



BANANA CULTIVATION IN VENDA

The cultivation of bananas forms one of the key industries in the newly established Republic of Venda, which is situated in Southern Africa. The commemorative envelope and four special stamps, which illustrate some aspects of the cultivation of this fruit, were designed by Mr A.H. Barrett.

Envelope

It takes two men to harvest a bunch of bananas. The bunch is cut from the plant by one and carried out of the plantation by the other. The blue plastic bunch cover is used to protect the fruit against sunburn, cold and insects during the developing stages and to reduce bruising when the bunch is harvested.

5c stamp

With correct spacing and complete shading of the ground between banana plants, weeds can easily be controlled by hoeing by hand. Being a shallow rooted plant, the banana tree may easily be damaged by deep cultivation and it is not advisable to cultivate mechanically plantations that are more than six months old.

10c stamp

Depending on facilities available in the packing sheds, the banana bunches are suspended either from hooks on rafters or from overhead conveyor chains while being cut into *hands* with a sharp curved knife. The hands are then washed in running water.

15c stamp

The clusters are immersed in *thiabendazole*, a fungicidal liquid that prevents collar rot at the stump or collar portion of a cluster after it has been cut from the bunch. Only first-grade bananas are marketed. It is therefore necessary to ensure that all split, blemished or injured fingers are removed. At this stage the hands are divided into smaller units called clusters to facilitate packing in the prescribed pattern.

20c stamp

The fruit is re-checked for blemishes and sorted for size before being packed into standard carton containers to weigh in at 21,5 kg per 20 kg carton.