



FUSARIUM WILT

An advisory on the presence of TR4 in Peru

In April 2021, Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4 was detected on a small-scale farm in Northern Peru. TR4 is a strain of the fungus formerly known as “Panama Disease.” The original strain of fusarium wilt (TR1) caused significant damage to the banana industry in the mid 20th century, wiping out the Gros Michel banana varietal, a predecessor of the Cavendish banana sold today.

The Peruvian government body SENASA took immediate steps to close the affected zone and eliminate the contaminated plants, with the support of Colombia-based CIAT. Equal Exchange’s partners are able to continue producing and exporting, and are implementing increased phytosanitary measures to prevent the spread of TR4 onto their farms. Equal Exchange is working with banana industry leaders in the region to fund containment and prevention efforts.

It is not yet clear what caused this specific outbreak, but we know that TR4 is spread through contaminated water or soil and the materials that carry them, such as boots or tires. The last confirmed case of TR4 in the Americas was found in Colombia in 2019. You can read specifics about that case and TR4 in general in our blog about the outbreak.

It’s important to note that TR4 has no effect on food safety or human health whatsoever. The fungus is not carried through the fruit itself. Rather, it attacks banana plants, which affects the productivity of banana farms and the livelihoods of those who manage them. It is a serious risk for banana growing regions, which will require international cooperation and investment to control.

Equal Exchange will continue to update our customer base as we learn more. For now, we do not anticipate an effect on our supply or our order fulfillment. We appreciate your interest in the challenges facing our partners. While information is developing, we invite you to learn more about TR4 from a webinar we produced in 2019.