
Cuban tobacco harvest increases despite drought

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The tobacco harvest in Vueltaabajo, Cuba's main region for the production of the leaf, increased by 3,400 tonnes over last year despite a nationwide drought, media reported.

Industry leaders in Vueltaabajo, located in the western province of Pinar del Rio, said 16,204 tonnes of tobacco have been harvested so far and that the total might increase by 100 tonnes in the coming days, Communist Party daily Granma said on Tuesday.

With some 16,000 hectares (35,500 acres) under cultivation, the 2014-2015 campaign "signals the beginning of the tobacco recovery" in Cuba, the article said, while acknowledging the impact of the country's worst drought in 115 years.

Pinar del Rio accounts for roughly 70 percent of Cuba's tobacco production and most of the varieties used in the manufacture of emblematic hand-rolled Havana cigars.

Despite the critical lack of rain, an additional 1,000 hectares are expected to be planted with tobacco for the 2015-2016 campaign.

The tobacco sector is Cuba's fourth-largest revenue generator and employs roughly 150,000 people on a regular basis, though the workforce can swell to 250,000 at the peak of the harvest.

In 2014, the island earned \$20 million from the export of machine-made small cigars.

Cuba's prestige cigar brands include Cohiba, Montecristo, and Partagas.