ALLIANCE FOR
WATER STEWARDSHIP

CI TÉCNICAS BALTIME DE COLOMBIA S.A.

COLOMBIA

NOVEMBER 2020

Dole

Tecbaco
C.I. Técnicas Baltime de Colombia S.A.

south pole

WWF
STRONG PARTNERS
FOR MORE
SUSTAINABILITY.

EDEKA

INTRODUCTION

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) is a global collaboration between businesses, NGOs and the public sector focused on the sustainability of local water resources.

AWS Members drive, recognize and reward good water stewardship by adopting and promoting a universal framework for the sustainable use of water – The International Water Stewardship Standard, or AWS Standard. The AWS Standard offers a credible, globally applicable framework for water users to understand their own water use and impacts. It provides the tools for transparent collaboration with others to implement sustainable water management practices across the wider water catchment. By following the steps and guidance in the AWS Standard implementers are improving site water performance and contributing to global sustainability goals.[1]
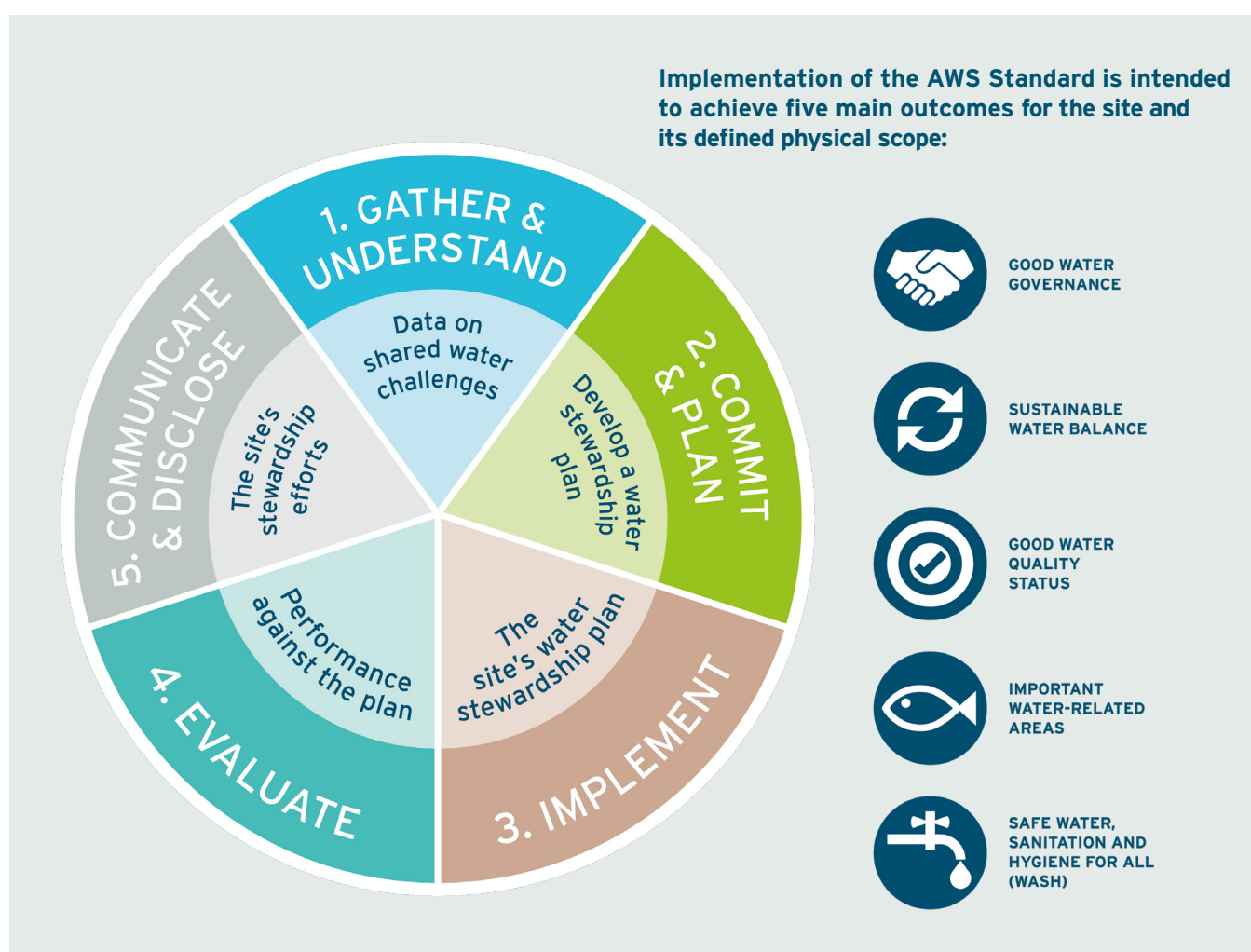
Implementation of the AWS Standard is intended to achieve five main outcomes for the site and its defined physical scope:

GOOD WATER GOVERNANCE

SUSTAINABLE WATER BALANCE

GOOD WATER QUALITY STATUS

IMPORTANT WATER-RELATED AREAS

SAFE WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE FOR ALL (WASH)

Figure 1. The AWS Standard V2.0: Five Steps and Five Outcomes

[1] a4ws.org

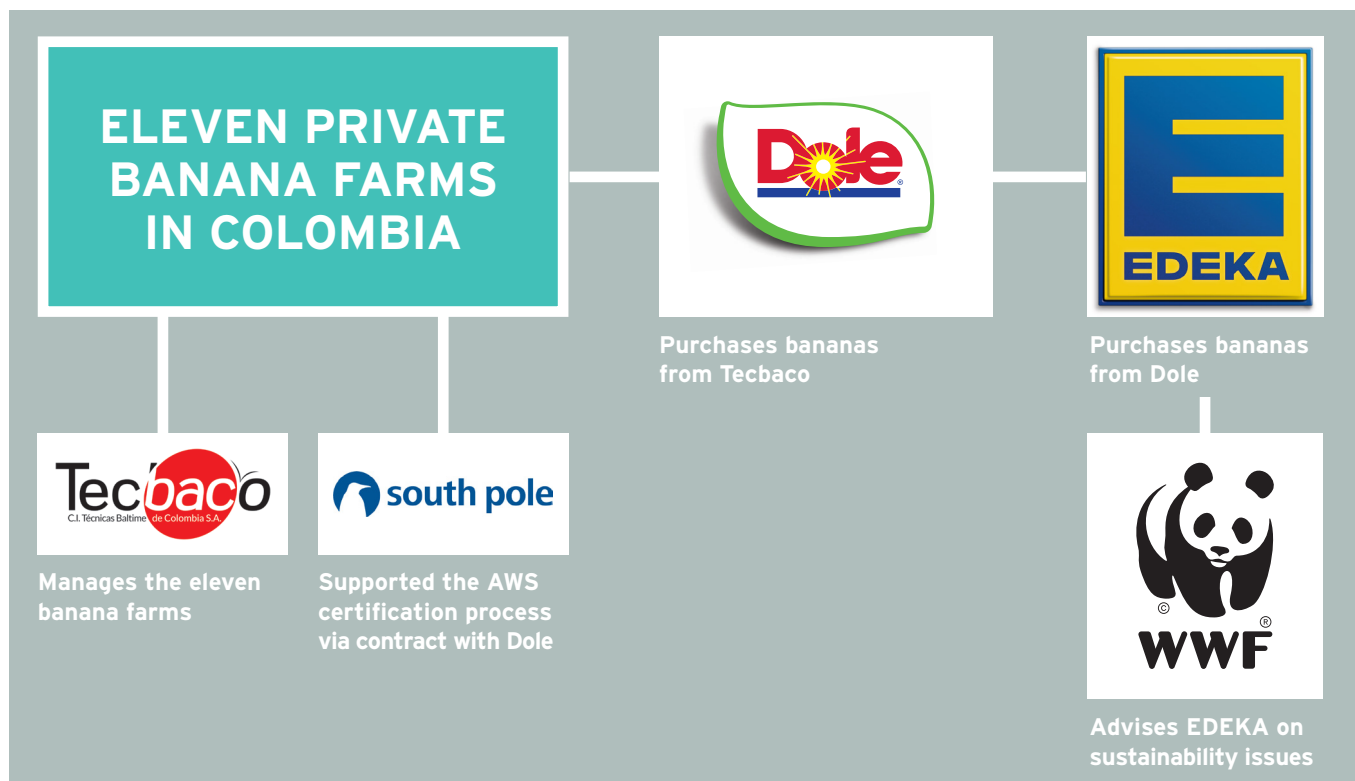Cover Photo: Bananas post-harvest, Ecuador. © Denis Ünver / WWF Germany.

OVERVIEW

The German food retailer EDEKA[2] is dedicated to making positive impacts on the environment and ensuring the sustainability of its food supply chains. EDEKA has partnered with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)[3] [4] to achieve its environmental goals, including applying the AWS Standard to drive good water stewardship practices. As part of this commitment, the partners decided to work with Dole Food Company, one of the largest producers of fruit and vegetables in the world and a key supplier to EDEKA, to implement the AWS Standard on 11 privately owned banana farms in Colombia managed by CI Técnicas Baltime de Colombia S.A (Tecbaco).

The farms are located in the Rio Frio-Rio Sevilla catchment where high water demand from agriculture is causing pressure on water resources in the region, especially during the three months of the dry season, January to March (Figure 2). The Sustainability Consultancy, South Pole[5] joined the project as a technical partner and helped farms to implement the AWS Standard and obtain the certification.

The 11 banana farms vary in size from 50-230 hectares, which are all considered large for Colombia. Due to the size of the operations, each farm is the source of hundreds of local jobs that are required to manage the plantation and the packaging facility installed in each of them. The farms are under the same management [Tecbaco][6] and worked together to achieve AWS Group Certification[7]. It is the first AWS Group Certification in the world, making it a particularly exciting achievement for all involved. The farms are also the first sites in Colombia to achieve AWS certification, making them leaders in water stewardship.

Group Certification is designed to facilitate collaboration amongst group members and to help reduce the costs of certification. The cost per group member is usually lower than if each group member pursued certification individually. It provides a way for more than one operation to be certified under a single AWS Certificate, as long as all group members' sites are located in the same catchment.

ELEVEN PRIVATE BANANA FARMS IN COLOMBIA

Dole — Purchases bananas from Tecbaco

EDEKA — Purchases bananas from Dole

Tecbaco — Manages the eleven banana farms

south pole — Supported the AWS certification process via contract with Dole

WWF — Advises EDEKA on sustainability issues

---

[2] https://www.edeka.de/nachhaltigkeit/unsere-wwf-partnerschaft/suesswasser/index.jsp

[3] www.panda.org

[4] https://www.behance.net/gallery/89403561/EDEKA-Water-Stewardship

[5] www.southpole.com

[6] Tecbaco website www.tecbaco.com

[7] For the purpose of certification, AWS distinguishes three types of operations: Single Site, Multi-Site and Group Certification

CONTEXT

The banana farms are situated between one of the world's highest coastal mountain ranges to the east, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and lush wetlands to the west, the Internationally designated Ramsar[8] wetland site of Cienaga Grande de Santa Maria. They are also near to the popular tourist destination Santa Marta and Tayrona National Park, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. Water travels down from the mountains to the ecologically significant coastal wetlands through this agricultural area, where the main crops are bananas and palm oil. During the dry season, water availability falls but the demand for these crops remains high. To meet their water demand, farms use irrigation systems fed with water from the municipal water provider, which relies on water from the Rivers Rio-Frío and Río Sevilla.

The same river sources also supply the poorly developed public water supply that is at times under pressure. In addition, farms use underground water for other operations such as provision of drinking water to workers or operation of the workers' canteen.

During recent years, climate change has increased extreme drought and flood events. This, combined with a growing population and tourism development creates additional pressure on the existing water challenges. There is a lack of accurate information about the demand for water in the catchment, but an initial study, conducted by Good Stuff International (GSI)[9], which looked at the demand for water for both banana and palm oil, indicated a critical situation for the catchment, especially during the dry season.
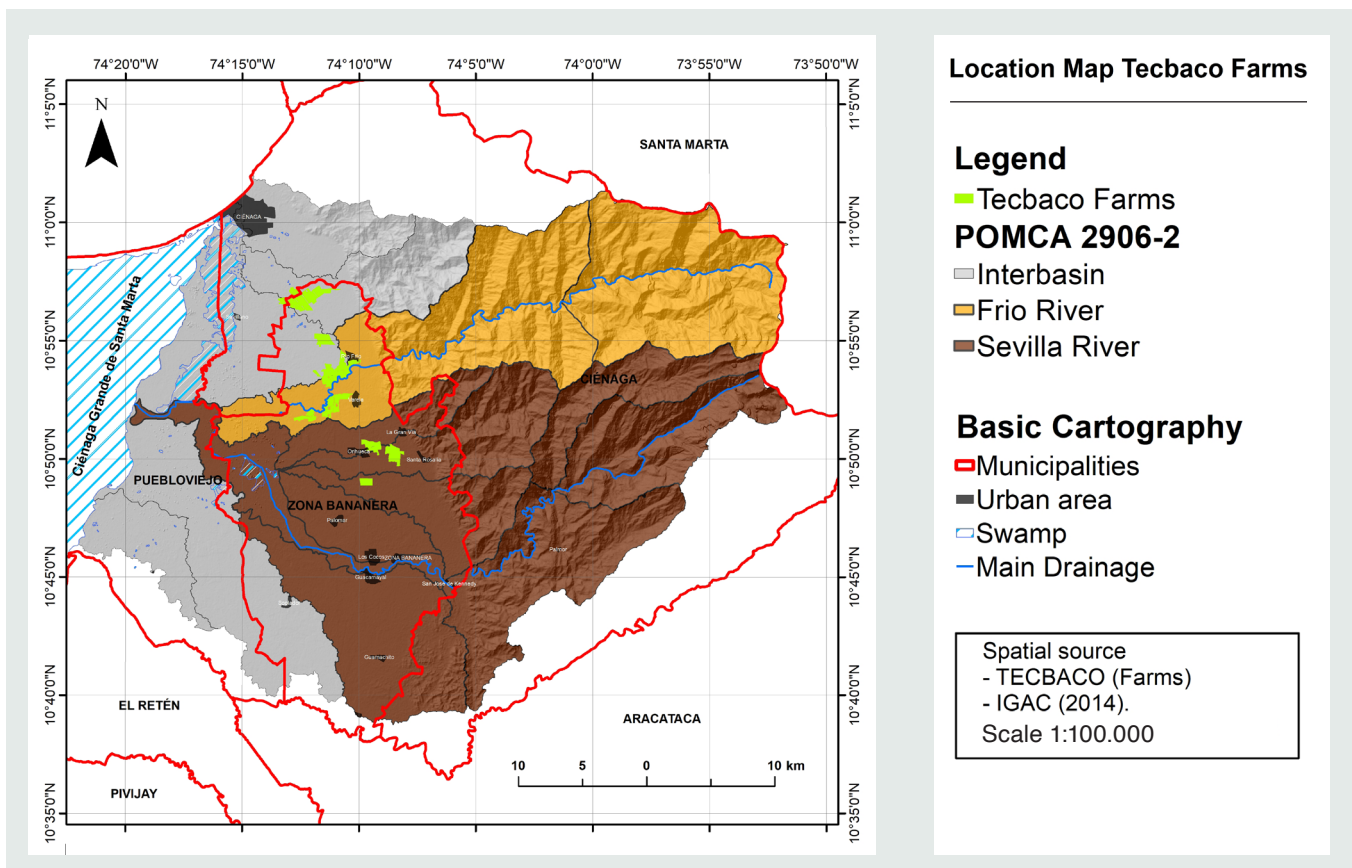

Figure 2. Rio Frio-Rio Sevilla catchment where the 11 banana farms are located
Source: WWF Colombia, 2020

---

8 The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance www.ramsar.org

9 http://www.goodstuffinternational.com/index.php/en/component/content/article/54-news/141-empowering-people-for-action-at-the-river-basin-and-supply-chain-levels-with-robust-waterinformation?Itemid=115

WHY AWS?

To address water stress in the catchment, one of the actions taken by the banana farms before the AWS certification, in partnership with WWF, was the creation of a multi-stakeholder platform – the Platform for Water Stewardship (Plataforma de custodia del agua in Spanish[10]). Farms were also implementing a toolbox of measures to reduce the use of agrochemicals and the use of water, as well as increase biodiversity, protect water bodies and improve labour rights, amongst others. A representative of Tecbaco participates in the periodic Platform meetings with other catchment users and relevant stakeholders such as local authorities, NGOs and businesses to discuss shared challenges, organize collective action and ensure stakeholder inclusion and participation in the catchment.

The AWS Standard was an opportunity for the banana farms to identify and implement clear activities towards collective action, become a driver of positive change and to explore how to deliver long-lasting benefits beyond the farm level. Through implementing and receiving AWS certification, the banana farms have become role models not only for other growers in the catchment; they have also shown their clients that they are ready to address water challenges in a transparent and collective way and distinguished themselves as a valuable partner for the local water provider and authority.

"In farming there has always been a mutual dependence between neighbors, but AWS took those relationships to a higher level by formally creating local water platforms which rely on the same water sources. It is important to think beyond the borders of our farms. Many sustainability issues with which we deal need more holistic solutions and tight local collaborations to deliver improvements for all."

Xavier Roussel, Vice President of Marketing and Sustainability for Dole Food Company

Photo: Protective vegetation covers are planted along smaller channels like this one to help prevent chemicals from polluting surface waters, Rio Frio-Rio Sevilla, Colombia. © Denis Ünver / WWF Germany.

[10] http://www.plataformadecustodiadelagua.org/

BENEFITS OF AWS CERTIFICATION

AWS Implementation and Certification has created a number of benefits for the farms and their local stakeholders. These include:

- **Raising awareness.** The certification process guides the farms to take the lead on collective action in the catchment. The farm owners and workers have increased their awareness and ownership of Shared Water Challenges as well as their understanding of good water stewardship practices in terms of governance, sustainability, quality, Important Water-Related Areas (IWRAs) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene known as WASH.

- **Strengthening stakeholder involvement.** Even though the farms in Colombia were represented in an existing multi-stakeholder platform, by actively involving the farms in the implementation of the AWS Standard they became more engaged. Sharing the findings and approach of AWS implementation, the farms presented water stewardship options to other stakeholders to consider and encouraged them to take action themselves. This may channel additional resources to the platform, continuing its operation and motivating other stakeholders to get involved.

- **Identification of data gaps.** The data collection required for the AWS Standard implementation helped identify key information gaps about the catchment, which is crucial for water stewardship. Now, farms are aware of the data challenges and are motivated to discuss collaborative actions to improve their understanding of the water balance in the catchment. For example, one gap identified concerned the need to research and understand the water dynamic of the aquifers from which the farms source their water. Information about its capacity, recharge period and linkage with the river network is crucial for the Water Stewardship Plan and long-term activities on the farms.

- **Committing to collective action.** The design of the Water Stewardship Plan required by the AWS Standard strengthened collective action on the farms and built an understanding of the challenges shared within the catchment.

- **Enforcing of regulation.** In countries such as Colombia, where the enforcement of water regulation faces some challenges, the implementation of the AWS Standard serves as a tool to ensure and demonstrate that farms are aligned with, and go beyond, national regulations.

- **Building trust.** The implementation of the AWS Standard signals to all their partners – whether suppliers, local community, NGOs or buyers, that the banana farms are ready to adapt and fulfil the increasing demand for responsible use of resources.

Photo: Bananas being washed and inspected before being packaged, Santa Marta, Colombia. © Christina Mallin, South Pole.

COLLABORATION

In addition to the ongoing collaboration with stakeholders as part of the water stewardship activities undertaken by the farms, two additional areas of collaboration were important for this project:

- The Platform for Water Stewardship was initiated in 2015 with the objective of creating a collaborative multi-stakeholder working group for water stewardship in the Rio Frio-Rio Sevilla catchment. Catchment stakeholders include the private and public sector as well as NGOs and local communities, who participate in the platform's regular meetings. The farms increased their engagement with the platform as part of their water stewardship activities and it remains an important partnership. The platform is facilitated by WWF Colombia and Good Stuff International.

- WWF and South Pole collaborated to provide technical support to the farms throughout the implementation process.

LESSONS LEARNED

During the course of this project, the farms involved and the partners they worked with have learnt lessons which may be helpful for others embarking on their own water stewardship journey. These include:

- **Build ownership and technical capacity** to empower the farms' AWS implementation team. The AWS Standard in the catchment requires a level of technical understanding for which relevant training is likely needed. For this reason, South Pole supported the farms' AWS implementation team by providing capacity building in key topics (for example water balance estimations and design of the water stewardship plan) and guiding the collection of technical information (for example water-related information at a catchment level). In addition, WWF provided technical contributions mainly related to Important Water-Related Areas.

- **Engage stakeholders** within the catchment early on. The implementation took one and a half years, involved multiple stakeholders and required coordination to meet deadlines. Particularly important is to engage relevant public institutions early on, especially when requiring information from them or their participation. Public agencies have busy bureaucratic agendas that should be carefully considered when planning the timeline, project schedule, and implementation of the Standard.

- **Encourage ambitious objectives and outcomes** at the catchment level. Farms may be reluctant to set ambitious objectives, afraid of not obtaining AWS certification if they are not achieved. However, efforts beyond existing practices lead to continuous improvement, which is a core element of water stewardship and the AWS Standard. The Water Stewardship Plan is an opportunity to set ambitious objectives that are supported by higher management of the farms. The significant management support increases the level of commitment.

- **Collaborate** to collect, generate and share information about the catchment. Key information gaps about the catchment may jeopardize its management. For example, through the implementation process, the farms identified the importance of generating information about underground water and about developing a water management plan for the catchment (which is the responsibility of the national water institution). The communication of these findings in the multi-stakeholder Platform for Water Stewardship is expected to raise awareness amongst water-responsible agencies and other catchment users to prioritize the generation of key information and the coordination of better data processes to enable good water stewardship.

- **Implement Group Certification** where appropriate and begin the process with pilot farms. This specific process showed that it was useful to familiarize pilot farms with the AWS Standard in order to share lessons learned and to provide a foundation for other farms to build upon. The Group Certification approach was the most efficient way to certify all 11 farms.

CONCLUSION

AWS Standard implementation requires a technical understanding of the key water aspects specific to the catchment, as well as engagement with stakeholders with different priorities and agendas in the catchment. Despite the initial effort required, AWS enabled the farms to develop a shared water stewardship strategy with potential long-term positive impacts for the catchment and the ability to make decisions based on data that was only collected because of this activity.

Specifically, the design of the Water Stewardship Plan required the farms to obtain and understand information (at the farm and catchment levels) about water use (water balance), water quality (pollution factors and levels), governance (enforcement of regulations), Important Water-Related Areas (location and conservation status) and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) (current condition within the catchment) in order to create objectives that would contribute to the improvement of water use in the farm and the catchment.

This process would be especially relevant in catchments with poor management and where water-intensive agricultural activities are present in combination with other multiple and/or diverse water users.

All partners involved in this process hope that the positive experience and lessons shared through this case study will encourage others to follow the leadership demonstrated by this group of farms, making them the first sites to achieve AWS certification in Colombia and the first AWS Group Certification in the world.

Photo: Banana plantation, Santa Marta, Colombia.
© Christina Mallin, South Pole.

This case study is part of a set of water stewardship case studies that can be found on the Alliance for Water Stewardship website a4ws.org/resources

To find out more, contact:
Carla Toranzo
AWS Latin America and the Caribbean Coordinator
carla@a4ws.org

info@a4ws.org

a4ws.org