Control of black Sigatoka disease in plantains is imperative for adequate yield. Black Sigatoka is caused by the fungus *Pseudocercospora fijiensis* (Morelet) Deighton, formerly known as *Mycosphaerella fijiensis* Morelet. The disease does not immediately kill the plants, but by reducing the effective leaf area it interferes with photosynthesis (Churchill, 2011). If not controlled, the disease has the potential to devastate plantain fields.

In Puerto Rico, the main plantain cultivar is ‘Maricongo’, a false-horn clone which is susceptible to black Sigatoka. Locally, a combination of synthetic pesticides and the sanitary removal of leaves, or parts of them, are used to control the disease. As suggested by Goenaga and Irizarry (2006), the use of French-type plantain clones may result in increased yield via increased production of fruits and by the tolerance of these clones to black Sigatoka. Resistance to this disease appears to be associated with French-type parents as the source of resistance in Musaceae breeding programs (Goenaga and Irizarry, 2006).

A French-type tetraploid (AAAB) plantain cultivar, ‘FHIA-21’ was developed by the “Fundación Hondureña de Investigación Agrícola” (FHIA) at La Lima, Honduras. Major attributes of this cultivar are its high tolerance to black Sigatoka and higher yields than false-horn clones (Rowe, 1997; Hauser, 2010; Calvo, 2010); details for the plant characteristics of ‘FHIA-21’ were summarized in its patent (Rowe, 1997). However, ‘FHIA-21’ is susceptible to the Banana Streak Virus (Martínez et al., 2015), a virus that limits plant development and consequently reduces its yield potential.

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1Manuscript submitted to the Editorial Board 15 March 2019.
2This work was supported by the Department of Agriculture of Puerto Rico – FIDA Grant identified as project ZFIDA-15. Authors express thanks to Dr. Raúl E. Machiavelli for the statistical analyses.
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The Banana Streak Virus infection in Musaceae is characterized by discontinuous chlorotic areas that turn into necrotic streaks on leaves and the split of the pseudostem (Lockhart, 1995). Nonetheless, because of its high yield potential, ‘FHIA-21’ continues to be used for processed plantain products especially in the Dominican Republic (Garming et al., 2013). Thus, the Department of Agriculture of Puerto Rico was interested in evaluating ‘FHIA-21’ to increase local raw material for processed plantain products. This study was conducted to evaluate ‘FHIA-21’ for plant characteristics, susceptibility to important diseases, and its production potential in four agricultural zones of Puerto Rico as compared to the local cultivar ‘Maricongo’.

Field trials were conducted between 2013 and 2015 at the Corozal, Gurabo, Isabela and Juana Díaz research farms of the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Puerto Rico. Locations differ in geographical conditions and in soil characteristics (Table 1).

Soil in the planting area was prepared conventionally (University of Puerto Rico, 1995). Planting corms were obtained from sword suckers weighing 0.45 to 1.81 kg. Prior to planting, suckers with similar weight were arranged as replicates. Each plot consisted of a bed 3.05 m wide and 10.97 m long containing six ‘FHIA-21’ and two ‘Maricongo’ plants. The plot accommodated three bunch-pruning treatments for ‘FHIA-21’ plants. ‘Maricongo’s bunches were not pruned. Thus, within the plot, two plants represented each treatment. The number of replicates varied by location as follows: Corozal, 25; Isabela, 35; Juana Díaz, 20. At Gurabo the experiment was planted three times with 30, 25 and 12 replicates.

At planting, each plant received 50 g of triple superphosphate. Each plant was individually side-dressed with 57 g of 12-5-20 fertilizer applied approximately at two, five and eight months after planting. Weeds were controlled by hoeing around the plant and the use of registered herbicides for the rest of the field. Nematodes and soil-borne insects were controlled by following current recommended practices. Drip irrigation was used. Because a major objective of this study was to evaluate ‘FHIA-21’ for its tolerance to black Sigatoka, no practices were carried out to control this disease.

At flowering (inflorescence apical emission) functional leaves were counted, and the height of the plant and diameter of the pseudostem were measured. The height was measured as the distance from the ground to the point where the flower emerged. The diameter of the pseudostem was measured at one meter above ground.

At six months after planting, and at flowering, plants were evaluated for susceptibility to black Sigatoka following procedures summarized by Carlier et al. (2003) and by Viljoen et al. (2017). Evaluations were made at Corozal, Gurabo and Isabela considering plantings made on similar dates. At each location, plots at the center of the field were selected, and among these plots 12 plants per cultivar were marked for sampling. For each of the 12 plants, the youngest leaf spotted (YLS) was identified, number of functional leaves and number of standing leaves (NSL) were counted, and the index of non-spotted leaves (INSL) calculated. The youngest leaf spotted is the first (youngest) leaf from the top of the plant having at least ten black Sigatoka necrotic lesions. Functional leaves were those with an erect petiole and more than 50% free of black Sigatoka lesions. The INSL refers to the proportion of standing leaves without the typical late-stage symptoms of black Sigatoka and was calculated as INSL = (YLS – 1) / NSL x 100. This index provides an estimation of available photosynthetic leaf area prior to fruit filling and is an estimate of black Sigatoka tolerance for cultivated Musaceae (Viljoen et al., 2017).

Plants with symptoms associated with the Banana Streak Virus were identified and counted throughout the crop cycle. Symptoms included necrotic streaks on the
Table 1.—Eco-geographical and soil characteristics of the locations used to evaluate ‘FHIA-21’ plantain.

| Location          | Geographical Zone                              | Soil Series and Soil Properties | Soil Series | Family            | pH | EC² | OM³ | CEC⁴ | P   | K   | Ca  | Mg  |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Corozal           | Eastern humid mountains                        | Corozal Typic Haplohumults     | Corozal      | 5.5               | 147.0 | 2.6 | 1.1 | 3.7  | 25.8 | 177.0 | 12.4 |
| Gurabo            | Caguas Valley                                  | Toa Fluventic Hapludolls       | Toa          | 6.5               | 105.6 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 16.2 | 10.8 | 213.4 | 71.6 |
| Isabela           | Northern coastal plains, subhumid section      | Coto Typic Hapludox            | Coto         | 6.5               | 86.5  | 1.9 | 0.6 | 7.8  | 11.4 | 90.8  | 8.0  |
| Juana Díaz        | Alluvial southern plains, (subarid)             | San Antón Cumulic Haplustolls  | San Antón    | 8.4               | 206.8 | 1.8 | 25.5| 37.0 | 309.8| 4393.0| 212.5|

¹Research farms of the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Puerto Rico.
²Electrical Conductivity
³Organic Matter
⁴Cation Exchange Capacity
leaves, stunted plants, splitting of the pseudostem, cigar leaf necrosis, absence of bunch or underdeveloped (abnormally-shaped) bunch. Many of these symptoms were described by Lockhart (1995).

Yield results were from the three plantings at Gurabo. Treatments for bunch pruning were applied between the second and third week after bunch emergence. Pruning consisted in the removal of the male floral bud and the apical hands. The pruning of hands in ‘FHIA-21’ was done so that their bunches retained six, five and four hands. Bunches for the ‘Maricongo’ plants were not pruned because this cultivar has an inflorescence that disintegrates as the bunch matures. Bunches were harvested when estimated ready for market. Freshly harvested bunches were weighed and fruits counted. The number of hands of ‘Maricongo’ were counted. For yield, analysis of variance was carried out using a mixed model. Aleatory effects were planting and replicates within planting. Fixed effects were ‘FHIA-21’ with bunches pruned at six, five and four hands and unpruned ‘Maricongo’. To compare the number of fruits per bunch and yield, two analyses were made. The first analysis included all plants whether or not the plant yielded or was unproductive. In this analysis yield was zero for unproductive plants. The second analysis included yield for plants that were productive and harvested. Means were compared by using the least significant difference at the 0.05 probability level.

Across locations, ‘FHIA-21’ consistently flowered later in the crop cycle and had more leaves at flowering than ‘Maricongo’ (Table 2). The latter observation is consistent with previous reports indicating that ‘FHIA-21’ flowers later than commercial false-horn clones (González-Vélez, 2014; Calvo, 2010). This result also indicates that the crop cycle for ‘FHIA-21’ is longer than that of ‘Maricongo’. The INSL for ‘FHIA-21’ was 93 or higher, indicating that the available photosynthetic leaf area prior to fruit filling was high (Table 3). These observations confirm that ‘FHIA-21’ is highly tolerant to black Sigatoka. ‘Maricongo’ had an INSL from 91 to 73 at six months. However, this index went from 35 to 52 at flowering. Thus, results indicated ‘Maricongo’ was more susceptible to black Sigatoka than ‘FHIA-21’ (Table 3).

At all locations ‘FHIA-21’ plants showed symptoms associated with Banana Streak Virus (Table 4). Common symptoms were the necrotic streaks on the leaves, stunted plants, cigar leaf necrosis, splitting of the pseudostem, absence of bunch and abnormally shaped bunch. ‘Maricongo’ plants did not present symptoms of this virus. Percentage of ‘FHIA-21’ plants showing symptoms of the Banana Streak Virus and becoming unproductive varied from 54% at Corozal to 26% at one of the Gurabo plantings (Table 4). Even though our results confirmed ‘FHIA-21’ is highly tolerant to black Sigatoka, the relatively high percentage of unproductive plants associated with Banana Streak Virus reduces the chances this cultivar will become commercial under the current agricultural system for plantain production in Puerto Rico. Local cost for plantain production is high; thus, a high percentage of productive plants is necessary to recover investment and to generate adequate returns.

In this study, the number of hands per bunch of ‘FHIA-21’ plants was set to six, five and four through bunch pruning. Unpruned ‘Maricongo’ bunch had on average 6.8 hands (Table 5). **Yield analysis counting all plants whether or not plants yielded or were unproductive:** Under this analysis, ‘FHIA-21’ plants with their bunches pruned to six hands had more fruits and higher bunch weight than ‘FHIA-21’ plants pruned to four and five hands, and more than ‘Maricongo’ (Table 5). **Yield analysis counting plants that were productive and harvested:** Under this analysis, the higher the number of hands in ‘FHIA-21’ bunches, the higher the number of fruits (Table 5). ‘FHIA-21’ plants pruned to six and five hands did not differ in bunch weight, and bunches from both treatments weighed significantly more than those from ‘FHIA-21’ plants pruned to four hands, and also more than ‘Maricongo’.
Table 2.—Plant height and diameter, days to flower and leaves at flowering for ‘FHIA-21’ and ‘Maricongo’ planted at various locations.

| Location               | Cultivar   | Plants sampled no. | Height m | Diameter cm | Days to flowering | Leaves at flowering |
|------------------------|------------|--------------------|----------|-------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Corozal                | FHIA-21    | 125                | 3.37     | 18.4        | 352               | 9.9                 |
|                        | Maricongo  | 51                 | 3.60     | 17.6        | 295               | 8.7                 |
| Gurabo first planting  | FHIA-21    | 141                | 3.20     | 18.0        | 258               | 13.7                |
|                        | Maricongo  | 59                 | 3.38     | 16.3        | 237               | 10.3                |
| Gurabo second planting | FHIA-21    | 103                | 3.21     | 18.3        | 265               | 14.2                |
|                        | Maricongo  | 46                 | 3.30     | 16.3        | 252               | 10.9                |
| Gurabo third planting  | FHIA-21    | 50                 | 3.03     | 16.5        | 256               | 13.2                |
|                        | Maricongo  | 21                 | 3.09     | 15.5        | 234               | 9.9                 |
| Isabela                | FHIA-21    | 144                | 2.89     | 15.9        | 314               | —                   |
|                        | Maricongo  | 58                 | 2.99     | 16.1        | 256               | —                   |
| Juana Díaz            | FHIA-21    | 91                 | 3.53     | 19.5        | 290               | —                   |
|                        | Maricongo  | 24                 | 3.41     | 17.8        | 246               | —                   |

*—Missing results.
Table 3.—Total and functional leaves and index of non-spotted leaves for ‘FHIA-21’ and ‘Maricongo’ plantains sampled at six months after planting and at flowering at various locations.

| Sampling date      | Location | 'FHIA-21' leaves | | 'Maricongo' leaves | |
|--------------------|----------|-----------------|---|-------------------|---|
|                    |          | Total    | Functional | Index of non-spotted leaves | Total    | Functional | Index of non-spotted leaves |
| Six months after planting | Gurabo   | 9.9      | 9.9        | 100 | 9.4      | 9.2        | 91 |
|                     | Corozal  | 10.7     | 10.7       | 100 | 11.1     | 9.4        | 61 |
|                     | Isabela  | 9.0      | 9.0        | 100 | 7.7      | 6.3        | 73 |
| At flowering        | Gurabo   | 12.2     | 12.2       | 100 | 10.3     | 10.1       | 51 |
|                     | Corozal  | 9.8      | 9.6        | 93  | 7.6      | 6.1        | 52 |
|                     | Isabela  | 6.7      | 6.7        | 97  | 8.4      | 7.3        | 35 |
Table 4.—*FHIA-21* plants with Banana Streak Virus (BSV) before and after flowering and percentage of unproductive plants at various locations.

| Location               | 'FHIA-21' Plants Planted | With BSV symptoms and dead before flowering | With BSV symptoms and with underdeveloped bunch | Unproductive % |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Corozal                | 150                      | 16                                         | 65                                             | 54             |
| Gurabo first planting  | 180                      | 25                                         | 21                                             | 26             |
| Gurabo second planting | 150                      | 28                                         | 21                                             | 33             |
| Gurabo third planting  | 72                       | 10                                         | 12                                             | 31             |
| Isabela                | 210                      | 29                                         | —*                                             | —              |
| Juana Díaz            | 148                      | 14                                         | 27                                             | 27             |

*—Missing results*
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Table 5.—Average number of fruits per bunch and bunch weight for ‘FHIA-21’ and ‘Maricongo’ plants, counting dead and unproductive plants, and plants completing crop cycle.¹

| Cultivar | Hands in the bunch | Fruits | Bunch Weight | Fruits | Bunch Weight |
|---------|-------------------|--------|--------------|--------|--------------|
|         |                   | Counting dead and unproductive plants | Counting plants that completed the crop cycle |
| FHIA-21 | 6                 | 57.8 a³ | 15.8 a | 72.1 a | 19.6 a |
| FHIA-21 | 5                 | 41.7 b  | 12.9 b | 63.7 b | 19.6 a |
| FHIA-21 | 4                 | 35.1 b  | 12.5 b | 51.8 c | 18.3 b |
| Maricongo | 6.8²            | 40.3 b  | 12.7 b | 44.0 d | 13.8 c |

¹These results are averages of plantings at Gurabo.
²Average number of hands for unpruned bunch.
³Within columns means followed by the same letter are not significantly different at P < 0.005.