

Disease Threatens Banana, the World's Most Popular Fruit *from VOA*

A disease that (1) _____ the world's most popular fruit – the banana – has arrived in Latin America. As a result, officials in Colombia have declared a state of emergency.

Bananas are among the most important food (2) _____ in the world, along with (3) _____, rice and corn. That information comes from the United Nations (UN).

Five years ago, the UN warned that a disease called Tropical Race 4, or TR4, could destroy “much of the world's banana crop.” The disease first appeared in Asia in the 1990s. It later (4) _____ to Africa and the Middle East.

There are as many as 1,000 kinds of bananas grown in more than 150 countries. The TR4 disease only (5) _____ the most popular and common kind of banana – the Cavendish.

It is easier and more (6) _____ for growers to produce just one kind of banana. Growers in Colombia and many other places choose Cavendish bananas. This variety can be (7) _____ to countries around the world without (8) _____ too quickly.

Banana industry (9) _____ say there is still time to find another kind of banana to grow.

Not that long ago, the Gros Michel, also known as Big Mike, was the world's most popular banana. Big Mike was destroyed in the 1960s by the same disease that is now threatening Cavendish.

Randy Ploetz is a (10) _____ scientist from the University of Florida. He studied tropical plant diseases. He said of the recent spread of TR4, “I don't think it's going to impact the (11) _____ of the Cavendish in supermarkets anytime soon.”

He added that Asian countries affected by the TR4 disease have planted different kinds of Cavendish or moved to uninfected (12) _____. But those bananas are not as productive, and they later become infected, too.

In Colombia, officials are taking special (13) _____ to stop the disease from spreading. Officials have removed plants infected with the disease and covered (14) _____ with black plastic (15) _____ to prevent spread of the disease. Officials have also set up controls at entrances to affected banana farms where they disinfect the (16) _____ that travel between the farms and ports. The country's military and police are also guarding banana farms to keep (17) _____ from spreading the disease through their clothes and shoes.

So far, the disease has been found on six farms near Colombia's (18) _____ with Venezuela. Officials say the affected area is still small and is not (19) _____ the country's banana exports.

Gert Kema is a plant scientist who studies bananas. He agrees that the banana industry needs to (20) _____. He says there are many types of tomatoes and peppers grown around the world, for example. Bananas should be no different. I'm Ashley Thompson.



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affects availability border cost-effective crops diversify farmlands hurting measures retired ripening sheets shipped soil spread thieves threatens trucks watchers wheat

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There are as many as 1,000 kinds of bananas grown in more than 150 countries. The TR4 disease only affects the most popular and common kind of banana – the Cavendish.

It is easier and more cost-effective for growers to produce just one kind of banana. Growers in Colombia and many other places choose Cavendish bananas. This variety can be shipped to countries around the world without ripening too quickly.

Banana industry watchers say there is still time to find another kind of banana to grow.

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Randy Ploetz is a retired scientist from the University of Florida. He studied tropical plant diseases. He said of the recent spread of TR4, “I don't think it's going to impact the availability of the Cavendish in supermarkets anytime soon.”

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