

# Port Remains Top Banana

## ••• Chiquita Fresh Signs 3-Year Agreement

Chiquita Fresh North America has signed a new 3-year agreement with the Diamond State Port Corporation (DSPC) to extend its lease at the Port of Wilmington through 2005, with an option to continue beyond this date.

Chiquita has been a customer and tenant of the Port of Wilmington since 1988. It imports over 500,000 tons of bananas a year.

Forty percent of Chiquita's bananas and fruit imports are discharged in the U.S. and the Port of Wilmington is Chiquita's largest port of call on the East Coast. The Port's close proximity to I-95 and I-295 enables Chiquita to provide advantageous over-night delivery to its customers. From Wilmington, Chiquita distributes its bananas as far north as the maritime provinces in Canada, as far west as Chicago, and south into the Carolinas.

The new lease provides Chiquita with 27.5 acres for its container and distribution operations at the Port. Chiquita's facility includes staging space for more than 800 containers, office space for its 21 employees, an 11-bay maintenance shop and a TIR gate with an inspection station.

Recently, the Port completed a crane rail extension project which now enables Chiquita to use the Port's container crane C4 along with ship's gear to efficiently discharge and load its vessels.

"The extension of the crane rail is another value added service provided by the Port," said Frank Vignuli, Chiquita Fresh North America Port manager. He added, "It will enhance the speed of our discharge and will give

our vessels greater flexibility in their operations."

The Great White Fleet (GWF), Chiquita's reefer shipping line, operates 3 vessels on a weekly service from Central America to the Port of Wilmington. *M/V Edyth L*, *M/V Frances L*, and *M/V Courtney L* call at the Port on alternating weeks and discharge an average of 450 containers of bananas and other tropical fruit per visit.

From Wilmington, these vessels sail to Puerto Cortes, Honduras; Puerto Barrios, Guatemala; and Puerto Limon, Costa Rica to load cargo. Additionally, service to El Salvador, Nicaragua and to Almirante, on the east side of Panama, is provided by Chiquita's in-house trucking company.

Murphy Marine Services, Inc. is the stevedoring company that loads and discharges GWF's vessels at the Port. According to Mark Murphy, President of Murphy Marine Services, Chiquita's overall container business in Wilmington creates over 100,000 man-hours of work per year for the laborers he hires from Local 1694 of the International Longshoreman's Association (ILA).

"We are very pleased with the great



Commenting on the new agreement, Chiquita Fresh Port Manager Frank Vignuli noted that he looks forward to continuing Chiquita's relationship with the Port of Wilmington and appreciates the operational support he receives for Chiquita's weekly discharge of nearly 450 containers of bananas from Central America.

cooperation we have enjoyed with the Port of Wilmington and the excellent stevedoring services by Murphy Marine," noted Vignuli.

"We are delighted that Chiquita Fresh has signed the new lease agreement," noted DSPC Executive Director R. Adam McBride. "Chiquita has been a long time friend, a loyal customer of the Port of Wilmington and a vital part of the Port's perishable cargo business and total revenue," he added.

Chiquita's cargo accounts for 10 percent of Wilmington's total annual tonnage and has contributed to the Port's status as the #1 port for imported bananas in the United States.

"We are grateful to Chiquita for helping us to retain our status as *Top Banana* in this very competitive reefer trade," McBride added.