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SUGAR Cane Growers Say Hartley's Campaign Jeopardizes Sugar Industry Sugar exports to Europe could be at risk

The Dominican Federation of Cane Field Growers (Fedoca) says Father Hartley discredits the industry before the European Community

By: Jhonatan Liriano

Santo Domingo. At present the Dominican Republic is exporting 30,000 tons of sugar to the European market and is preparing to significantly boost that quota beginning in 2010, when some Africa, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) countries will cease to produce the staple in order to switch to biofuels.

The sector's bonanza and growth, however, has been endangered by the alleged discredit campaign being carried out in Europe by a Catholic priest, Christopher Hartley, denounced the president of the Dominican Federation of Cane Field Growers (FEDOCA), Bernardo Díaz.

He said that by alleging that in our country's rural villages Haitian workers and their families are subjected to slavery-like practices, Hartley is conspiring against an industry that makes great efforts to grow in a context of respect for the rights of its workers.

The landlords' representative said that the accusations made by the priest before the international community are a "formidable lie that this pseudo man of God keeps repeating, with the only motive of damaging our sugar industry, which is starting to recover from years of stagnation."

Request

Fedoca's president requested that the apostolic nuncio Józef Wesolowski call Hartley's attention and inform the Vatican about the damage his behavior is causing on Dominicans.

He added that the few Haitian citizens employed in cane cutting in the country live in adequate conditions and their villages have access to sanitary services, food and education.

Their presence in the industry is bound to dwindle in the next few years, as the industry continues the modernization of its sugar mills.

On this subject, Diaz explained that Consorcio Azucarero de Empresas Industriales (CAEI), has already mechanized about 70% of its sugar cane harvest.

30,000 tons of sugar is the volume the country is exporting to the European Community annually. An increase is expected for 2010.

In addition to the 30,000 tons of sugar exported to Europe this year, the Dominican Republic enjoys a preferential quota of 195,000 tons with the United States of America.

Sugar is quoted at about US\$0.20 cents/pound on international markets, while the United States market pays, on average US\$0.22 cents.

During the 2008/2009 sugar harvest, the cane growers delivered to Colón sugar mill -- which belongs to CAEI, a company of the Vicini Group -- 325,000 tons of raw sugar cane and are preparing to offer a total of 425,000 tons when the Porvenir Mill, owned by the State, resumes operations in 2010.