



Agriculture in the News

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Issues Affecting Caribbean Agriculture

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US\$ 2.5 Million injected into Small Ruminants Production by Tracey Thompson, Jamaica Information Systems, 8 June 2012-06-11

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is injecting US\$2.5 million into initiatives to improve production of small ruminants.

The money is being provided through the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC) project, and will go towards efforts to improve breeding, provide training, develop the value chain, and expansion of herd through rapid multiplication techniques.

See full article on page 1 under Livestock Section

Agriculture in the News is a newsletter which provides a compilation of selected news articles on issues affecting agriculture in the Caribbean region. Articles from Newspapers, Online News Service Agencies, Newsletters and Press Releases are featured.

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Livestock

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Full Article

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Portfolio Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke, in his recent contribution to the budget debate, said the effort is aimed at boosting production to satisfy local demand for mutton.

“Only 15 per cent of our current consumption is being satisfied by local production. We are confident that the quality of our goat and mutton meat is such that any increased production will be absorbed locally, given our taste preference,” he said.

Turning to other livestock, he said that Jamaica is almost self-sufficient in poultry meat, eggs and nearing self-sufficiency in pork, while beef and dairy production has declined. He said that efforts will be intensified to boost production of dairy.

“Institutional consumption is being targeted as the major strategy to stimulate increased production of milk, particularly, as it relates to the school feeding programme. Once this increased demand is stimulated, then the resources of the cess on dairy products will be used to provide loans to improve pastures, acquire stocks and for retooling. At the same time, we will intensify our research in indigenous alternative feeds,” the Minister said.

Agro-Energy

Ministry of Agriculture launches biogas project by Official Website for the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, 6 June, 2012, http://www.ab.gov.ag/article_details.php?id=3134&category=38

Full Article

The significant cost of fuel is one of the main problems that local farmers in Antigua and Barbuda face and they will soon find relief.

The Ministry of Agriculture is embarking on a biodigester/biogas project which could save farmers thousands of dollars in annual production costs. The Biogas system will be installed at Titan Farms Limited in the village of Liberta.

Biogas simply refers to the gas produced by the biological breakdown of organic (plant and animal) matter as well as animal manure.

The system is to be installed at Titan Farms and will be an enclosed structure which will allow for the breakdown of the organic matter to take place. They plan to use mainly manure for the biogas production. The gas derived can be used for lighting, cooking and for fuel for machinery on the farm such as generators and combustion engines.

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture is assisting the Ministry of Agriculture with funding for the Biogas system.

Agriculture Minister, the Hon. Hilson Baptiste says, “The cost of fuel is one of the biggest problems affecting Livestock farmers. The biggest expense for farmers in Antigua is the cost of fuel.”

Minister Baptiste is of the view that since Agriculture is becoming increasingly scientific; it is up to the farmers to improve their level of production. He hopes that other [Livestock] farmers incorporate the system on their farms as well.

According to the Agriculture Minister, the Biogas Unit at Titan Farms, once properly installed should be operational by next week.

Marvin Joseph, a proprietor of Titan Farms says the successful installation of the Biogas Unit will, “Provide immense benefit for local farmers.” He says the unit could save Livestock farmers close to \$3,000 dollars in electricity bills.

The Ministry of Agriculture will seek outside assistance in providing additional Biogas systems for other Livestock farmers across the country.

Agricultural Development

IDB approves 15 million grant to support agriculture policy reform in Haiti by IDB Website, 1 June 2012,
<http://www.iadb.org/mobile/news/detail.cfm?language=English&id=10010>

Full Article

A \$15 million grant from the Inter-American Development Bank will assist Haiti in its efforts to [modernize its agricultural](#) policies and institutions to increase farm productivity and competitiveness. The IDB resources will be complemented with a \$7 million grant from the [Haiti](#) Reconstruction Fund.

The program, the first of a series of three policy-based grants, will provide budget support as the Haitian government carries out reforms to address several of the major constraints hampering [agriculture](#), which continues to play a dominant role in the country’s economy. Several donors, including the IDB, are providing financial and technical assistance for these reforms.

Farming provides the principal means of subsistence for over 1 million Haitian families and generates about half of the country’s jobs. Agricultural productivity, which is lower than in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, has declined over the past two decades, with significant output drops in key crops such as bananas, coffee and rice.

Among the reforms Haiti will undertake is strengthening the Ministry of Agriculture ([MARNDR](#)) to carry out its planning, programming and budgeting functions, improve its capacity to manage, monitor and evaluate programs and increase the effectiveness of its services. Under this program the ministry will create a team of public procurement specialists to boost its capacity to absorb and administer financial resources provided by the government’s treasury and donors.

This reform will enable the MARNDR to better execute programs under its management. At present, IDB grants are financing agriculture projects totaling more than \$200 million in Haiti, including crop intensification, irrigation, rural value chains, farming technology transfers, land tenure clarification and watershed management.

Another reform involves updating land administration policies and legal and institutional frameworks. About 60 percent of privately owned parcels lack property titles, a situation that limits long-term rural investment and farmers’ access to credit. Land titling in Haiti is costly and cumbersome and governed by antiquated laws and procedures. Under this program the government will promote legislation to enable surveyors and notaries to use modern technologies that could increase the efficiency of their services.

Haiti will also promote new legislation to assign legal status to water user associations, enabling farmers to manage and maintain irrigation systems. Policies will be updated to ensure coordination between irrigation and watershed

management. An inter-agency commission will monitor the management of the Péligre dam, seeking to balance the demands of hydro power generation with the need to provide water to irrigate the Artibonite valley, the country's principal rice-growing region.

In addition, Haiti needs to build up its agricultural health system to international standards in order to protect crops and livestock from domestic and exotic pests and diseases. The reforms will start by establishing an operational plan with specific targets and rationalizing the use of financial resources for such services.

To expand access to improved farming technologies the reforms will promote the creation of a renewed agricultural research system capable of providing guidance to local rural producers. They will also expand gradually a system of smart subsidies, especially in the northern region where the IDB is concentrating investments, fostering the development of farming advisory services.

The program was designed in coordination with other donors supporting Haiti's efforts to improve agriculture, including the World Bank, IFAD, IICA, USAID, USDA, the European Union, France, Canada and Brazil.

Haiti and the IDB

The [Inter-American Development Bank](#) is Haiti's leading multilateral donor. Since the 2010 earthquake it has approved \$534 million in new grants and disbursed \$396 million for the Haitian government, supporting investments in agriculture, transportation, energy, water and sanitation, education and private sector development.

Food Security

Rethinking Food Security in Africa by Godwin Aster and Jeffery T. Oliver, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, 5 June 2012

Full Article

Africa needs to rethink its food import burden and consider 'local content' options, such as the inclusion of cassava flour in wheat to reduce the rising import bills, says the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture's Ambassador, Former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

The IITA Ambassador views the 'local content' option as part of efforts to free up resources for infrastructural development and poverty alleviation in the continent.

In 2011, estimates show that Africa spent more than \$50 billion on food imports. The rising prices of food does not make the situation better in the years ahead, according to Dr. Akin Adesina, Nigeria's Agriculture Minister who is also an economist.

"If we want to develop, we must change our consumption habits. We must consume what is our own, what is around us in Africa. In this way, we will be able to make progress," Obasanjo added.

As the President of Nigeria between 1999 and 2007, Obasanjo promoted a 10 percent cassava inclusion policy in wheat bread in an effort to promote agricultural growth and diversify the economy.

The policy, backed by improved agricultural practices from IITA and national partners, increased cassava production in Nigeria by 10 million tons within 6 years, making Nigeria the world's top producer of cassava.

Building on that success, researchers from IITA, working in a pilot bakery, have raised cassava content in bread to 40 percent without compromising quality.

Upon tasting the 40 percent cassava bread, Obasanjo exclaimed, “The taste is good!”

“We need to promote it to make people adopt and consume it,” he said. Besides relieving the burden on food imports, the adoption of cassava flour offers several benefits to Africa. It promises to make cassava competitive by creating markets for the root crop and offering fair prices to farmers.

With climate change taking a negative toll on most grains, cassava production is fast becoming an option. The crop’s tolerance of extreme weather such as drought and its ability to thrive on poor soils are increasing its appeal.

In Nigeria, for instance, the government estimates that the 40 percent inclusion of cassava flour in wheat bread could help the country save about N254 billion (\$1.7 billion) annually.

“But more than savings, this will also provide jobs for our youths,” said Adesina.

The success of the cassava policy in Nigeria aims to radiate benefits to larger aspects of the economy including helping in stabilizing the exchange rate of the naira to the dollar and more importantly, making the farmers proud and richer.

Youth and Agriculture

Agriculture Agenda by The Barbados Advocate, 8 June 2012,
<http://www.barbadosadvocate.com/newsitem.asp?more=local&NewsID=25180>

Full Article

Harrison College intends to integrate agriculture into its school curriculum so that the school can play its part in giving impetus to a national effort to promote agriculture and food security.

This is according to principal of Harrison College, Winston Crichlow, who was speaking during the acting Chief of Agricultural Officer, Ralph Farnum’s tour of the school’s greenhouse yesterday afternoon at the school’s compound in Crumpton Street, Bridgetown, St. Michael.

“It is our intention to integrate agriculture into our curriculum and come September I am expecting that a more sustained effort will be made to ensure that the students get a hands-on experience in agriculture and tie it into the various subjects,” said Crichlow.

“I believe that food production should be the number one endeavour in any country because we should have food security. It is important that everybody removes themselves from the stigma and prejudice of agriculture,” he continued.

“Students at Harrison College are involved because I think that we need some of the best brains and minds in a project such as this, to give impetus to a national effort to put agriculture on the pedestal it should be on and not treat agriculture and agricultural workers the way that they have been for too long,” said Crichlow.

Saying that he wants students to be involved in the process from the first form, he said that such an initiative can demonstrate the theory of Biology to students in a practical way, students can appreciate the value of food and the school can play its part to develop the country.

Farnum stated that he was impressed with what he viewed at the school. He said it is good that the student are seeing the benefits of agriculture which is required for us to survive.

He encouraged them to continue, adding that the Ministry will provide assistance as the school continues to develop greenhouse technology so that the youth can understand the importance of food in terms of security, sustainability and health.

The greenhouse project officially opened in 2009 but due to some challenges has now restarted, primarily through the work of the gardener Andre Nurse. Nurse said that he is looking forward to working with the students more next term in an effort to promote food security in Barbados.

Guidance counsellor Beverley Holder said that the organic produce such as tomatoes, sweet peppers, okras and cabbage will be sold to help with school funds and the start-up costs of the greenhouse. Holder added that students are already seeing the linkages between agriculture and food and nutrition and that the aim is to show children that agriculture is a viable career option. She said that the school will start a 4-H Club next term as well. (AR)

Preschoolers learn to plant vegetables by Laurel V Williams, Trinidad Newsday, 6 June 2012

Full Article

A team from ASTT headed by vice-president Mohamed Hallim visited two preschools in Gasparillo yesterday and commended staff members and students for their effort in planting the short-term vegetable crops.

Hallim explained that about six weeks ago, students as young as two to five-years-old at the All Are Angels Education Services Limited began participating in the preschool agriculture project.

All Are Angels runs a pre-school and day care centre at Hungermarch Road, Gasparillo.

Hallim said it was the philosophy of the organisation to teach agriculture at a young age to ensure food security in the long run.

“We want to catch them very young. These students are involved in all aspects of agriculture as putting soil into containers, planting seedlings, watering the plants on a regular basis and ensuring the plants get sunlight,” Hallim said. This programme began three years ago and is funded by ASTT, at a minimal cost, with staff members having to undergo a training course.

Due to the age of the children, members of the group provide the labour and overall management of the crops. He added ASTT welcomes any school that may wish to have a similar project conducted.

ASTT executive member, Sugrim Kalpo, noted the project compliments classroom activities as it incorporates various subjects. “Apart from having a hands on approach to agriculture, the students learn colours, shapes, textures, the difference between tall and short using the plants,” Kalpo told Newsday.

ASTT director, Ryan Rampersad, said with a decline in the farming population, it was necessary to generate interest in the agricultural sector.

As students watered the patchoi, principal and founder of All Are Angels preschool and day care centre, Carolyn St Lewis said the children had been excited to participate in growing plants. It helps, she added, to build the students’ self-esteem, knowing they assisted from planting to harvesting.

Teacher Runuka Bain added, “They also learn about sharing, working together with friends, and responsibility. A total of 57 students participated.”

Technology

Barbados urges farmers to continue investments in Technology by Caribbean Journal, 7 June 2012, <http://www.caribjournal.com/2012/06/07/barbados-urges-farmers-to-continue-investment-in-technology/>

Full Article

Local farmers in Barbados must continue to invest in low-cost agricultural technology both for affordability and sustainability, according to Ralph Farnum, chief agricultural officer in the country's Ministry of Agriculture.

The Ministry is "actively" pursuing the use of new farming technology, according to Farnum, which involves "row covers."

"This row cover technology is low-cost," he said. "We had on trial about four crops so far, and with the same row covers, you got about five times the production compared to growing such crops in the open field."

By increasing crop quality, farmers could fetch better returns on the market and be able to reinvest those funds in even newer technologies.

Tropical row covers are protective materials used to shield crops from harsh elements including cold, wind and damage from insects.

They also reduce the incidence of moisture, which can attract pests and cause diseases.

"What we are really doing here is producing a microclimate within the crop shield," he said. "A greenhouse does that as well. It produces an area where there is no direct rainfall, where the wind is reduced and light is also decreased. Basically, you are setting up a microclimate that suits the crop you are growing."

The region has increasingly been looking to apply technology in agriculture, with Grenada the latest Caribbean country to bring the issue to the forefront.

Barbados has been exploring row cover technology for some time, beginning last year with a pilot project involving hot peppers.