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Suriname

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PARAMARIBO, Suriname: The banana industry in Suriname is aiming at the number one spot as the region's largest banana producer an official here told Caribbean Net News. Anand Ramkisoensing, manager of the Foundation for Preservation of the Suriname Banana Sector (SBBS) said that currently millions of dollars are being invested in the company to guarantee its viability and sustainability.

"In Suriname we have optimal conditions for the production of banana and we should take advantage of this. We don't have heavy earthquakes, hurricanes or other natural disasters which contribute to a continuous production in the sector," said the SBBS manager.

He further noted that Suriname had to rebuild the sector again from scratch when the banana industry collapsed, production was abandoned and several thousands workers lost their jobs.

Starting in 2002 the government and the European Union invested several millions in a restructuring program which should ultimately result in privatisation of the sector.

While banana production in 2006 was 46,500 tonnes production in 2007 will increase to 60,000 tonnes, Ramkisoensing disclosed. In 2008 production and export is expected to increase further to over 70,000 tonnes.

On Thursday, Suriname and the European Commission (EC) signed a contract with French contractor Eral to build a new irrigation system for the banana sector

"These contracts will improve the irrigation system of the SBBS banana plantation in Jarikaba. The objective is to achieve more effective and efficient irrigation, which will lead to lower water and diesel use, thus decreasing the cost of production," said Helena Laakso, EC representative in Suriname at the signing ceremony.

The European Commission is financing the new irrigation system for euro 3.6 million, while a total of euro 22 million has been allocated for the restructuring of the banana industry. Already 19 million has been contracted, said Laakso. The EU representative, however, contended that there are challenges ahead, indicating the Economic Partnership Agreements that are currently being negotiated between the EU and the ACP countries including the Caricom nations.

"Privatisation is seen by the SBBS and the Surinamese government, as well as by the EC, as a means to guarantee the future sustainability of the export banana sector in Suriname," Laakso noted.

Minister of Planning and Development Cooperation, Rick van Ravenswaay and SBBS manager Ramkisoensing noted that, with the current investments, the government is trying to strengthen the position and competitiveness of the company in order to secure a smooth privatisation.

"If we have a strong and competitive company, we could earn a lot more and secure sustainable jobs," said Ramkisoensing.

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