



Lecture 36
Horticulture, Politics, and World Affairs:
Bananas and the Banana Republics



Banana

A gigantic tropical herb consisting of a pseudostem made up of leaf sheaths with an inflorescence pushing through the sheaths

Basically two types of fruit
Banana: Consumed mostly as fresh fruit (AA, AAA)
Plantain: Cooking banana (AB, ABB, AAB)

Staple food in the tropics

Bananas now one of most popular and cheapest fruit imports

An amazing horticultural achievement

Seedy bananas used for wind breaks, Hawaii















History of Horticulture: Lecture 36



Greenhouse production in Morocco for banana



Greenhouse production in Morocco for banana



Greenhouse bananas in Morocco



Greenhouse bananas in Morocco

History of Banana

Cultivated in southeast Asia in antiquity
Seedless types selected
Known by reputation to Theophrastus
Introduced to Mediterranean region in 650
May have moved to Africa by Arab traders in first century or from India via southern Arabia and Ethiopia
Many cultivars in Uganda suggesting long history
Established early in New World

History of Banana in Latin America

In last half of 19th century, Captain Lorenzo D. Baker and Minor C. Keith introduced the first bananas to Boston and the US Northeast between 1870 and 1889
Fruit an immediate success leading to banana bonanza
American entrepreneurs sought to control both banana production and trade

A combination of sea captains, railroad builders, and adventurers formed the Boston Freight Company which became the United Fruit company (1899)

Company became plantation and shipping monopoly

Developed horticultural and shipping techniques and system of plantation management

Their efforts made banana one of the first fresh foods to be internationally commercialized

Bananas of high quality now available the year around at moderate prices the world over

A significant horticultural achievement

Bananas and Colonialism

United Fruit Company was aggressive in the unstable frontier of Central America

Industry unique because no other perishable produce brought such a long distance to market or available without regard to season

Industry based on the fact that fruit could be picked green and ripened off the plant

However, company subject to severe, constant, and bitter criticism as “Industrial Colonialism” despite the fact that conditions on plantation probably better than in rural areas

Criticism based on

Monopoly exploitation

Political manipulation

Abuse of native labor

Disregard for human hardships

Preemptory management tactics

History of Horticulture: Lecture 36

It became obvious that a single large American company was to directly interfere with the political fortunes of a number of Central American countries, admittedly corrupt and greedy

Not unlike Standard Oil in the Mideast

Persistent revolutions and coups were the result and the epithet of Banana Republics was applied to these countries, a shameful period of US-Latin American interactions

With the present World Trade Organization, the banana wars continue between European and American companies vying to divide and dominate the world market for banana

The banana wars continue