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Banacol opens plant in Philly

By **Jim Offner**

(July 23) A summer of aggressive expansion is continuing for Colombia-based C.I. Banacol SA, which just opened a new warehouse and distribution center near Philadelphia.

Banacol Marketing Corp., a major supplier of tropical fruits, plantains, pineapples and bananas, formally opened its new 80,000-square-foot facility in Eddystone, Pa., July 20, although the facility had been up and running for several weeks.

The facility, company officials said, has cold-storage capacity for more than 10,000 pallets of mixed produce. It also has a forced-air cooling room that can handle as many as 980 pallets at one time.

More than 200 truckloads of product are shipped out of the facility each week, said Sandy Daniel, vice president of operations and director of the new plant.

Banacol is based in Envigado, Colombia, and has branches in Costa Rica; Coral Gables, Fla.; Antwerp, Belgium; and Philadelphia.

The new Philadelphia-area operation has 11 full-time employees, with more than 70 additional support workers based elsewhere.

INNOVATIONS

The warehouse brings several cooling innovations, said Jim Still, president of Global Logic LLC, the Media, Pa.-company that designed the plant.



Banacol Marketing Corp., Envigado, Colombia, has opened a new facility in Philadelphia that has 80,000 square feet of space. More than 200 truckloads are shipped from the facility weekly.



“The Banacol facility will be the first of its type in the world to monitor and control, not only temperature, but oxygen, CO₂, ethylene, and relative humidity,” he said.

Opening the new plant came about a month after Banacol finalized a deal to purchase a 13,000-acre banana-growing operation and port facilities in northern Colombia from Cincinnati-based Chiquita Brands International Inc. for about \$51.5 million.

That deal made Banacol the largest banana producer in Colombia, at about 23 million boxes per year, said Bill Sheridan, executive sales and marketing vice president.

Now, he said, the new distribution facility strengthens the company’s reach into East Coast and Canadian markets.

“It doesn’t come very often, where you can build a facility from the ground up,” he said. “We’re taking this opportunity to do it the right way. It’s just going to enhance our position in the marketplace.”

Banacol exports about 28 million boxes of bananas per year, including product from Costa Rica.

The new facility also helps Banacol with ramped up production of tropical fruits and gold-variety pineapples grown in Costa Rica, Sheridan said.

Daniel said the company ships about 4,500 pallets per week in bananas, gold pineapples, plantains, tropicals and frozen products out of the new operation.

EUROPE

The new facility likely will help the company advance its plans to return to European markets, Posada said.

“We’re looking at different opportunities,” she said. “We have some very large distributors that are interested in purchasing a significant amount of volume per week.”

Banacol has not had a presence in European markets since the late 1990s, Posada said.

“Europe is one of the main banana markets in the world, and this a chance for us to be there again,” she said.

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