

BANANAS

The ubiquitous banana, often taken for granted, is in fact a staple of billions of people's diets and one of the most important crops on earth.

This exhibit will look at its origins and types, how it spread throughout the world's tropical regions and lastly, look at recent production and export ways and means.

Philatelic material and ephemera from a variety of sources will be used to present the story of this amazing fruit.

Exhibit Plan

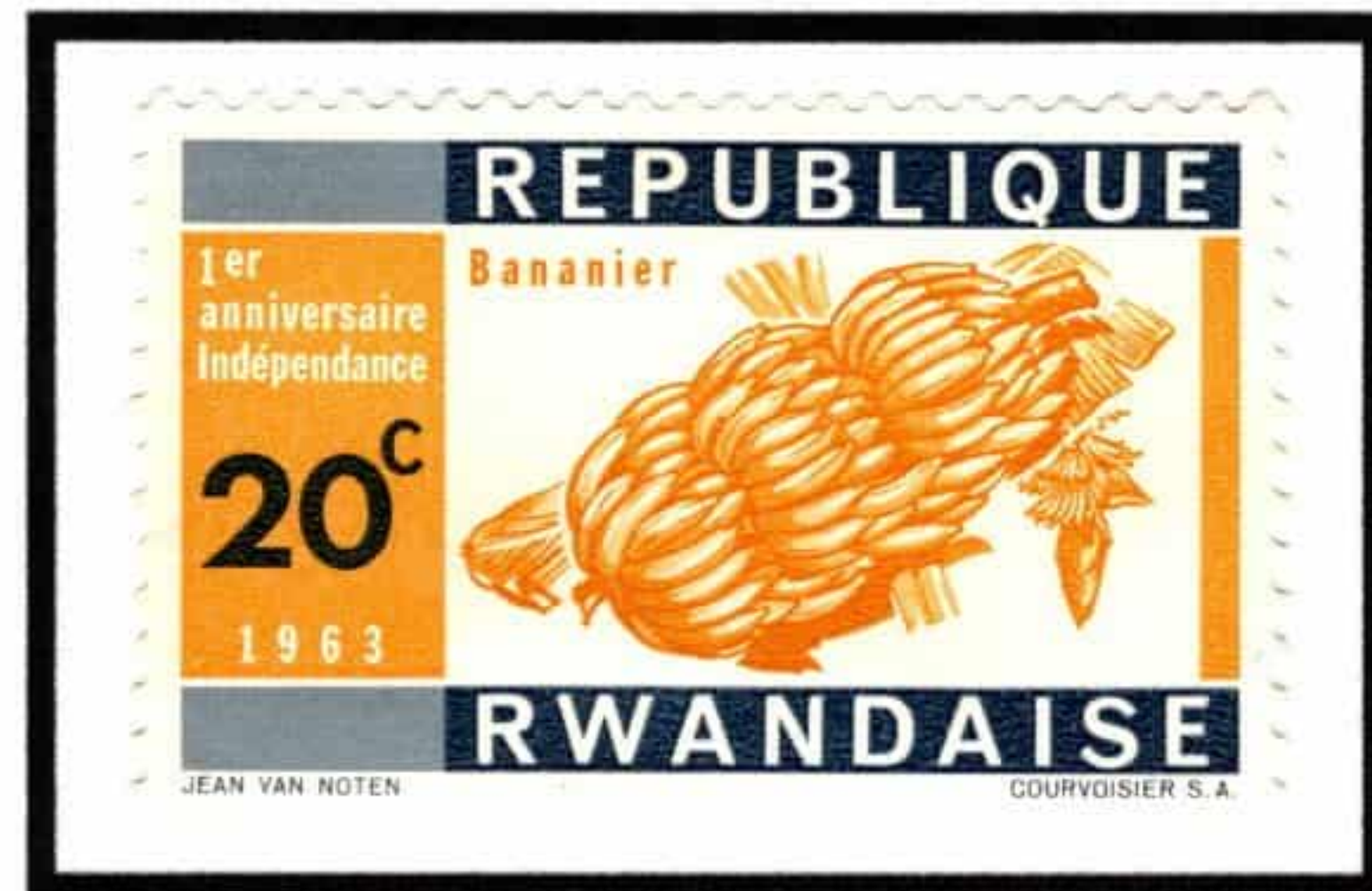
- 1) Introduction and Exhibit Plan
- 2) In the Garden of Eden
- 3) Origins in Asia
- 4) Types

The Spread of Bananas Around the World's Tropical Regions

- 5 & 6) Africa
- 7) Europe
- 8) the New World

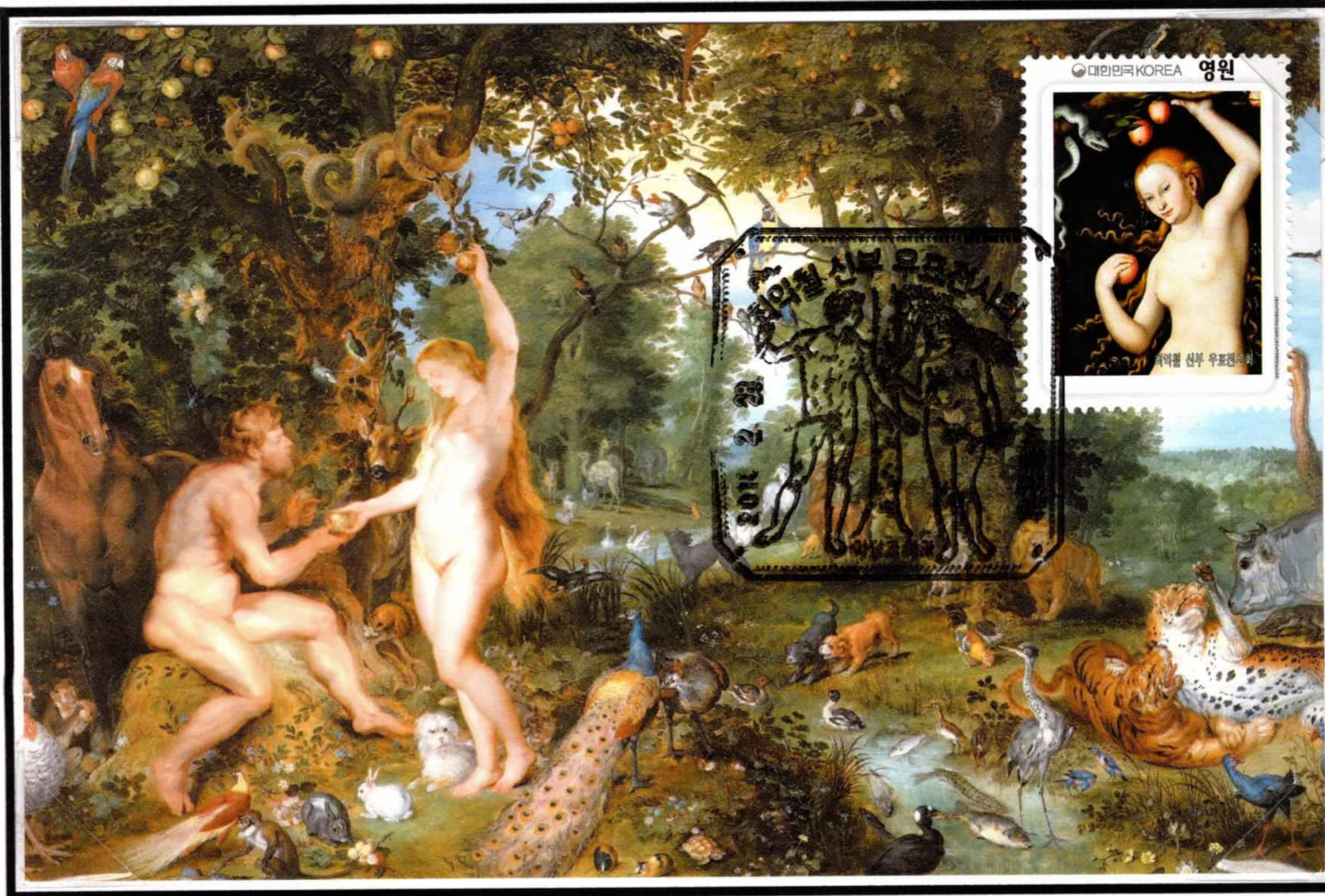
Production and Export

- 9) How Bananas Grow
- 10) Small Scale Farming
- 11-12) Commercial Scale
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In the Garden of Eden

While this may seem an odd place to begin our story of the banana, there is considerable opinion that the infamous apple consumed in the Garden of Eden was actually, wait for it...a banana.



A 2021 Austrian higher value offering showing Adam, Eve and our mystery tree.



The belief that the fruit mentioned in the Bible is an apple is the work of Renaissance artists most likely inspired by a misread translation from their Gutenberg Bibles. Arabic texts situate bananas, known as the Tree of Paradise (and sometimes directly as the Banana Tree), in the sacred garden.

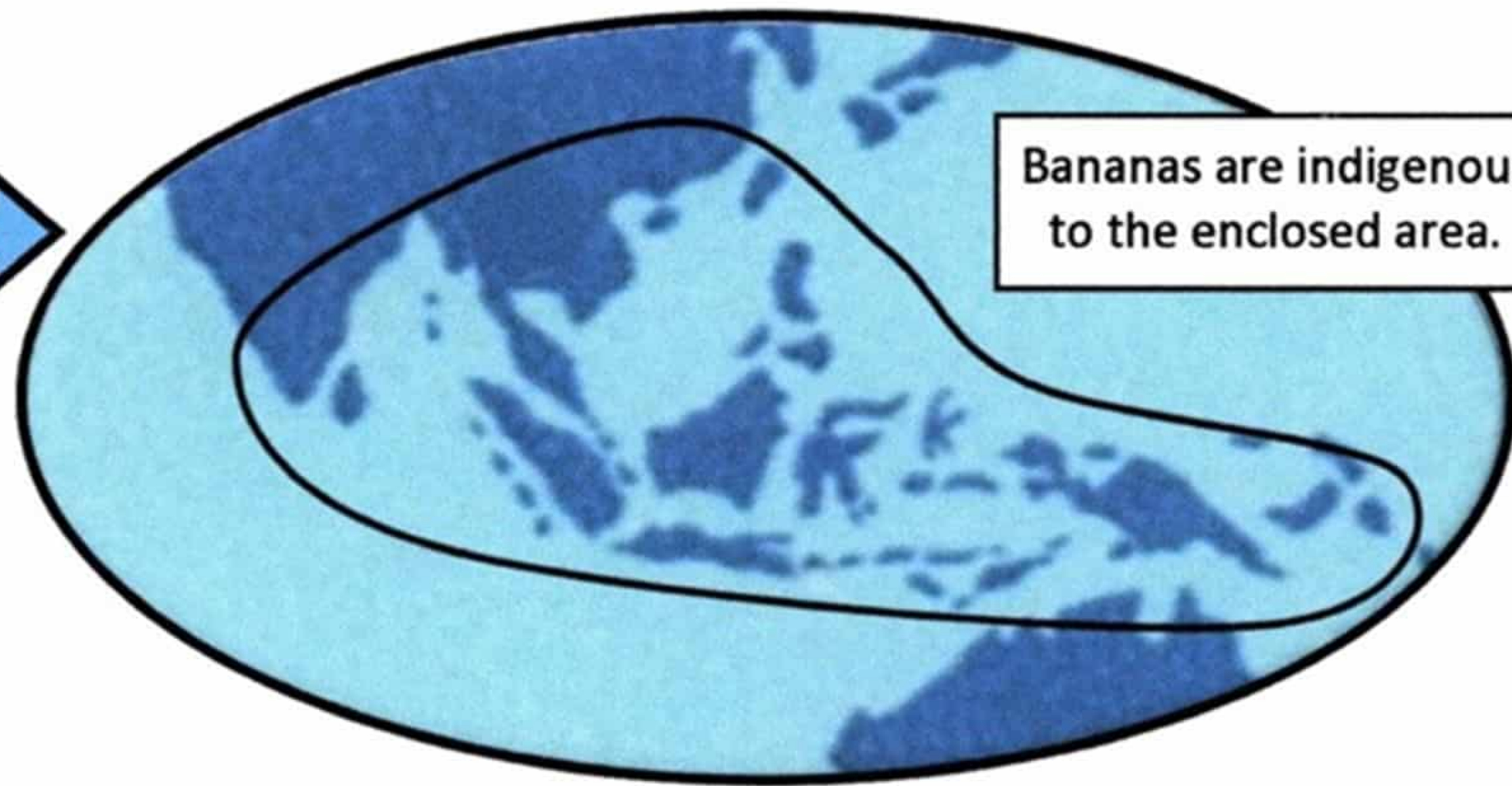
Today, bananas are farmed in Jordan, Egypt, Oman and Israel. Apples, not so much, and those that are, are limited in number and done with the assistance of modern agricultural means.

c1890's Stereoview Card Showing the supposed location of the Garden Eden, the Euphrates River Valley in current day Iraq. The area is ideally suited to the growing of tropical fruits. From 1892 through 1963, the Keystone View Company of Meadville, Pennsylvania was a major producer and distributor of both comic/sentimental and educational stereoviews such as this one.



Origin of the Banana

Bananas originally came from the area that stretches from southern Asia down through Malaysia, Indonesia and New Guinea. The area is home to a huge number of indigenous species of bananas. Banana farming in the area can be traced back thousands of years.



Bananas are indigenous to the enclosed area.



Street market in Saigon, Vietnam
Circa 1960 showing an assortment of bananas, green and yellow, for sale.



"Banana Tree" from Bangladesh's 1978-82 definitive issue featuring important places and industries of the country.



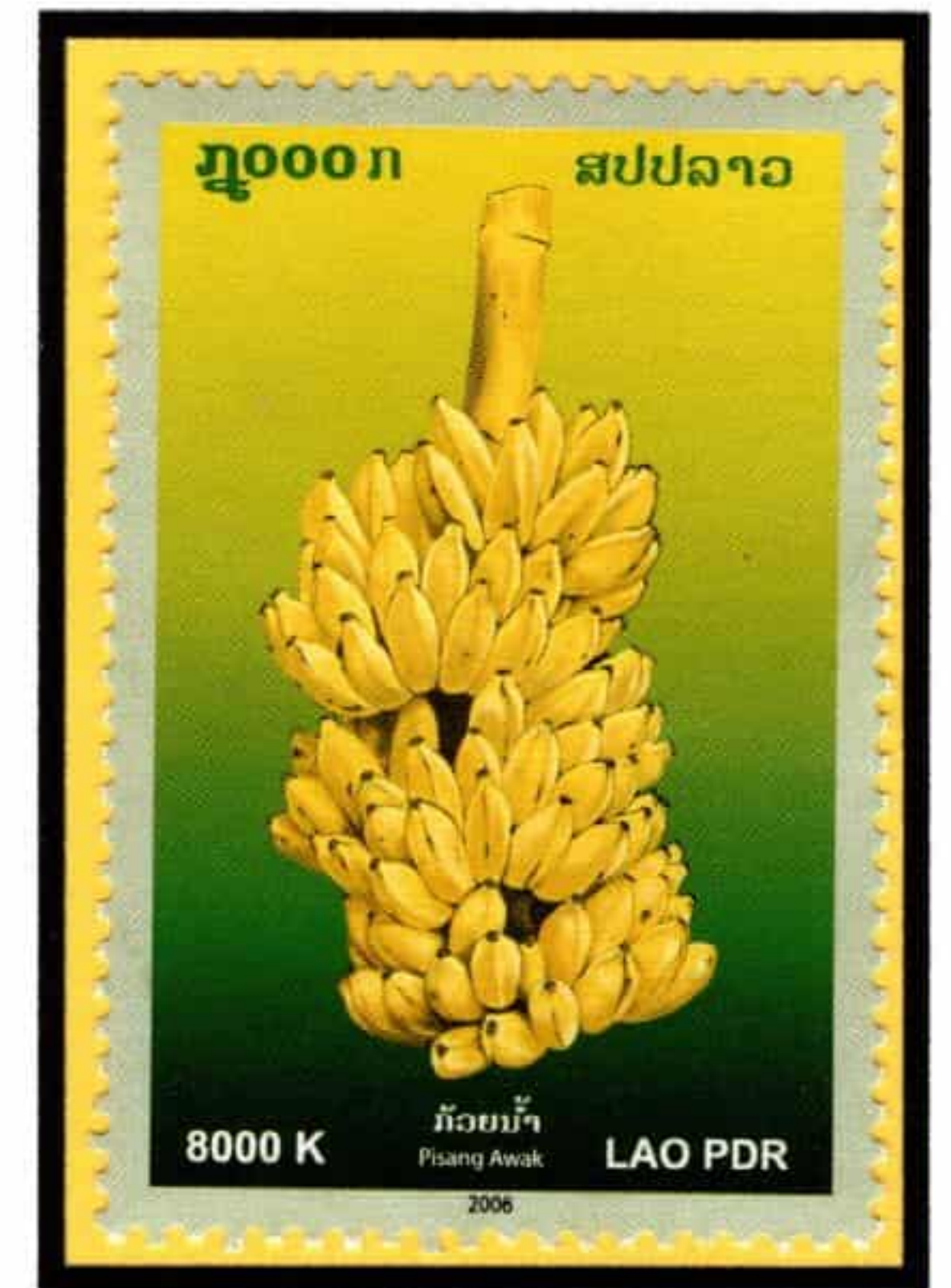
A sampling of the many different types of bananas from the region where they carry names such as "pink pepper banana", "five chain banana" and "hot banana". This series was designed by George Bennett, an American, who spent the last 15 years of his life living in Fiji and producing watercolour paintings of Fiji's diverse fauna and flora. His work also graces Fijian currency and stamps from Tonga.

Types of Banana

Today, it is believed that there are around 1,000 varieties of bananas in different sizes, shapes and colours. They range from small red bananas to long fat green bananas; there are purple bananas and chubby baby bananas that are only three inches long.

All of these bananas are generally categorized into two types, yellow dessert and green cooking.

A 2006 Laotian series featuring local bananas. At top left are *bungulan* bananas, a green cooking banana. The remaining three are types of yellow dessert banana.



Yellow dessert bananas are the ones we are most familiar with, the ones we look for in the grocery store and eat in our banana splits.

Green Cooking Bananas are generally not eaten raw. Many cooking bananas are referred to as plantains. These cooking bananas are more starchy and less sugary than dessert bananas and are a major food staple in West and Central Africa, Asia, the Caribbean islands, Central America and northern South America.

Sweden : From a 1985 series celebrating Nobel Prize winners for Literature, Miguel Asturias in this instance.

Guatemalan by birth, Asturias' work brought attention to the ways of indigenous cultures.

Prominent in this illustration are the green bananas that are a staple of many South American diets.

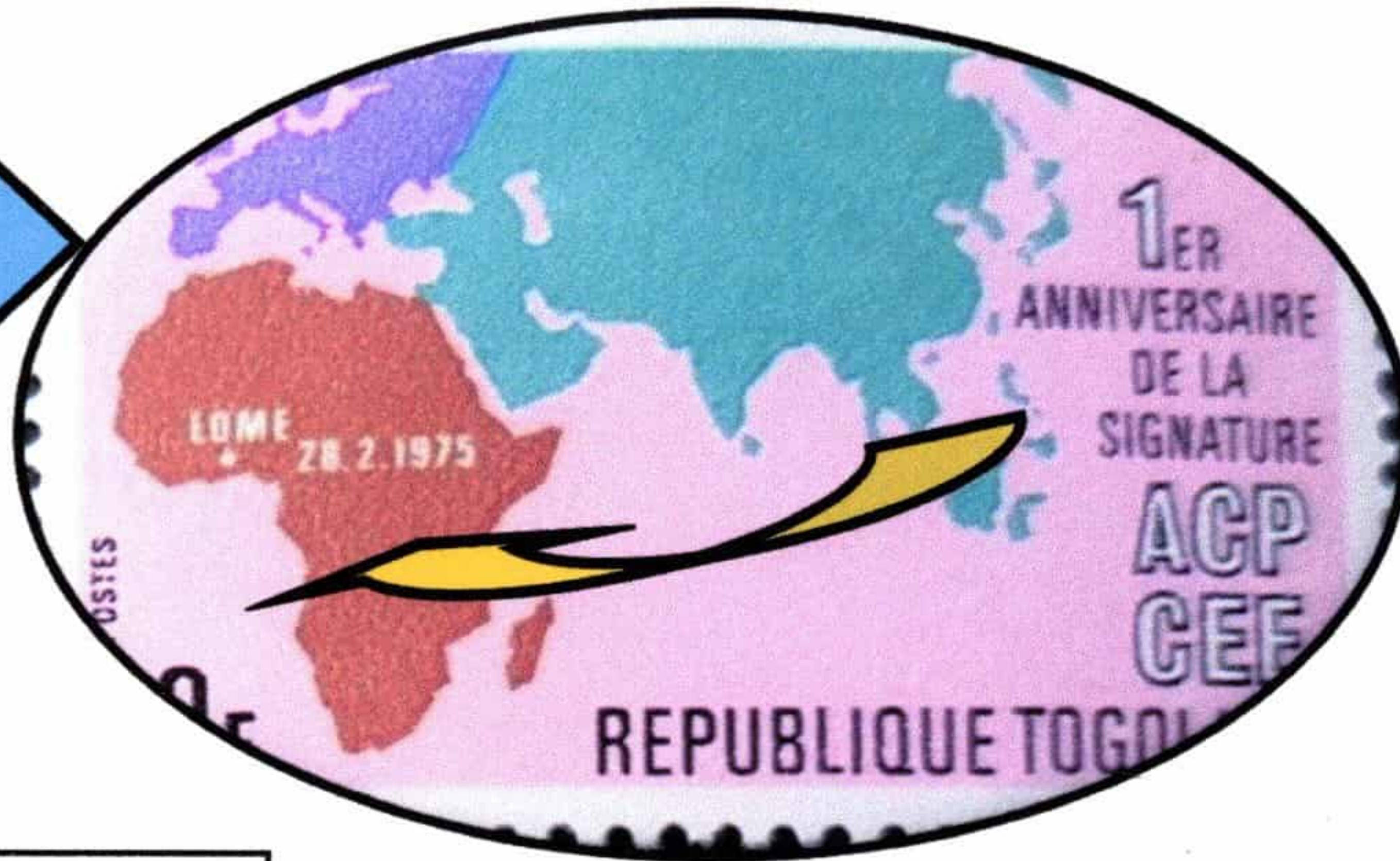


The Spread of Bananas around the World i) Africa

From their home in Asia, bananas first moved into Africa. For a very long time only two varieties thrived there, the African plantain and the East African Highland banana. Then, perhaps a thousand years ago, a third type arrived and flourished - the *banan*, Arabic for "finger".

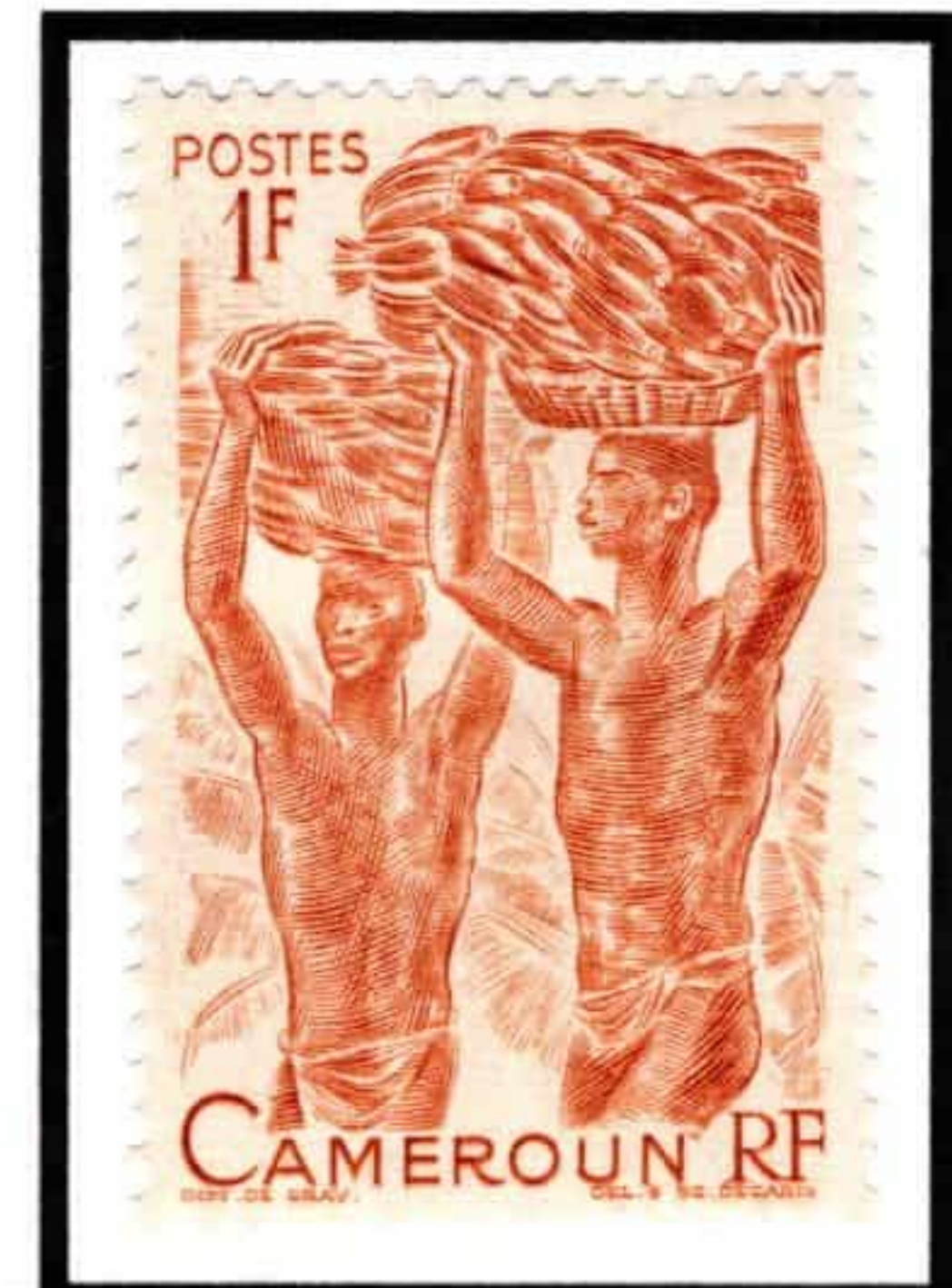


A 1976 Togolese commemorative.



banan إصبع

Men ferrying plantains in East Africa circa 1960.



Banana harvesting: above 1946, below 1959.



The cancel below is from the city of Banana on the DRC's south coast.



From a 1959 five stamp series.



From a 2001 series on Kenyan crops.

Stamps from Guinea, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya. These countries stretch in a belt from the west coast to the east coast across the middle of the African continent, part of the area most reliant on the banana.

The Spread of Bananas around the World i) Africa

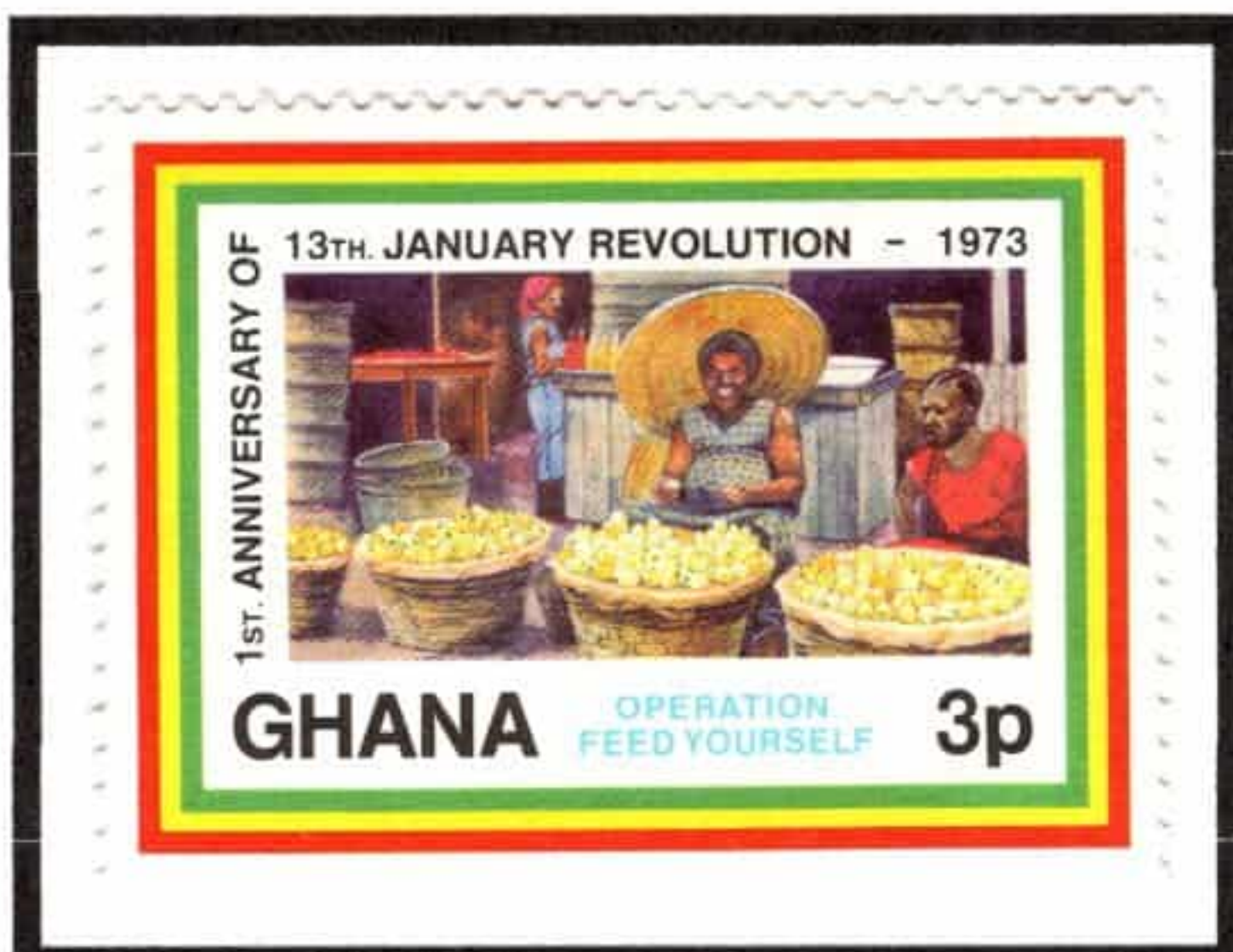
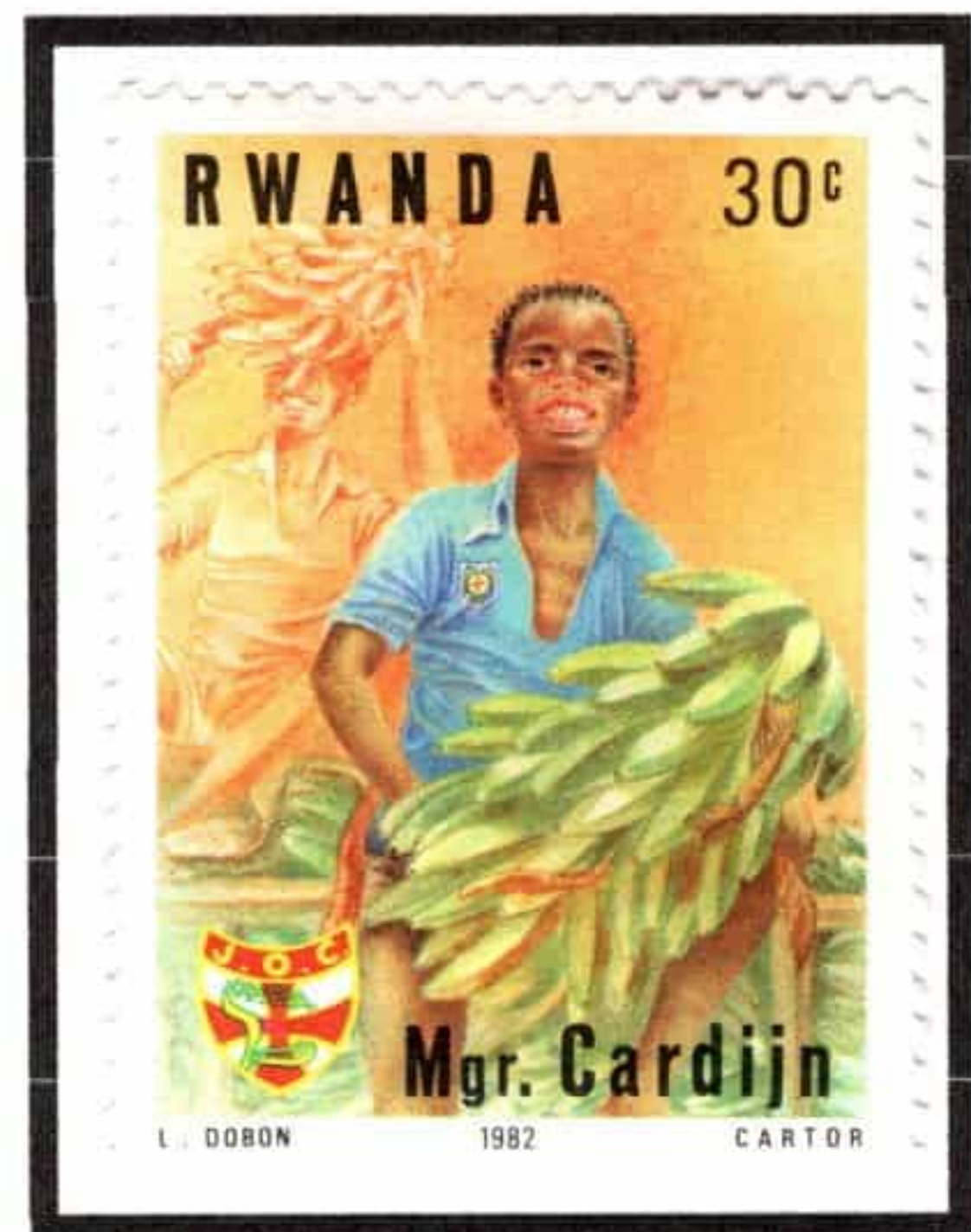


A French photo postcard from a series on French Guinea printed at the turn of the last century. This one showing a banana plantation, part of the A.O.F. Agricultural School. The caption reads "A banana diet".

Banana production plays a crucial role in African economies. It serves as a source of income for millions of smallholder farmers and provides significant employment opportunities. While there is some level of export, most are consumed locally.



From Cameroon's 1954 definitive issue. The artwork is by Robert Cami, a renowned French artist who designed a number of stamps in addition to his other work, some of which hang in London's National Gallery.



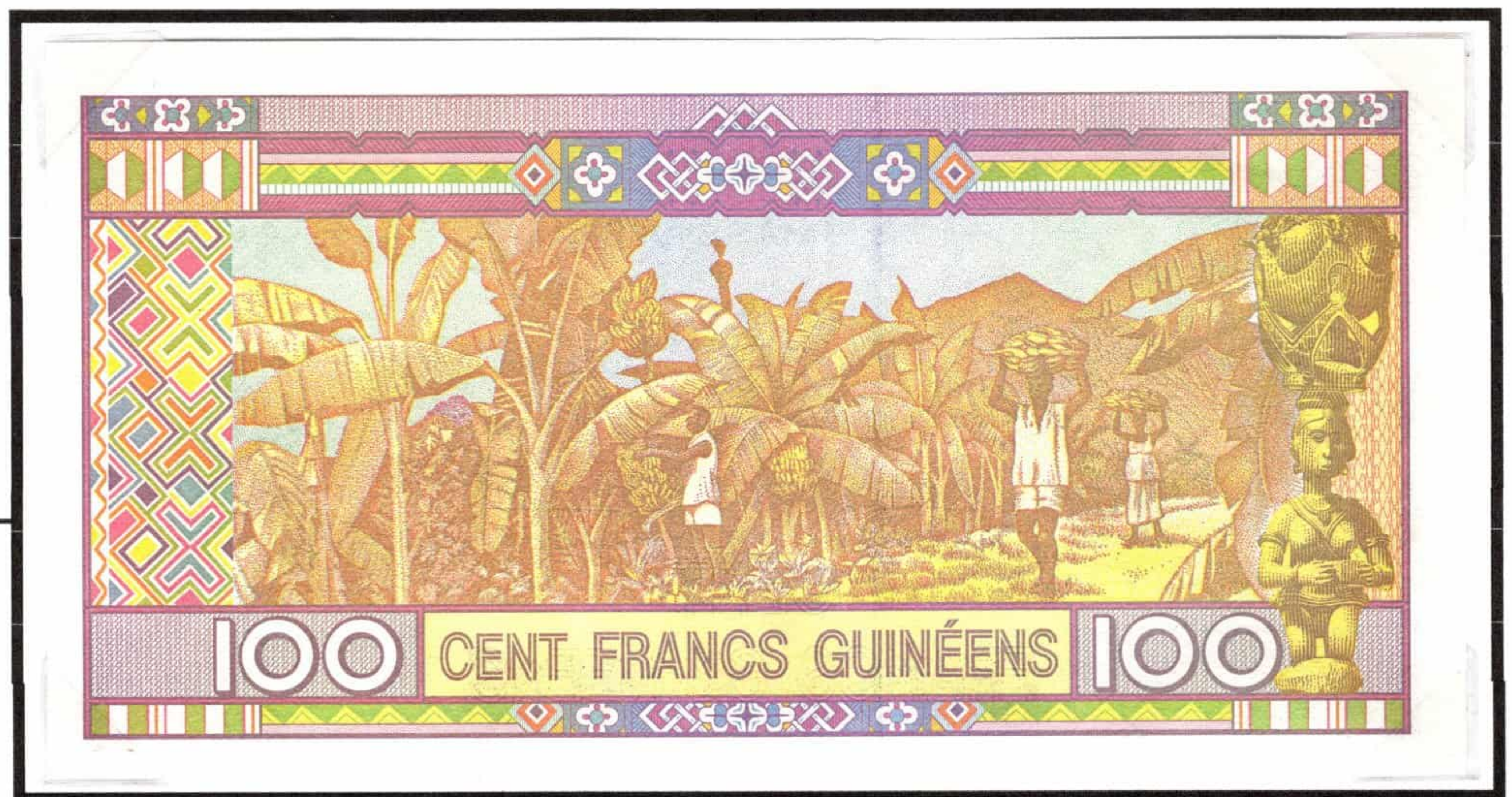
From 1973's "Feed Yourself" issue showing banana sellers.

Over 80% of African grown bananas are green cooking bananas.



Sierra Leone, 1933. Punters near the Banana Islands.

A colourful banknote from Guinea with a banana plantation pictured on the reverse side. The speaks to the importance of the crop to the country.



The Spread of Bananas Around the World ii) Europe

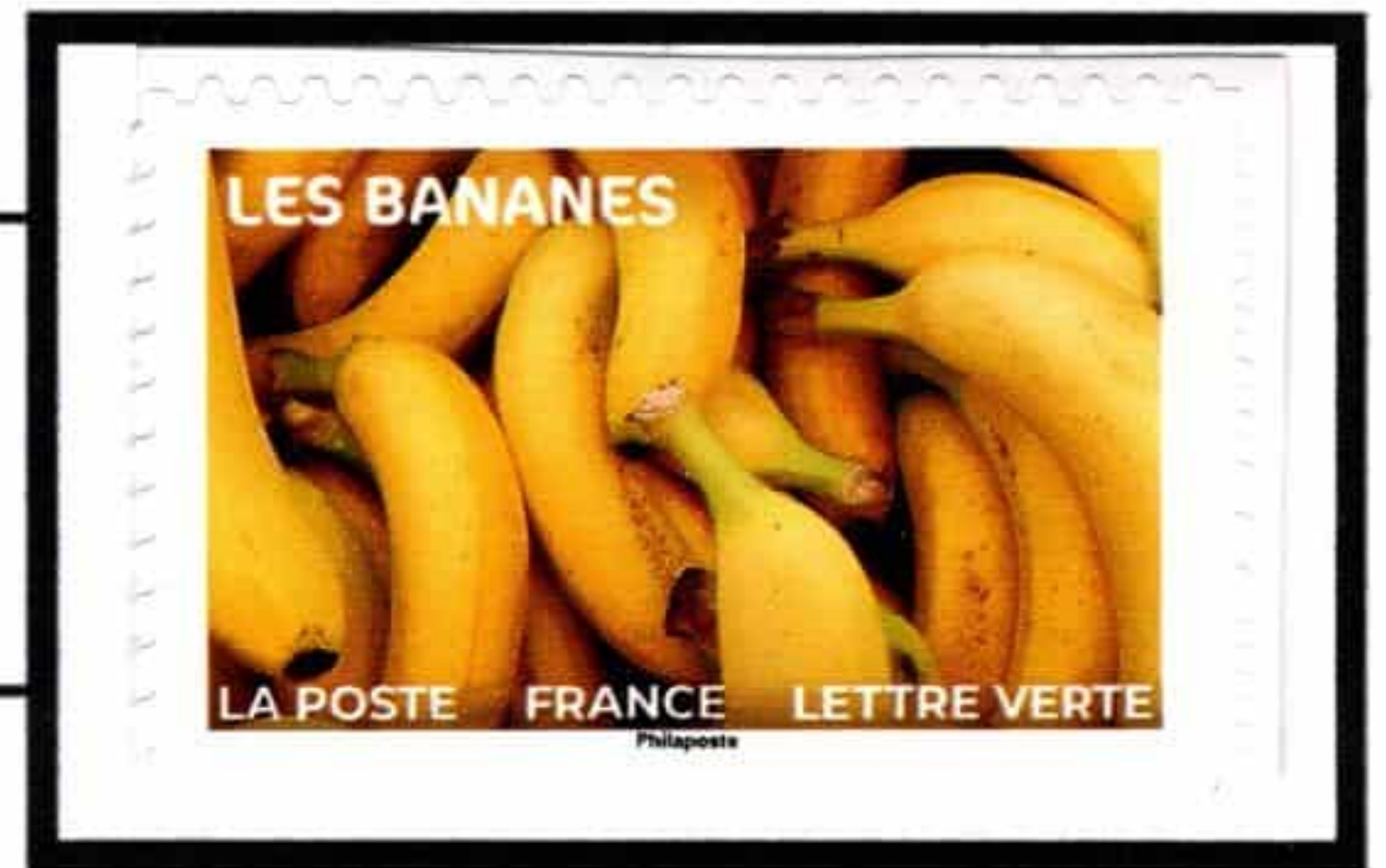
The first Western recorded mention of bananas dates back to ancient Greek texts, where they were referred to as "fruit of the wise." However, it wasn't until the 15th century that bananas began appearing in European markets thanks to Portuguese explorers who brought them back from their travels.



A beautifully engraved French stamp from 1945 with bananas in the bottom corners. The stamp was printed by *Institut de Gravure et d'Impression de Papiers-Valeurs*, Paris. The institute played a significant role in producing postage stamps (engraving and printing), notably stamps from French Guinea and French Equatorial Africa.



From a 2023 series on fruit, this is a Green Letter rate stamp, an ecological alternative to the regular rates.



Circa 1935 - a French advertising postcard promoting bananas as an ideal food for children.

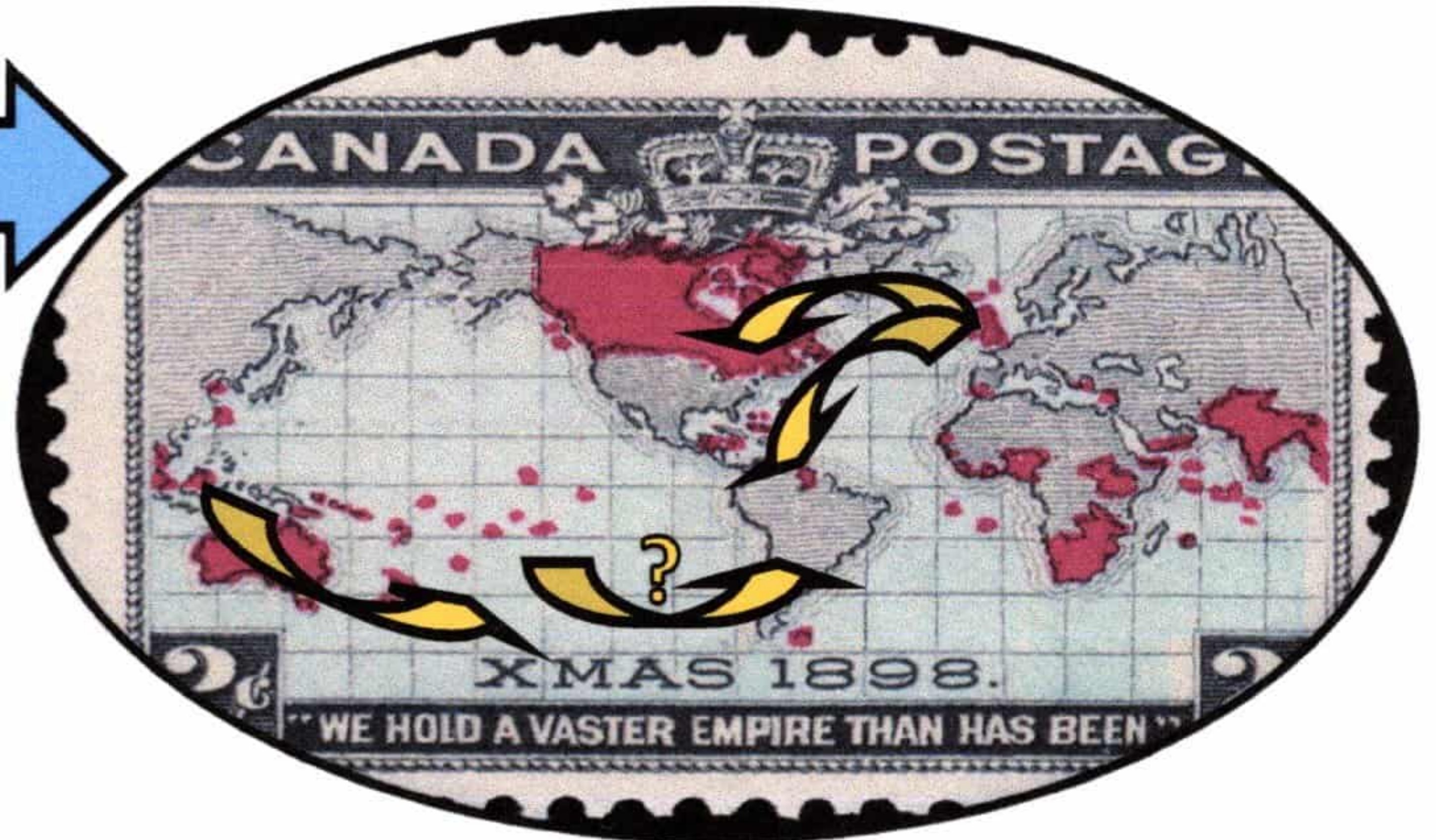


A couple selling bananas on the street in post war Germany.

A German advertising stamp circa 1920s: "Home of the Jamaican Banana". Influenced by Art Nouveau and Art Deco, these stamps were used by companies to promote products, events and services and were often included or given away with products.

The Spread of Bananas around the World iii) the New World

There are a couple of theories as to when bananas first made their way to the New World. It's possible some intrepid Polynesian sea-farers made their way to South America from Easter Island. Pottery shards and other items found in Ecuador, estimated to be over a thousand years old, were found to be more Polynesian than South American...and where Polynesians went, bananas followed.



1932 Cook Island issue featuring an open water double canoe. Some of these canoes were 100 feet long and could carry 250 people.

Alternatively, they may have first come to the Americas and the West Indies with European advances into the New World. However they came, they rapidly took root and became part of the local landscapes.



A 1907 postcard carrying a 1906 1/2 penny stamp featuring the Jamaican Coat of Arms. The card itself shows the ever present banana trees found through the tropical regions of the Americas.

*Typical
Native
Homestead
Jamaica W.I.*

*Jas. Johnston, Brown's Town, P.O.
and another.
From Orford M. Hall
C/o Augusto & Co
Averythill St Thomas
Jamaica
Sanish West Indies*



Part of an un-perforated souvenir sheet from Ecuador's 1964 Special Meeting on Bananas.



Costa Rica Air-Post Imperforated Plate Proof from a five stamp series issued for the 1950 National Agricultural, Livestock and Industrial Fair held in the city of Cartago. The dominant position of bananas to the sector is reflected in their use on these stamps.



How Bananas Grow

To understand production, we need to know how bananas grow. Botanically speaking, bananas are berries. Banana "trees" are technically not trees, they are really herbaceous plants. Instead of a tree's usual trunk or woody stem, banana plants' stems are composed of multiple individual leaf stalks.

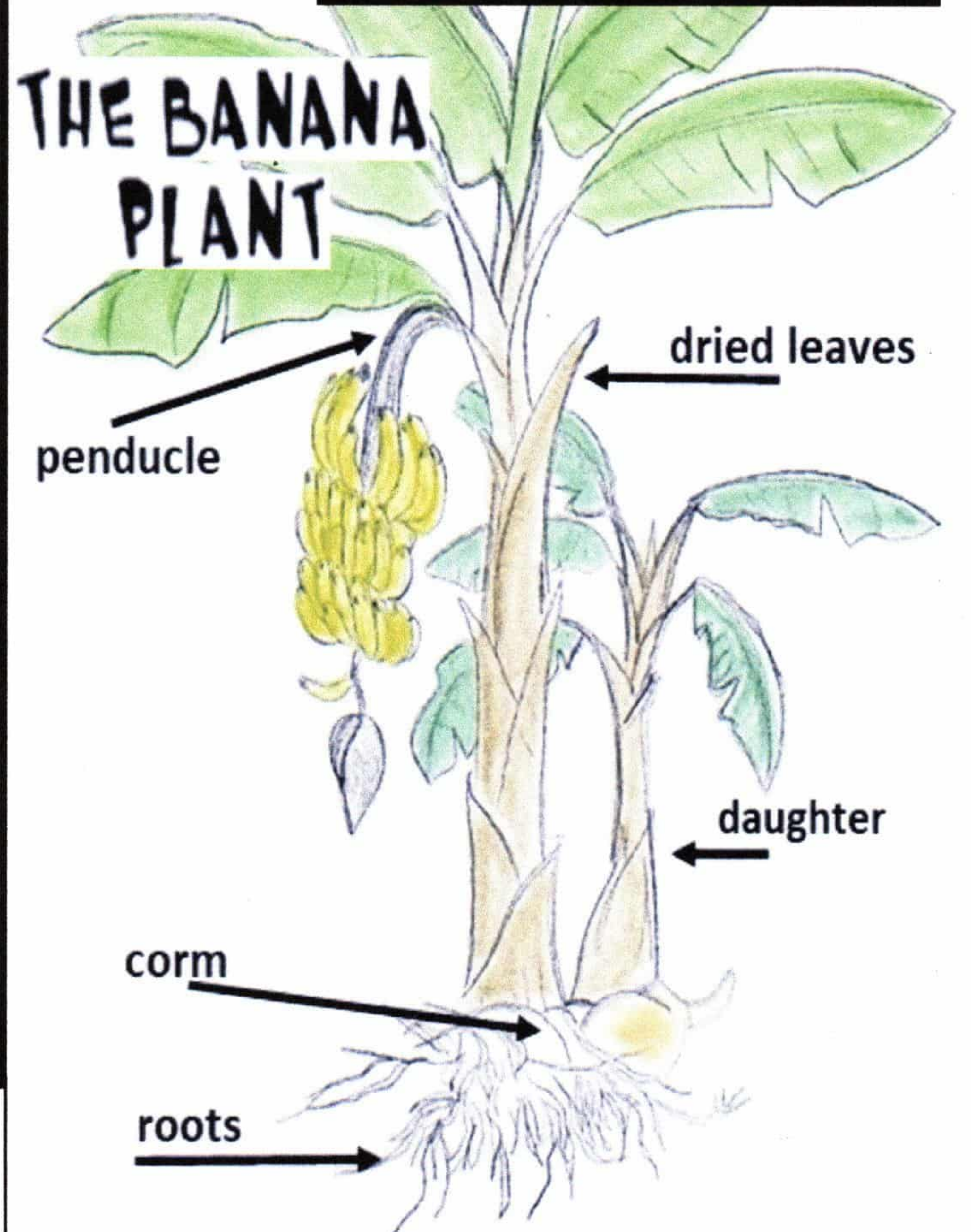
The heart of a banana plant is something called a corm. This is a bulb like part of the plant that lies underground. Suckers grow from the corm producing new plants - sometimes referred to as "daughters" of the original plant.

About a dozen daughters come from a corm so a hand-full of corms will eventually get you a banana plantation.



Bananas just a few days old. The fingers point upwards thanks to something scientists call "negative geotropism". The rest of us call it growing towards the sunlight.

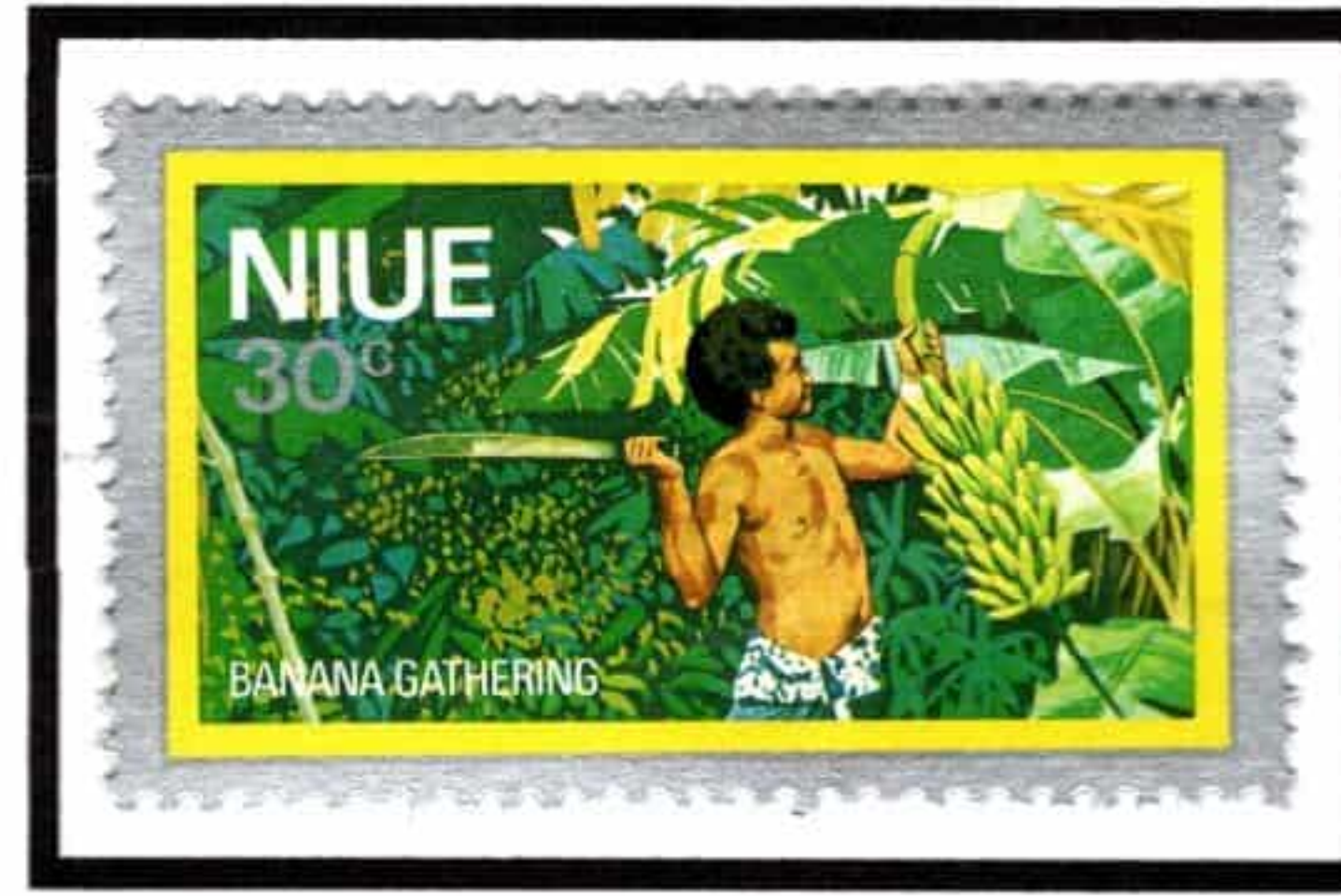
A daughter plant can be seen at bottom right of this stamp from Bermuda's 1994 definitive issue.



Production : Small Scale Farming

Bananas are the most consumed fruit in the world with approximately 100 billion consumed every year globally.

Only 15% of global green banana production is used in trade, the rest is consumed domestically in the countries where they are grown, often by smaller producers providing for a local market.



Issued for Commonwealth Day, this 1983 stamp carries the image of a local farmer.



Inner stalls, Montego Bay Market – circa 1965.

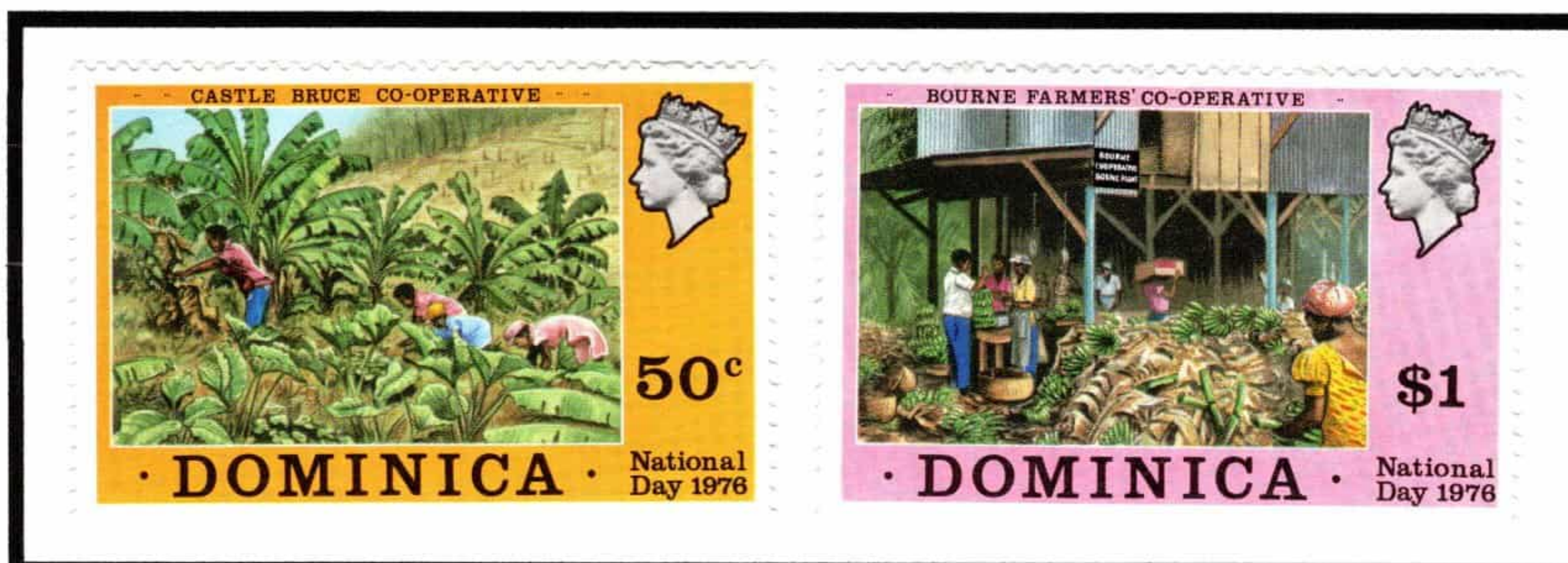
The food here is all produced at a local level.

The card was produced by The Novelty Trading Co. Ltd.

Based in Kingston, the company has been in business since 1925.



John Player cigarette card from 1904. Jamaican farmers harvesting bananas for transport to market by donkey.

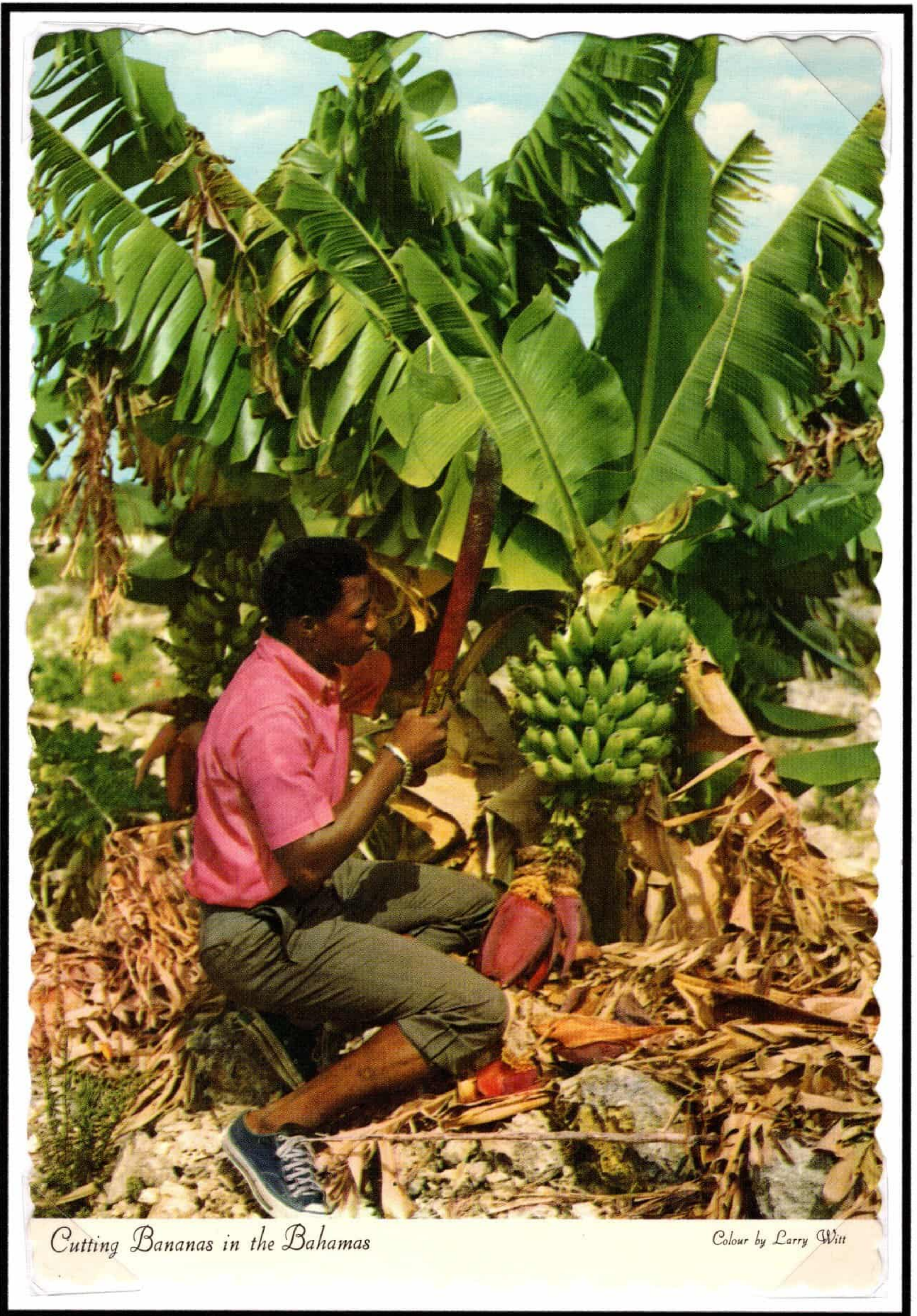


Jamaica's 1963 "Freedom From Hunger" issue promoting self-reliance and small market crops.



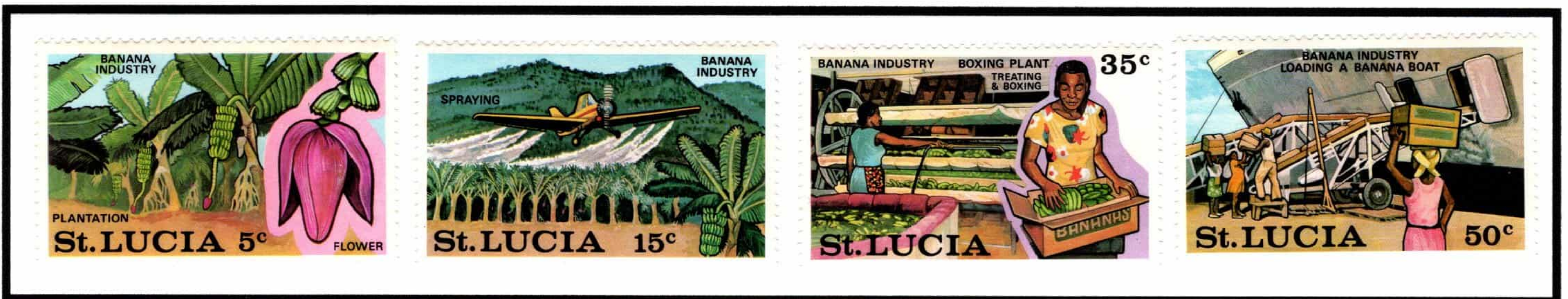
"Banana Gatherer" from Brazil's 1976 definitive series. The stamp was designed by Marta Caval Canti Poppe, one of Brazil's most prolific stamp artists. She worked at the Post and Telegraph Company (ECT) in its Philatelic Department as a designer for some 33 years.

Production : Commercial Scale



Picking bananas is delicate work and is still done only by hand. Considerable care is required to ensure that the fruit is not damaged during the process.

The two series of stamps here outline the basic steps of commercial banana production. Hand picking of the fruit and transportation to the sorting/boxing plant where it is readied for transportation to market via container ship.



Production: Commercial Scale



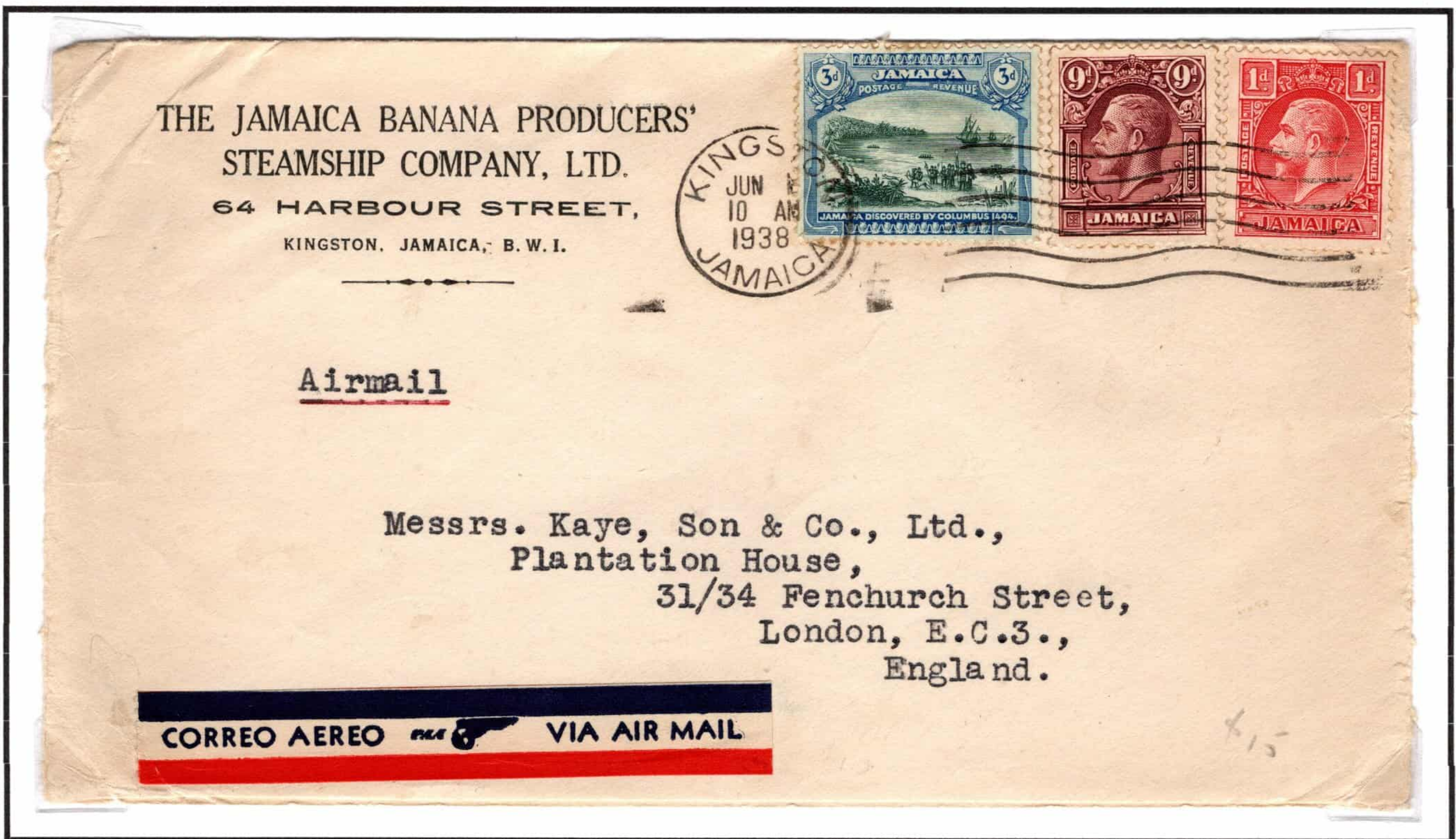
Corporations such as Dole and Del Monte own their own farms in Guatemala (below), Ecuador and other South American countries. Once leaders in banana exports, the West Indies has fallen from its place of dominance.



The first banana plantations in Australia were started by Chinese migrants working in the gold-fields. Today, Australia has a robust commercial banana industry, primarily dessert bananas grown locally (by Australian standards that is) in areas along the western, northern and eastern coasts.



Production: Commercial Transportation



The JBPSS Co. Ltd. was formed in 1929 to carry bananas to Europe and passengers and general cargo to Jamaica. This 1938 letter was to Kaye, Son & Co. Ltd., ship owners and brokers heavily involved with the Caribbean banana trade.



From Dominica's 1969 definitive issue. Lighters ferry bananas to a waiting cargo ship for transportation to off-shore markets.

Jamaica was the first commercial producer of bananas in the Western Hemisphere with most of her product shipped to Europe and North American.



"Loading Bananas" from St. Lucy's beautiful 1938 definitive series featuring George VI and local scenes.



With apologies to Harry Belafonte, while the cutting and transportation was usually done by men, the actual loading onto ships was a job primarily done by women.

Production : Commercial Transportation



The world's primary import markets continue to be North America and Europe with South America and the West Indies supplying the need.

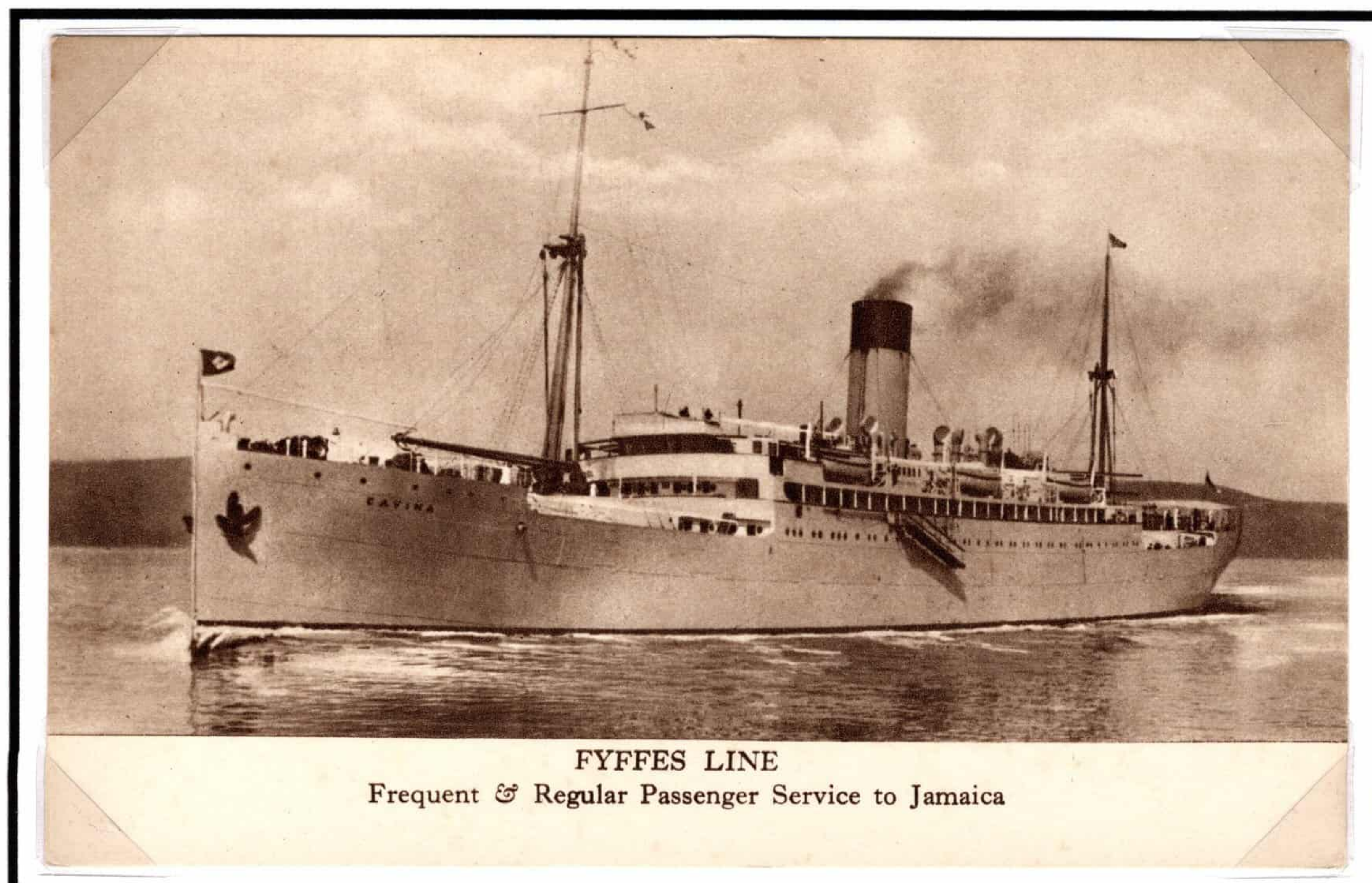


A 2 cent/centavo Cinderella, good for newspapers and letters, from the banana carrying Central American Steamship Co.



Fyffes started importing bananas to England in 1888 and is still in the business. I got this "Top Banana" game bank note in 1968 on a trip from Jamaica to England on one of their ships, the "Golfito". The game, of course, is about the banana industry - growing, harvesting, packaging, shipping and marketing.

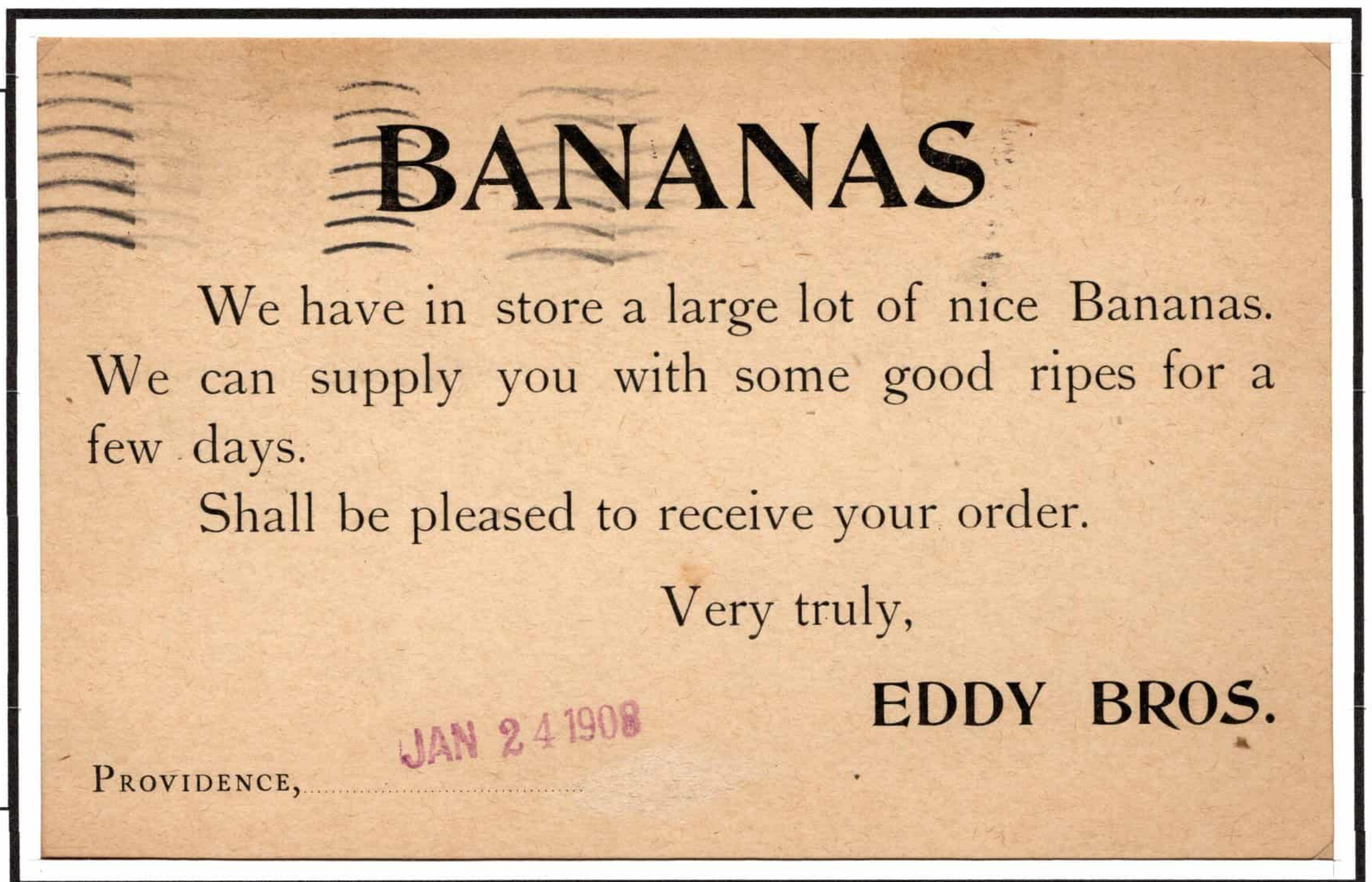
"Banana boat" is the descriptive nickname that was given to fast ships engaged in the banana trade. They were designed to transport the easily spoiled bananas rapidly from tropical growing areas to North America and Europe. They often carried passengers as well as fruit.





Lloyd and Charles Eddy started a wholesale fruit business in Providence in 1883, under the name of "Eddy Bros.; Fruit-dealers," and they carried on the business for forty years. Much of their tropical fruit was transported through the port of New Orleans.

1908 US UX10 banana availability advertising card. These cards were in common use in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by businesses such as this one.



Unloading and sorting in New Orleans, "The World's Greatest Banana Port", before transporting to final destinations, such as the Eddy Bros. for retail sale.

This card, produced by the Louisiana News Company out of New Orleans, shows a sorting plant.



Conclusion



PRICE CURRENT OF
W. E. STAGG, JR.
FOREIGN FRUITS,
18 Jay Street, New York, *May 2* 1882.

183 Rialto

ORANGES.

Valencia, (420) case.....	.....
Imperial, case.....	.....
Messina, box.....	.....
Palermo, " <i>strawberries</i>".....	.....
Florida, " <i>strawberries</i>".....	.....
Jamaica Stem Cut, bbbs.....	.....

LEMONS.

Messina, box.....	.....
Palermo, " <i>strawberries</i>".....	.....
Catania, " <i>strawberries</i>".....	.....
Malaga, case.....	.....
Palermo, " <i>strawberries</i>".....	.....

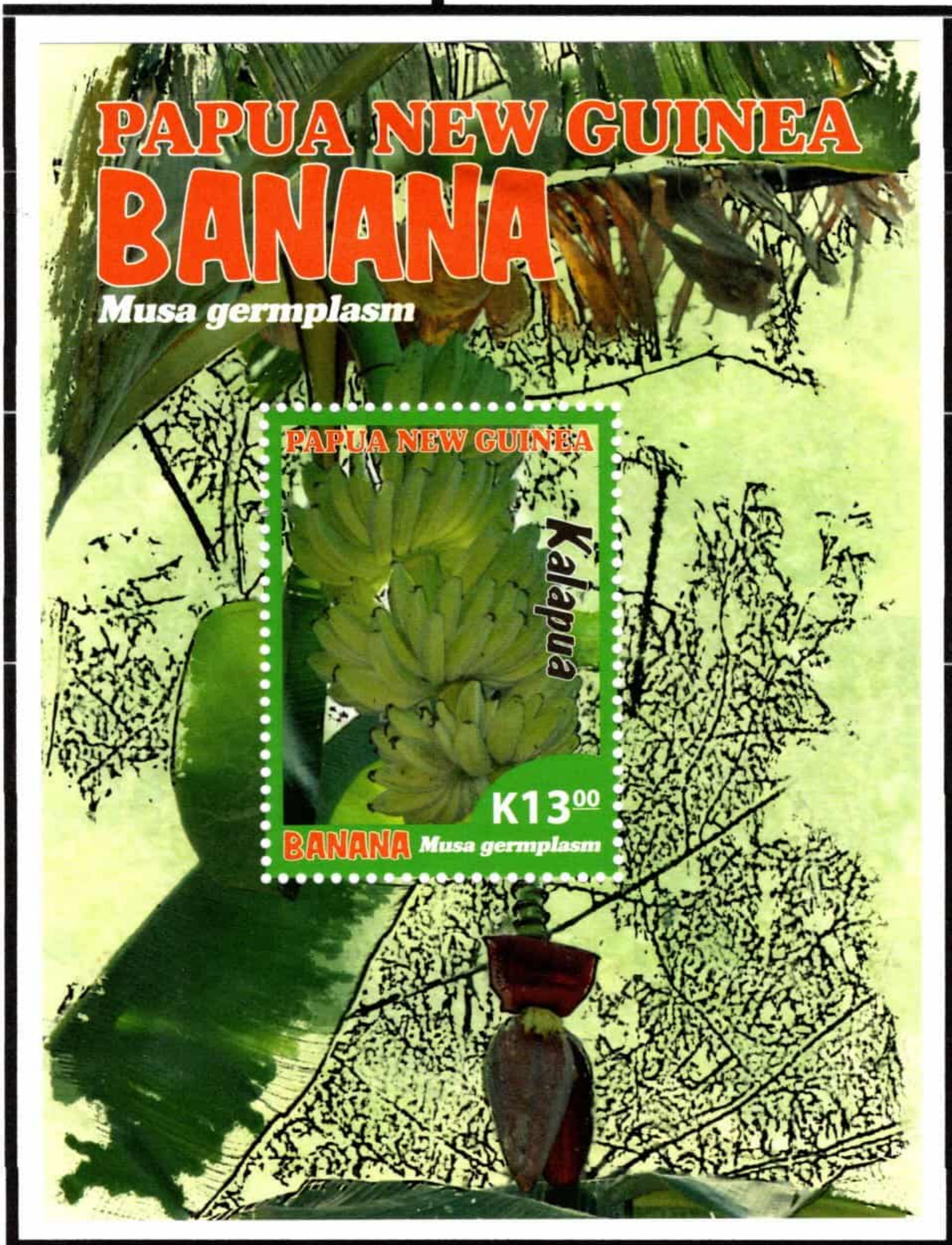
BANANAS.

Aspinwall, yellow, bunch.....	.....
Spanish, red, bunch.....	.....

All orders will meet with careful and prompt at day of shipment.



"Bananas", one of Jamaica's most often re-printed stamps in its 1938, 1949, 1952 and 1981 formats.



So there you have the story of the banana. Its origins and types, its 7,000 year journey that spread it to all of the world's tropical regions, its place today as a major food source and a look at the industry it has become.

A truly remarkable fruit and one worthy of more than a passing glance as we stroll down a supermarket aisle.

Happy peeling.

