes to the Banana Imports Fighting Fund, two cents to the Australian Banana Growers Council and three cents from Queensland growers only goes towards Plant Protection.

All growers have benefited from the recommencement of industry promotional activities last year. Your support is vital for the long-term success of our industry. Marketing campaigns gain momentum over time and it is vital that we view the campaign as a long-term investment.

So, ensure you make your contribution to the levy. For more information contact Australian Banana Promotions Company CEO Craig Allen or your wholesaler or marketing group.



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Patrick Leahy
Chairman

Case put for national levy

Regular readers of Australian BANANAS would be aware that the ABGC has been busy developing a discussion paper for the establishment of a compulsory national banana levy. That discussion paper was sent to all growers in April and a series of grower meetings were held in all major banana production areas during May/June.

The discussion paper aims to clearly establish the case for a compulsory national levy, explain how it would work in practice and inform growers about the process that must be followed by an industry when attempting to implement a levy.

The regional meetings obviously provided growers with an opportunity to convey their views on the proposed levy to myself and other ABGC directors whilst also assisting the ABGC in determining whether sufficient industry support for the levy exists such that it would warrant proceeding to a formal ballot.

It was very satisfying for me to see the level of attendance at the grower meetings and to hear first-hand the concerns of growers in the various regions not only with the levy proposal but with the state of the industry in general.

We certainly fielded a lot of questions about the levy and how it would work in practice and I think we were able to allay many of the concerns that were raised.

However, it was obvious that many growers hold specific concerns in relation to securing ongoing funding for programs that are already in existence and are of importance to their region, such as the Bunchy Top control program in New South Wales, or that perhaps are not in existence but are considered highly desirable, such as a specific marketing program for Ladyfinger bananas.

These concerns are understandable but misplaced. Take Bunchy Top control for example, who could seriously argue that Bunchy Top control is not a critical funding priority for

the entire banana industry (including north Queensland)? This is a disease that would have a devastating impact on the national industry and it is therefore in the interests of the Australian industry to see it contained to the areas where it currently exists and hopefully one day eradicated entirely.

It is also important to understand that under a national compulsory levy regime, investment decisions must be consistent with the industry's strategic plan, which in turn must reflect the priority funding needs of the industry at a national, state and regional level. In other words, as long as a proposed levy-funded project addresses a priority funding need as identified in the strategic plan and the proposal is sound, it will, in all likelihood, be approved.

In fact, the development of that strategic plan will be the very first task undertaken if the levy proposal is approved.

The ABGC is now working its way through all of the feedback it has received in relation to the levy proposal and will then decide whether sufficient industry support for the proposal exists such that a formal ballot of all commercial banana growers is warranted.

Such a ballot would be undertaken by either a state or federal electoral authority and would require a majority of the votes cast to be in favour of the proposal for it to proceed.

I would like to remind you that it is not too late to have input into the process, either by way of a written submission to ABGC or informally through a conversation with any of the ABGC directors whose contact details are on Page 6 of this magazine and on the ABGC website.

Please consider your position in relation to the levy very carefully because this will be the only opportunity for the banana industry to secure a funding stream for its future research, promotion and plant protection needs. There will be no second attempt to implement the levy – the future of your industry rests in your hands.

Finally, a reminder that the Sixth Banana Industry Congress will be in Cairns and Tully 10 – 13 August. I hope to see you there.

There will be no second attempt to implement the levy – the future of your industry rests in your hands.

industry

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markets

COVER:

Melbourne Storm player and Innisfail export Billy Slater.

Photo courtesy of Australian Banana Promotions Company Ltd.

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August 10-13

Phone: 07 3254 0522



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Len Collins
Imports chair

Canker saga highlights risks

Work is continuing on our imports campaign, although we believe Biosecurity Australia is unlikely to complete its next draft Import Risk Assessment on Philippines bananas this year because of the complexity of the pest and disease scenarios.

The Senate Rural and Regional Committee's Report tabled in March reinforced industry's view that there were many problems with the science and statistical analysis which need to be fixed in the revised draft IRA report.

The ongoing eradication of citrus canker in the Emerald production area is a stark reminder about what's at stake.

It is still unclear how citrus canker breached Australia's quarantine defences (that will be investigated by a Senate Rural and Regional Committee inquiry) but the \$13 million of taxpayers' dollars spent so far trying to overcome the disease demonstrates the high price of exotic incursions.

This episode has, to date, cost Emerald growers in excess of \$100 million in lost trees and lost production, which reinforces why the banana industry is committed to ensuring our industry remains free of exotic pests and diseases.

You will have heard that the Tully production area has been officially granted area-freedom status for Black Sigatoka, more than three years after we had our own brush with a category one exotic disease.

ABGC thanks growers for their committed support for the eradication program and is

justifiably proud that the industry achieved an outcome that many thought was not possible.

There have been no detections of Black Sigatoka in commercial plantations since August 2001 or on feral bananas since October 2001 and based on this, the National Plant Health Committee granted Pest Free Area status for Banana Black Sigatoka in the Tully area.

This achievement underpins industry's determination to ensure the existing ban on imported bananas remains in place.

The banana industry sponsored a tour of north Queensland for incoming Senator Barnaby Joyce recently with the view to bringing him and Senator Ron Boswell up to speed on the imports issue and other matters of concern.

Both Senators – and north Queensland Senator Jan McLucas – are great advocates for the industry and recognise the role that banana growers play in regional economies.

On a sad note, it was terrible to hear news of the tragic death of Biosecurity Australia's principal scientist Dr David Banks.

Dr Banks was one of 15 victims of the nation's worst air tragedy in 40 years, which occurred when the plane they were travelling in crashed into a hillside on approach to the Lockhart River airstrip in far north Queensland on 7 May.

I've known David for many years, since we worked together on the Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy. He was a nice bloke and a highly respected scientist. It is sad to think he lost his life doing a final field trip before retiring.

Changes in food labelling standards unlikely

The recent proposal by Food Standards Australia New Zealand to scrap the requirement for country of origin labelling to be displayed on imported unpackaged fish, fruit and vegetables encountered a solid wall of opposition from both sides of politics.

Queensland Premier Peter Beattie told State Parliament on 11 May that he had written to FSANZ saying the Queensland Government did not support their proposal that information about country of origin only be made available to consumers on request. And Senator Ron Boswell said no-one in Federal Parliament is likely to

support changes to country of origin labelling of unpackaged foods. He said the Australian Government believes consumers have a right to know where their food comes from and expects the requirements for the clear display of country of origin and import labels to continue.

Premier Beattie said: "We are committed to better labelling and will do everything we can to enforce that. Submissions have been made by the Department of Health and the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries."

"We support the consumer's right to know where their food is sourced from."

I urge all growers to continue paying the 5c/carton BIFF levy because we will need to have funds in reserve to continue our efforts and respond to the next IRA report.

If we hadn't invested in our campaign, there would be imported bananas in Australia today.

Court decides in favour of pork industry - Page 41

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ABGC 2005 Board: *from left*, Patrick Leahy, Peter Bale, Tom Day, Marc Jackson, Vicky Kippin-O'Connor, Cameron MacKay, Mark Reppel, Nicky Singh in ABGC's Brisbane office.

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Mr M Singh
Mr C MacKay

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Mrs V Kippin-O'Connor
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Mr T Day
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Sub-Committee**
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Mr M Singh
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Plant Health Committee

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Mr C MacKay
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Mr P Bale
QDPI&F and NSW DPI
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Mr M Singh
Mr C MacKay

Congress Program Committee

Mr P Leahy
Mr M Singh
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Mr T Heidrich
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Mr A Imeson (AABW)
Mr P Allen (Visy Board)

Mandatory code emerging

The Centre for International Economics has been appointed by the Federal Government to undertake the Regulatory Impact Statement for the Horticulture Code of Conduct, with CIE director Kerry Barwise recently named as project leader.

The government has committed to implementing a mandatory Horticulture Code of Conduct to be prescribed under the *Trade Practices Act 1974*. The code is being developed during 2005 for implementation early next year.

A draft Regulatory Impact Statement is scheduled for release in mid-July, to be followed by consultation and a final RIS in mid-September ahead of Notification of the code in early 2006.

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is co-ordinating the development of the code – in consultation with other federal government agencies – following a grower-led call for a mandatory code of conduct for the fruit and vegetable industry.

What industry wants in a mandatory code

In April 2005, leaders of about 30 peak bodies representing the horticulture production sector were consulted on what industry wants in a code. It was agreed that the code should:

- ensure contractual clarity and transparency in the sale of produce by growers.
- be based on the nature of transactions between growers and others ie. on transaction types rather than supply chain 'labels' such as wholesaler, broker, exporter etc, eg
 - produce sales made through representatives of growers are *agency transactions*; and
 - produce sales made at an agreed price to parties who subsequently re-sell for potential gain are *merchant transactions*.
- 'deem' an 'agency' transaction to exist unless otherwise agreed between growers and traders.
- specify 'minimum terms of trade' that clearly define the nature of produce sales transactions (agency or merchant) and distinguish obligations and responsibilities associated with each transaction type.
- include effective, affordable and workable dispute resolution processes

Why growers need a mandatory code

Growers have long been calling for a mandatory code to oversee trading relations between themselves and their trading partners. The reason is simple – despite forming the core link in the fruit and vegetable supply chain, growers have the least amount of power. They have been unable to get contractual clarity and effective dispute resolution systems.

Under a mandatory code, parties are obliged to participate and must follow the guidelines of the code and, if there are problems, participate in the prescribed dispute resolution mechanisms.

Horticulture Australia Council (HAC) and the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) are working with government and stakeholders to develop an effective code that provides contractual clarity and flexibility to ensure it meets industry needs.

Marc Jackson is the banana industry's official representative on the code's grower review panel. ABGC also has its own Horticulture Business Code Sub-Committee, the members of which are Marc Jackson, Nicky Singh, Vicky Kippin-O'Connor and Tom Day.

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Bringing Billy on board adds

An exciting new Australian banana television commercial, aired in regional and metropolitan areas in February 2005, spearheaded the revitalised national advertising

and promotion campaign for the banana industry. The advertisement was the first instalment of the new Australian banana marketing plan and strategy coordinated by Growcom for the Australian Banana Promotions Company, which is funded by levies paid by Australian banana growers.

The 25 cents/carton levy funds a number of activities to build and support the Australian banana industry for the long term.

Promotion activities receive 15 cents, five cents goes to the Banana Industry Fighting Fund, two cents to the Australian Banana Growers' Council, and three cents (from Queensland growers only) goes towards Plant Protection.

Grower support of these programs is vital for the long-term success of the Australian banana industry.

Marketing campaigns gain momentum over time and it is vital that the Australian banana industry views the campaign as a long-term investment.

In addition to the television campaign, further promotional activities are underway. These include a tactical radio advertising campaign launched in May to target consumers aged 50-plus with other radio promotions, such as giving bananas to consumers, being used to support the campaign.

Two attention grabbing radio advertisements will be broadcast on a rotational basis in five capital cities and selected 'retirement belt' regional areas.

The first advertisement aims to alert consumers that bananas are in plentiful supply with a strong call to action for consumers to get their bananas 'today'.

The second advertisement educates consumers that bananas contain no fat and are a great 'pick-me-up' fruit.

The current radio campaign is the first time the Australian banana marketing



Craig Allen 03 9372 3035



muscle to banana promotion

campaign has aired on radio in regional areas such as Canberra, Wollongong, Coffs Harbour, Geelong and Newcastle.

Comprehensive new point-of-sale packs have been developed for use by retailers to reinforce the television campaign and to target shoppers in-store, with distribution through independent retailers and IGA stores. The impressive packs include leaflets, shelf wobblers, stickers, a bin banner, poster and hanging mobile plus two retailer competitions (one for independent retailers and another for IGA stores) for the best in-store banana display.

The pack aims to urge all fresh food retailers to get behind Australian bananas to boost sales and support the industry. Negotiations are also underway with other major retailers to get banana point-of-sale material in stores.

The popular www.banaland.com.au web site is due to be relaunched soon, after extensive development to offer a range of interesting facts, new games and recipes.

Public relations is well underway with activities targeting press, magazines, radio and national television to publicise the nutritional benefits of bananas and provide variety information and recipe ideas. Good media coverage has been achieved with strong interest in the nutritional and health benefits of bananas.

The recruitment of Rugby League player Billy Slater has also helped gain further public relations coverage. Billy has appeared at the banana media launch in February and on several television programs promoting bananas and his involvement as Banana Ambassador.

Australian bananas also featured in the Woolworths Fresh Food Pavilion at the Sydney Show in March this year with our presenter speaking about bananas with a 'Paddock to Plate' theme plus demonstrating cooking with bananas and handing out samples of recipes and fresh bananas to the audience.

Keep an eye out for bananas in the Woolworths Pavilion at the Brisbane Exhibition in August. This and much more is planned this year across Australia!

For more information contact Australian Banana Promotions Company Chief Executive Officer Craig Allen on 03 9372 3035.



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National levy consultation

The Australian Banana Growers' Council is proposing a national levy regime that is sufficient to fund a suite of programs in the areas of research, development, marketing and promotion across all banana varieties.

The levy regime is required to secure a sustainable, long-term future for the banana industry, which faces a range of challenges including increased competition in the marketplace from other fruits and processed snack foods, the ever-present threat of exotic pest and disease outbreaks as well as rising crop production costs and declining returns.

A compulsory national levy will ensure sufficient funds are available to:

- Defend bananas' position as Australia's convenience fruit of choice. We are facing rapidly escalating and increasingly well-resourced competition from other

fruit industries that are determined to increase their share of the consumer dollar. We must ensure this is not at our expense.

- Undertake banana pest and disease surveillance, research and control programs in all states and territories.
- Provide a mechanism to fund an eradication attempt in the event of an exotic banana pest or disease incursion.
- Provide sufficient funds to undertake research that may ultimately reduce production



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costs, develop new banana varieties resistant to pests and diseases, or add value to the raw product.

Three levies are proposed amounting to a total of 1.2 percent of the first point of sale price for all banana varieties. The rates are: Marketing and Promotion 0.8 percent; Industry Research and Development 0.4 percent; and Emergency Plant Pest Eradication (EPPE) 0 percent.

The EPPE levy is required to fund the banana industry's share of any exotic banana pest or disease eradication under the *Government and Plant Industry Cost Sharing Deed in Respect of Emergency Plant Pest Responses* to which the banana industry is a signatory. The levy is set at zero because it will only be activated in the event of an exotic outbreak to which an eradication response is considered appropriate.

If the EPPE is activated, it would be offset by a corresponding decrease in the levy percentages for the promotions and R&D levies so that the overall contribution would remain at 1.2 percent of sale price. Once the eradication response was



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completed, the EPPE levy would return to zero.

The amount of money raised through the proposed levy is projected to be \$4.2 million, which when joined by matching government funds for R&D will rise to \$4.8 million.

The ABGC in conjunction with Horticulture Australia Limited will establish an Industry Advisory Committee to provide levy program investment advice and recommendations.

The ABGC is committed to ensuring that commercial growers of all banana varieties are given an opportunity to consider and comment on the levy proposal. A series of grower meetings have been held, and written submissions are welcome. At the conclusion of the formal levy consultation period at the end of June 2005, the ABGC Board will decide whether there is sufficient preliminary support for the levy to warrant proceeding to a formal ballot of all commercial banana growers.

PHOTOS: New South Wales growers hear the business case presented by banana industry leaders.



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As the organisation of the Congress gains momentum, it's time to bring you up to date with what's being planned for Cairns and Tully from August 10-13.

The most important component of Congress is the business program and most of the planning process has been taken up trying to get this right.

We are delighted to report that, courtesy of Australian Banana Wholesalers, Professor David Hughes is going to join us again, with a presentation entitled ***The Twenty First Century Fresh Produce Company***.

Those of you who attended the 1999 Congress will recall that Professor Hughes challenged us to work smarter and gave us some fascinating insight into his world. With a title like this, one wonders what he has in store for us this time.

Our keynote speaker in Cairns on Saturday August 13 is Sir Colin Berry, one of Britain's leading scientists and social commentators who will discuss the evolution of agriculture

throughout the ages and the role played by genetic manipulation in improved agricultural productivity.

Big ticket items such as marketing and promotion, industry levies, the labour force, workplace health and safety, plant health, water and sustainability, will dominate the meeting agenda in Cairns on Thursday August 11 and Saturday August 13.

On Friday August 12, we take the whole of Congress to the growing region where a main feature will be the opportunity for hands-on sessions during the Field Day at Tully Showgrounds.

The choice of Tully Showgrounds was made for practical and logistical reasons. With several buildings able to hold the displays, should the weather be an issue, it became the obvious choice.

"Our wish list was for there to have been a suitable venue halfway between Innisfail and Tully, but this was not to be," said organisers

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Marion Powell and Robert Seaman. "This would have made our job much easier."

Lots of hands-on sessions will be repeated during the day so delegates won't miss out. There will be displays of the latest in R&D as well as products and services available to the banana industry.

Packaging, transport, the environment and water will be some of the sessions attendees will be able to participate in.

Congress delegates (those taking out full registrations) will have the added bonus of being eligible to enter a prize draw to win a trip to Hawaii and the International Billfish Tournament. This prize is being sponsored by Visy Board.

What better way to celebrate the importance of the banana industry to the region than with a street parade? Support for the parade from local communities continues to grow, with many schools, community groups and local businesses planning to take part.

Bananas, bananas and more bananas

– themed floats, school children, community and service groups, local businesses all marching from the top of Butler Street to the Tully Showgrounds will add a bit of magic to the day.

After the parade arrives at the showgrounds, there will be activities for children of all ages.

Local entertainers and identities are joining in throughout the day, with appearances at a special concert which will commence at 6.00pm.

Marion and Robert offer a special thank you to Congress sponsors and especially to our Foundation Major Sponsor Visy Board, which has come on board again.

"Whilst there are many who support us, we must pay a special tribute to Visy Board. When they were first approached in 1994, they were the first to come aboard and without their generosity, and the generosity of all our sponsors, Congress would not be the leading event in horticulture.

For further information or to participate in any of the activities please call the Congress Secretariat on 07 3254 0522.

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See page 32**

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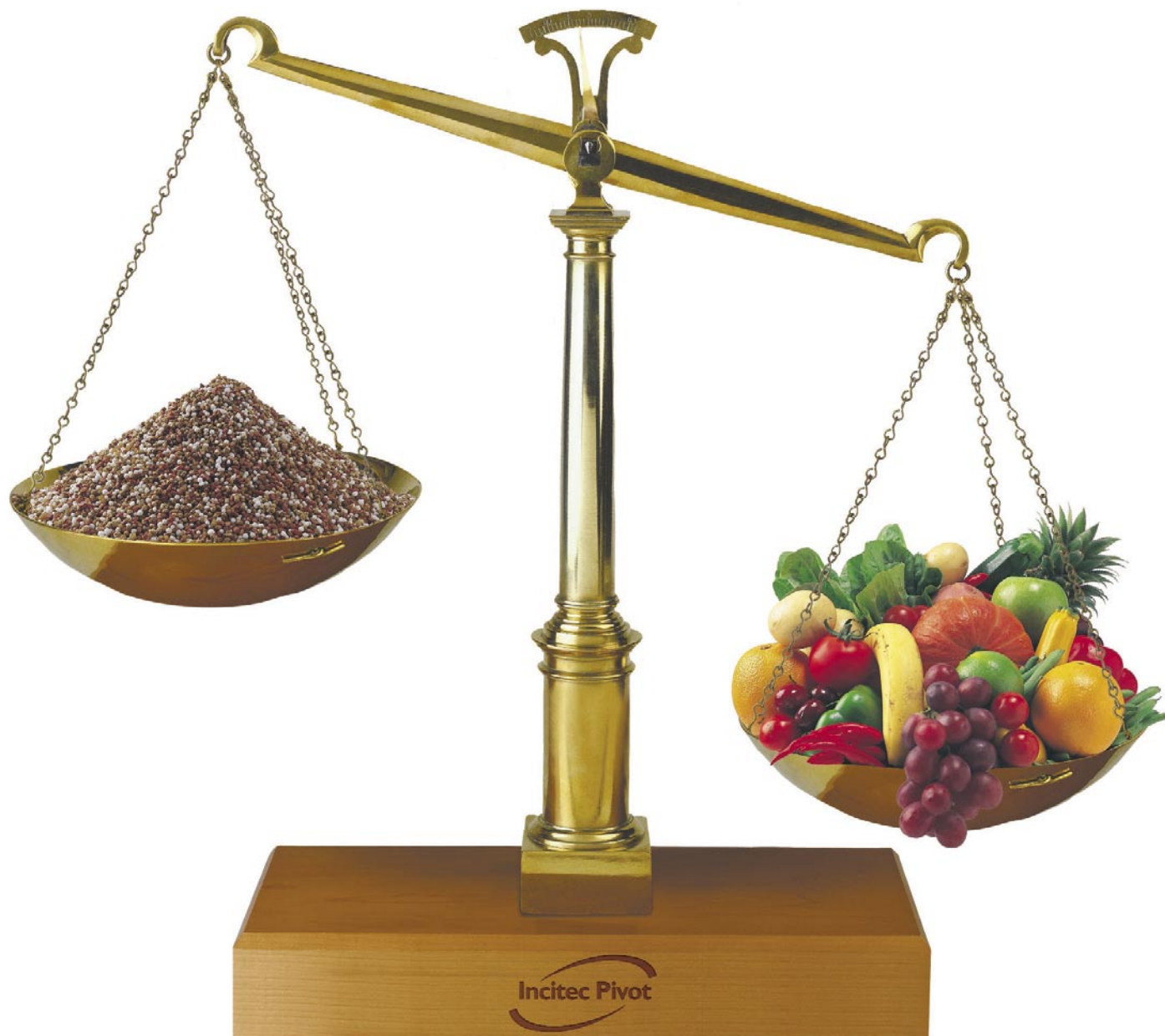
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Energy project powers on

Research has shown that a banana waste-to-energy process is technically possible and economically viable – and would create value from the substantial volumes of banana waste.

The findings suggest that a facility capable of processing 6000 tonnes per annum of residues will produce annually the energy equivalent of 222,000 litres of diesel. At a capital cost of about \$550,000 to set up the facility, the opportunity is attractive at face value.

In addition to energy generation, there is the spin-off potential for producing organic fertilisers from the residues of the process.

The Australian Banana Growers' Council last year engaged Ergon Energy to manage this research project, which included work undertaken by The University of Queensland and financed by the Queensland Sustainable Energy Innovation Fund.

Banana waste residues are attractive as a potential energy feedstock because they are:

- extremely homogenous, unlike municipal solid waste;
- in high concentrations within a small geographic area and;
- are fully bio-degradable.

More than 80 percent of Australian bananas are produced in north Queensland and because the industry has a consolidated packing capability, industry wastes such as the peduncle and unmarketable fruit are likewise aggregated.

Now that the study has shown that remote waste-processing facilities are technically possible and economically feasible, the researchers strongly recommend that a prototype facility be established.

This would act as a proof of the concept, be a tool to eliminate in-field process issues and provide the basis for continuous process/system improvement.

Because the residues from post-anaerobic digestion are recognised as a rich source of organic fertiliser, a market survey of organic fertilisers needs to be completed with the view to further adding value.

In summary, the research indicates that broad deployment of waste-to-energy facilities throughout the Australian banana industry is a viable option where the energy extracted can be used to displace diesel or industrial use LPG.

Moreover, it is reasonable to conclude the same solution is available and relevant to many other Australian agricultural industries.

The findings suggest that a facility capable of processing 6000 tonnes per annum of residues will produce annually the energy equivalent of 222,000 litres of diesel.

*PHOTO below:
UQ laboratory digestors*

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Formosana shapes up

Jeff Daniells
DPI&F
P: 07 4064 1129

BELOW: plant crop bunch of *Formosana* – note the well shaped hands, rounded fruit tips and relatively 'dirty' stem from below the bunch.

A handful of banana growers recently inspected progress in the evaluation of a new Cavendish variety at South Johnstone Research Station. The replicated trial includes the new selection *Formosana*, from Taiwan, compared alongside the industry standards of Williams and Grande Naine.

Participants were able to see first-hand the very large plant crop bunches of *Formosana* that were hanging, as well as do a taste comparison of *Formosana* with Williams. The verdict? The growers thought *Formosana* tasted much the same as Williams. Some preliminary results from the South Johnstone trial were also presented.

Trial background

Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries Program Leader, Bob Williams, imported *Formosana* about three years ago from the Taiwan Banana Research Institute. *Formosana*, which is also known as GCTCV 218 and NC 301, is a tissue culture offtype of a Giant Cavendish selected for resistance to subtropical race 4 of *Fusarium* wilt (Panama disease). It is now being cultivated commercially in Taiwan.

After *Formosana* completed its period in quarantine, tissue cultured plantlets were sent to: (i) the Northern Territory to be screened for resistance to tropical race 4 *Fusarium* wilt by Northern Territory Government staff led by Geoff Walduck; and (ii) South Johnstone for agronomic evaluation (plant characters/yield etc). Field trials began in January 2004.

Slower cycling

In preliminary results from South Johnstone, *Formosana* took about three months longer (12 months versus

9 months) to bunching than Williams/Grande Naine. However, the few bunches of *Formosana* harvested to date have been in excess of 40kg – about 10kg heavier than Williams and Grande Naine. Plants of *Formosana* were about 70cm and 90cm taller than Williams and Grande Naine respectively.

Tropical Race 4 threat

Currently this strain of *Fusarium* wilt is not present in north Queensland but has had devastating effects on the small Cavendish industry near Darwin in recent years. Strict quarantine is crucial for keeping the disease out of north Queensland. However, should a disease incursion occur in that region, it would be invaluable to have a resistant Cavendish variety for replanting. On the following pages, Geoff Walduck from the NT reports on results of their disease screening. Preliminary results suggest that *Formosana* is susceptible to Tropical Race 4 *Fusarium*, however it appears to be less susceptible than Cavendish.

PHOTOS: Symptoms of *Fusarium* wilt tropical race 4 strain which is a particularly devastating disease and a major threat to the north Queensland Cavendish-based industry.

