

Bananas Are Helping Keep RP from Becoming a Banana Republic - MabuhayRadio

Written by Ben Sanchez, Jr.

Friday, 02 November 2007 16:49 - Last Updated Thursday, 07 October 2010 16:21

Very few Filipinos know that the Philippines is the fourth-largest banana exporter in the world. Still fewer understand that bananas contain more nutrients than apples, which have to be imported.

Little was known about the fruit until Alexander the Great went to India in 327 BC. Alexander was so fascinated with bananas that he described it as "the heavenly fruit that tasted like nectar sweetened in honey."

Too bad, our Philippine-grown fresh bananas are not obtainable abroad except in one country. Philippine bananas are exclusively exported to Japan. However, Filipino exporters are shipping "banana chips" to the United States in growing quantities.

Read on...

Ben Sanchez

QUOTE.

A Banana A Day Keeps The Doctor Away

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By Henrylito D. Tacio

If there is a tropical fruit that can (be the) counterpart (of the) temperate zone's apple, then it's the banana. After all, most of the parts of the fruit – and even the leaves – have been found to have medicinal properties.

The Philippines is the only Asian country to be included in the list of the top four leading banana-exporting nations, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The three others are from South America, namely: Ecuador (which provides more than 30 percent of global banana exports), Costa Rica, and Colombia. All four countries account for about two-thirds of the world's exports, each exporting more than one-million tons.

In popular culture and commerce, "banana" usually refers to soft, sweet "dessert" bananas that are usually eaten raw. The bananas from a group of cultivars with firmer, starchier fruit are called plantains, and are generally used in cooking rather than eaten raw. The word "banana" is derived from the Arabic word "finger."

"Banana is still the most important crop in the Philippines," says Dr. Patricio S. Faylon, the executive director of the Laguna-based Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD). "It contributes about US\$20 million annually, mainly through fresh exports of the fruit. Processed bananas such as chips, cracker, and catsup have also started to contribute dollar earnings."

Banana is grown mostly in Mindanao, where a total land area of 208,190 hectares is planted to the crop. Luzon has a total of 123,594 hectares devoted to banana, while Visayas has 85,971 hectares.

Bananas are grown in 132 countries worldwide, more than any other fruit crop. India leads in global banana production, representing approximately 23 percent of the worldwide crop but most are consumed domestically. In Asia, banana is also grown in Indonesia, China, Thailand, and Malaysia, among others.

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The banana is mentioned for the first time in written history in Buddhist texts in 600 BC. Alexander the Great discovered the taste of the banana in the valleys of India in 327 BC. The existence of an organized banana plantation could be found in China in 200 AD. In 650 AD, Islamic conquerors brought the banana to Palestine. In the Middle Ages, both Moslems and Christians thought that the banana was the forbidden fruit of paradise.

Today, banana is one of the most-popular fruits around the world. Unfortunately, the fruit is on a crash course toward extinction. Not all is well with our bananas, especially with saba/cardava, lakatan, and latundan produced by smallhold farms," said a policy briefing issued the PCARRD.

The 1923 musical hit, "Yes, We Have No Bananas," was reportedly written after songwriters Frank Silver and Irving Cohn were denied in an attempt to purchase their favorite fruit by a syntactically colorful, out-of-stock neighborhood grocer. Big Mike, the prominent banana variety in the 1950s in the western hemisphere, does no longer exist after a disease infected the plant causing it to be wiped out from most farms and plantations.

"The world today is endangered with another banana apocalypse – the emergence and evolution of the dreadful banana bunchy top (BBT), banana streak, banana bract mosaic, and fusarium wilt," the policy briefing warned.

"In the Philippines, BBT remained in most farms that brought considerable damages to prime banana-producing provinces in the country," it added. "Diseases have even evolved and multiplied, which created new banana monsters, such as the black sigatoka, bugtok, moko, and other infectious diseases of quarantine concern."

Losing banana in our food table is unthinkable. After all, banana is one of the most healthful fruits the world has known. Alexander the Great was so fascinated by the virtues of this fruit that he described it as "the heavenly fruit that tasted like nectar sweetened in honey."

Health experts claim that banana is low in protein, free of fats but high in energy. A fully-ripe banana has 20-25 percent sugar. It has a significant amount of B-vitamins, especially B1 and B6. B1 is a brain tonic whereas B6 relieves, in particular, uncomfortable symptoms of the pre-menstrual tension syndrome like irritability, headaches, tender breasts, and water retention.

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According to a recent survey undertaken in the United States among people suffering from depression, many felt much better after eating a banana. This is because bananas contain tryptophan, a type of protein that the body converts into serotonin, known to make you relax, improve your mood and generally make you feel happier.

"One medium-sized banana boasts of 100-125 kilo calories, 4-5 grams fiber, about 400 milligrams potassium, 17 milligrams calcium, 36 milligrams phosphorus and traces of other minerals like iron," said Professor Kanwar, an eminent biophysicist who writes for the 'Health Tribune.'

Researches conducted recently at the University of Minnesota, School of Medicine, substantiate earlier reports that high potassium diets (banana being one of these) lower blood cholesterol levels. Subjects getting extra dietary potassium are also less prone to hypertension, strokes and atherosclerosis and finally show significantly low mortality rates.

A major study reveals that diets loaded with potassium-rich bananas may be able to cut the risk of strokes by one third. Scientists feel that many people can be protected against strokes and heart attacks by minimizing sodium (common salt) intake and by consuming plenty of potassium-rich foods of which banana is one. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration has just allowed the banana industry to make official claims for the fruit's ability to reduce the risk of blood pressure and stroke.

If you are having trouble with stress, potassium-rich banana can help you. Potassium is a vital mineral, which helps normalize the heartbeat, sends oxygen to the brain and regulates the body's water balance. When you are stressed, our metabolic rate rises, thereby reducing our potassium levels. These can be rebalanced with the help of a high-potassium banana snack.

Banana can also help people trying to give up smoking. The B6 and B12 it contains, as well as the potassium and magnesium found in the fruit, help the body recover from the effects of nicotine withdrawal.

By the way, when you compare banana to an apple, banana has four times the protein, twice

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the carbohydrate, three times the phosphorus, five times the vitamin A and iron, and twice the other vitamins and minerals. Perhaps, it is high time to change that well-known American phrase to "A banana a day keeps the doctor away!"

Unknowingly, the fruit is not the only useful part of banana. According to Wikipedia, the banana blossom is used in Southeast Asia and in Indian cuisine, either served raw with dips or cooked in soups and curries. The tender core of the banana plant's trunk is also used, notably in the Burmese dish. A banana fried with batter is a popular dessert in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

Bananas are also eaten deep fried, baked in their skin in a split bamboo, or steamed in glutinous rice wrapped in a banana leaf in Myanmar. The juice extract prepared from the tender core is used to treat kidney stones.

The leaves of the banana are large, flexible, and waterproof; they are used in many ways, including as umbrellas and to wrap food for cooking, carrying and packing cooked foods. In south India, food is traditionally served on banana leaves in homes and some restaurants also follow the practice. Some farmers prefer to grow banana plants only for their leaves. Puerto Rican "pasteles" are boiled wrapped and tied inside the leaf.

Banana chips are a snack produced from dehydrated or fried banana or, preferably, plantain slices, which have a dark brown color and an intense banana taste. Bananas have also been used in the making of jam. Unlike other fruits, it is difficult to extract juice from bananas because when compressed a banana simply turns to pulp. UNQUOTE.

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