



## The story of Angel Iñiguez, 31 Banana farmer at El Guabo, Ecuador

*'For us, being in El Guabo and selling Fairtrade bananas has meant that our family are well looked after and that we can stay together. The finca provides an income for all of us; my parents, my brother, sisters and their families as well as my own. We always take a lot of care over the finca. I like to make it look beautiful so that it is a lovely place to be. It gives me great pleasure to see all the flowers amongst the bananas each day and I bring my daughter here to show her.'*



**Angel is married and has a young daughter Daniella, who is 2½ years old. He tells about his life as a banana producer.**

'I have nearly 6 hectares of land which my father bought in my name. All of my family works here together. My father and I tend to the banana plants every day. My mother, sisters, brother and brother-in-law work in the washing and packing station on the *finca* on harvesting and shipment days.

I really enjoy the countryside and agriculture. I have been living here for the last 10 years since finishing my studies. We're surrounded by other small producers in the region. We always take a lot of care over the *finca*. I like to make it look beautiful so that it is a lovely place to be. It gives me great pleasure to see all the flowers amongst the bananas each day and I bring my daughter here to show her.

We have been members of El Guabo for 4 years now. It was always an aim of ours to join, but we rented this land until 2004 and so it wasn't possible. Then, thanks to God, we were able to buy it. I wanted us to be in El Guabo because I knew that as small producers we would be better off. There is a fair price all year round, and the volumes are more stable. To be able to buy the land we had to sell a small truck that my father had bought. He was reluctant to sell it because we could make money transporting goods in it. He told me that I needed to wake up and make sure that I knew what I was doing. In the end I managed to convince him that it was a good thing to sell the truck to have the money to buy the land and to join El Guabo.





For us, being in El Guabo and selling Fairtrade organic bananas has meant that our family are well looked after and that we can stay together. The *finca* provides an income for all of us; my parents, my brother, sisters and their families as well as my own. Our income from bananas has improved and my father has been able to buy another small truck to replace the one he sold. He made the right decision.

It was too hard here before we joined El Guabo. We had no security or stability in terms of price or volume because we sold our bananas to intermediary buyers for whatever price they offered us. Sometimes we would get good prices, say \$6 or \$7 a box, but then prices would fall as low as \$0.80 to \$1 a box. We were too small to sell to the big multinational companies, they only want to buy much bigger volumes directly from producers. We were never able to plan any projects to make improvements to the *finca* or to our home.

We never bought anything for our house before we joined El Guabo. Now we have been able to buy a fridge and to replace some of our very old furniture. Because we have more income and can employ two people to work with me it means that my father doesn't have to work as much. He is 68 years old and before we all had to work 7 days a week. Now we don't work on Sundays and my father doesn't have to work so hard, he can potter around more. Besides that we know we provide to other families with an income by employing two people. This is the difference that the Fairtrade systems make, it doesn't only change our lives but we are also able to help others.

Since joining El Guabo, our *finca* has improved such a lot. El Guabo provided us with low interest credit so that we could invest on the *finca*. We have built a cable wire system to transport the harvested bananas from the banana plants to the washing and packing station. We used to have to carry them on our shoulders for up to 350 metres. Each one weighs from 20 to 30 kilograms so it was exhausting work. Now, the furthest we ever have to carry them is 50 metres to hook them onto the cable system. We have built a proper washing and packing station.

We have a concrete floor now whereas it used to just be the earth. When it rained and we were standing washing bananas in the tanks, we used to sink into the mud. We never used to have access to a water supply to irrigate the banana plants, we had to wait for the dirty run-off water to come into our canals from neighbouring land. It wasn't very clean or sufficient. With assistance from El Guabo, we located a fresh water source on our *finca*. It is fantastic, we are no longer reliant on the river water run offs from other farms and our production has increased by 30%. The banana plants didn't produce as many bananas because they weren't getting enough water. The water is clean and crystal clear and there are lots of fish and shrimp in it, which means the water is healthy and not contaminated.

In El Guabo, our farm workers have health insurance paid for them, they receive a food hamper once a month and an allowance for school equipment for their children. I am pleased that we can offer this support because they have real needs and they only earn a basic wage.

My family, the workers and I all use the medical centre provided by El Guabo and funded by the Fairtrade premium. Before if we had any problem we had to go to the hospital. It is free but unless you are an emergency case, often you aren't treated or seen because they are too busy. There are private medical clinics but they cost a lot.

*The important thing is to keep helping us by buying our Fairtrade bananas. We are small producers and by buying our bananas, you are helping us and the workers on our farms to progress. If you don't buy our fruit, we can't look forward to better times and keep taking care of the environment!*

