



Diana Figueroa Prado  
Mexico, Central America & the Caribbean Regional Researcher & Representative  
Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

February 26, 2021

Ms. Figueroa Prado,

Regarding the recent publication by "Surcos": "La República Piñatera" we thank Business & Human Rights Resource Center for the opportunity to clarify the unfortunate assertions made in this article.

## Salaries

*Assertion: "... in addition to paying wages of poverty and subjecting its employees to extreme working conditions and total abuse of power ..."*

The company is a recognized source of employment in the country, with more than 8,000 jobs provided in Costa Rica, especially in rural areas where employment is most needed.

Agribusiness is one of the best paid industries in the country and the company is one of the companies that grants the most incentives to its employees. These include:

- Average salary: more than 40% above the legal minimum wage.
- Subsidies for medical disabilities so that workers achieve 100% of their income when on medical leave.
- Financial aid for employees and their children. Full set of school supplies provided to students at the beginning of the school year.
- Vacation days above the legal minimum.
- Paid leave for loss of a loved one, births, serious illnesses of family members, marriages, among others.

We take pride in the relationship we have with our employees and are guided by our Social Responsibility System that was implemented in 2005 which ensures that a respectful and fair work environment is maintained. The system also has a documented grievance mechanism which can be used at any time to address issues that employees may raise.

## Reforestation

*Assertion: "... permanent deforestation in search of new agricultural frontiers for their pineapple crops ..."*

Since 1996, Costa Rica passed a law that prohibits land use change; deforestation is prohibited. Furthermore, it is part of our Company policy to protect forest, not destroy it.

At Dole's pineapple operations in Costa Rica, 25% of the area is protected forest or ecosystems. The company not only conserves these areas but has increased the vegetative cover over the years with reforestation programs undertaken with employees and community members. Currently, Dole maintains more than 5,500 hectares of protected forest in its operating divisions of Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Ecuador.



## Responsible handling of agrochemicals

*Assertion: "...the massive uncontrolled use of pesticides of all kinds, some of them even denounced as prohibited ..."*

In 1998, the Company was the first agricultural concern in the world to have its environmental management system, verified by a third party and certified to ISO14001, which ensures the implementation of the best agricultural practices.

This system establishes a rigorous environmental policy that guarantees strict compliance with all laws and regulations on the use of agrochemicals in the countries where we operate. **Prohibited products cannot be used, neither by law nor by company policy.**

All the products used to control pests and diseases are handled and applied in accordance with the manufacturers' recommendations and have been approved and recommended by our research department. In addition, to ensure responsible management of agrochemicals, we carry out internal and external audits and comply with all the procedures established by our certified management system.

## Application of crop protection products

*Assertion: "... direct fumigation on workers in the plantations ..."*

We strongly deny this assertion.

**By company policy, no product is applied in areas where employees are working.** The company has a rigorous management system that ensures that product applications are carried out under strict preventive measures, in such a way that it does not affect the health of our employees.

Agrochemical application procedures include:

- Signs are placed in the application areas to prevent the entry of personnel during the application and so that re-entry periods are respected.
- Tractor-driven application equipment is identified with colored flags to warn employees of the need to keep a safe distance.
- Personnel using agrochemical application equipment is trained at least once a year.
- The application equipment is frequently calibrated following pre-established maintenance programs.
- Any incident is reported and resolved immediately using the mechanisms established in the certified management system.
- Emergency brigades have been established and are trained to respond to any accident involving agrochemicals.
- All personnel undergo a pre-employment medical examination; those who use agrochemical application equipment are subject to blood cholinesterase<sup>1</sup> testing twice per year.

## Water and the environment

*Assertion: "... The contamination of the environment, including the water sources of many local communities, some of which have been fighting for years against these practices, and that even have to be supplied with water by tanker trucks since their natural intakes have been poisoned by Dole and other companies ... "*

It is unfair to relate our Company to contamination of water and the environment.

All our farms in Costa Rica have a certificate of environmental viability issued by the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE) through the National Environmental Technical Secretariat (SETENA). Having an environmental viability license denotes that the farm complies with the best practices in environmental matters in accordance with Costa Rican legislation.

All the crop protection products that we use are approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), the Ministry of Health and MINAE. All regulatory guidelines for handling and application are strictly followed.

The company conducts water monitoring on the farms and the results indicate that the agricultural practices implemented comply with the established requirements.

The company ensures that employees have access to drinking water. On the farms, constant monitoring is carried out to ensure that the source, the distribution system, and the drinking container are in good condition.

For more than 30 years, the Company's certified laboratory has monitored the water quality of all the farms in the country and presents the reports of analysis to the Ministry of Health.

## About the specific cases raised

One of Dole's priority goals is to create a safe and healthy working environment for its employees. To achieve this, the Company has developed a system for the management of occupational health and safety at work. It has also

---

<sup>1</sup> Test required for some employees that handle certain types of agrochemicals. The test can serve as an early indicator of sensitivity to exposure to these substances.

provided social and economic benefits to its collaborators when they are faced with a health situation that does not allow them to report to work.

Within the framework of social dialogue, on November 11 and December 17, 2020, meetings were held between company and union representatives at Muelle farm to discuss on-the-job health and safety aspects. Within this constructive dialogue, we had a fluid exchange of information, where, among other things, relevant occupational health and safety indicators at the national and business levels were presented.

It is important to highlight that the incidence rate of occupational accidents at the farm fell to an index of 86 in 2020. This is 60% less than the parameter established by the National Insurance Institute of Costa Rica (INS) for the agribusiness sector. The company is a recognized leader in occupational health management and has received awards from this institute for more than 20 years.

In addition, the SINATRAA union organization presented a series of requests and occupational health concerns related to its affiliates. Each of the requests and concerns raised were answered in a detailed and extensive manner. An important procedure addressing requests for job relocation that must be followed for the prevention of occupational hazards was explained. It is necessary for an official medical professional to determine an eventual incompatibility between an employee's health condition and the job function being performed. If this is not done in this way, our occupational health technicians on the farm run the risk of relocating an employee to a job that eventually could worsen their health condition.

This is precisely what has been happening with Cándido Amador. He has requested a job relocation without having presented the key medical report from the INS which could determine incompatibility between his health condition and his work duties. As of February 25, 2021, he has not yet presented the medical report from this institution needed to determine whether he can safely be relocated to another job.

On the other hand, regarding what was indicated by Cándido as to the application of agrochemicals, we reiterate that by company policy no product is applied in areas where employees are working.

As to the person identified as Mariano in the article, we could not identify any employee with this specific circumstance. However, the procedure for job relocation would be the same as that described above.

It is important to note that, in the meetings held in November and December between farm representatives and the union, neither of the two cases referenced in the Surcos note were included among the grievances presented. The Company appreciates continued interaction with stakeholder and worker representatives such as the process of social dialogue that was mentioned above. This process is supported by labor relations personnel designated at the farm level, as well as by the activities performed by the social workers on our staff that implement social programs at each one of our farming operations. In addition, external review of our business processes is an essential part of our sustainability strategy. This is exemplified by the constant third-party audits and certifications that we subscribe to at our pineapple farms in Costa Rica which include: ISO14001 (Environmental Management Systems), Global GAP (Good Agricultural Practices), Fairtrade (social standards and premium), and organic certification (under both the United States and European frameworks).

## **Conclusion**

We deeply regret the frivolity with which our company is accused of such serious acts without providing any evidence. It is deeply concerning that such baseless claims are presented as legitimate by a respected organization. We once again appreciate the opportunity to present the actual facts and demonstrate the false nature of the assertions that have been made.