

Tobacco is coming back again



Photo: Guerrilla Newspaper

By Roberto Morejón

Every early morning in this unusually cold month of December, the *vegueros* of Pinar del Rio go through their tobacco plantations, in search of repairing the damages left by the devastating Hurricane Ian in that western Cuban province.

With wind gusts of up to more than 200 kilometers per hour, important parts of the leaf curing houses were blown to pieces on September 27, and many plantations were damaged.

From the main Cuban province dedicated to the cultivation of the solanaceous plant, thousands of tons of tobacco leaves were urgently transported by rail or road to other provinces, in order to apply the required treatment there.

The hurricane surprised the territory with more than 33,000 tons of tobacco from the last two harvests stored in various facilities, but at least 14,000 tons were damaged.

In order to transport the precious agricultural product to other provinces, it was necessary to count on the experienced vegueros and other technicians, because the leaf cannot be mistreated.

In order to guarantee the entire infrastructure, in Pinar del Río they worked on two lines: to rebuild the more than 10,000 houses that were damaged and to reactivate planting, taking advantage of the most favorable stage of the year.

With the readjustment of plans, because not all the farmers can plant seeds due to the damages caused by the meteorological phenomenon, the payments of the insurance agency in view of the quantified losses and the availability of fertilizers and other inputs, the tobacco industry in Pinar del Río has been working tirelessly until today.

No one accepts the idea that the main exportable product of Cuban agriculture will decline, although it is known that the harvest will not be as large as previously expected.

But experts set priorities according to the demands for export in 2023, in order to plant the 900 hectares of covered tobacco calculated before Ian's crossing and the Virginia type tobacco agreed with the cigarette factory located in the Mariel Special Development Zone, west of Havana.

With these and other priorities, along with the restoration of thousands of seedbeds decimated by the hurricane, the experienced farmers of Pinar del Río are working hard every day, still lamenting the losses, but knowing that their traditions and knowledge will help them to get back on their feet.

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