



IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

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Agriculture *in the* News



Issues Affecting Caribbean Agriculture

IN THIS ISSUE 10-25 SEPTEMBER 2012

- | | |
|-----|--------------------------|
| 1. | Mango |
| 1. | Barbados Cherry |
| 2. | Roots and Tubers |
| 3. | Livestock |
| 4. | Climate Change |
| 6. | Organic Farming |
| 7. | Food Security |
| 9. | Maize |
| 10. | Agricultural Development |
| 11. | Economic and Social Aid |
| 12. | Agriculture and Media |
| 13. | ICT and Agriculture |
| 14. | Agricultural Research |
| 15. | Renewable Energy |
| 16. | Upcoming Events |

CARDI/CTA announce media awards on climate change reporting by Observer Media, 15 September 2012 <http://www.antiguaobserver.com/cardi-cta-launch-media-awards-on-climate-change-reporting>

St. John's Antigua- An opportunity has presented itself for climate change reporters of the Caribbean to be awarded for their work.

The Caribbean Agricultural and Research Development Institute (CARDI) and The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA) have teamed up for a second consecutive year to launch a Caribbean-wide Media Awards on climate change, a release said.

For more information see page 12

AGRICULTURE IN THE NEWS is a monthly 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.

For copies of documents cited, visit the web address or source of the information provided.



IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

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Our Vision

To be the centre of excellence in the Caribbean for the provision and application of research and development in agriculture and rural enhancement.

Our Mission

To contribute to the sustainable economic well being of Caribbean people by the generation and transfer of appropriate technology through research and development within the agricultural value chain.

www.cardi.org

Mango

Philippine government to trial a new mango drying technology by Freshfruitportal.com, 24 September 2012
<http://www.freshfruitportal.com/2012/09/24/philippine-govt-to-trial-new-mango-drying-technology/>

Full Article

The Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) has announced it will trial a new mango drying system next year, website *Bworldonline.com* reported.

The government agency pilot-scale conveyor dryer set uses far-infrared and convection heating (FIRCH) to dry mango slices, and is the result of a study from researchers Robelyn E. Daquila and Romualdo C. Martinez.

PhilMech expects the technology will help costs for processed food manufacturers.

“Based on research by PhilMech, the local mango industry is constrained by limited drying capacity to achieve maximum production,” PhilMech executive director Rex L. Bingabing was quoted as saying in a statement.

“And the industry must take advantage of the peak harvest season from March to April to produce as much dried mangoes [as possible] which has a growing export demand.”

He highlighted dried mangoes were an important part of the local mango industry, but out of the US\$35 million in mango exports in 2010, processed mango products only accounted for 10%.

Barbados Cherry

Vitamin C and Beta-carotene may protect brain health by Freshfruitportal.com, 21 September 2012
<http://www.freshfruitportal.com/2012/09/21/vitamin-c-and-beta-carotene-may-protect-brain-health/>

Full Article

A German study has found patients with mild dementia have significantly lower levels of antioxidants vitamin C and beta-carotene in their bloodstream.

The findings of the University of Ulm research, led by professors Gabriele Nagel and Christine von Arnim, show it may be possible to influence the onset of Alzheimer’s disease (AD) through a person’s diet or dietary antioxidants.

Fruits with high Vitamin C levels include **acerola cherries, guavas**, litchis, blackcurrants, peaches and kiwifruit, while unsweetened citrus and apple juices also contain high traces of the antioxidant.

Beta-carotene is a red-orange pigment found in many horticultural crops, such as peppers, lettuce, kale, carrots, spinach, turnips and pumpkins.

The study measured the levels of several antioxidants in the bloodstream of 74 AD-patients and 158 healthy control subjects, with the results published in the *Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease*.

“In order to possibly influence the onset and development of Alzheimer’s disease, we need to be aware of potential risk factors,” Nagel said.

Participants in the study were aged between 65-90 years of age, recruited from the cross-sectional study IMCA ActiFE (Activity and Function in the Elderly in Ulm).

While blood testing showed encouraging results for vitamin C and beta-carotene, there was no significant difference in the levels of vitamin E, lycopene and coenzyme Q10.

Potential confounding factors such as education, civil status, BMI, consumption of alcohol and tobacco were included in the statistical analysis.

However, the researchers emphasized other factors such as storage and preparation of food as well as life stressors, may have influenced the findings which means more surveys are needed.

“Longitudinal studies with more participants are necessary to confirm the result that vitamin C and beta-carotene might prevent the onset and development of Alzheimer’s disease,” Nagel said.

Roots and Tubers

Climate Change threatens global food security by allAfrica.com, 25 September 2012
<http://allafrica.com/stories/201209250667.html>

Full Article

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr. Akinwunmi Adesina, has disclosed that climatic change has been fingered as a threat posed to global food security and human existence in the world.

He made the disclosure at the *16th Triennial Symposium of International Society for Tropical Root Crops (ISTRC)*, tagged: *"The Roots (and Tubers) of Development and climate change"*, in Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital.

He said climate change was going to have a significant impact on the development of tropical root crops in the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions in the years ahead, likely to be both negative and positive.

He said about 30 countries were ably represented at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta where international agricultural business personnel were gathered at the symposium to generate an effective tropical root crops production in the world.

The President, Manufacturer's Association of Nigeria (MAN), Chief Kola Jamodu, in his welcome address, said the symposium would provide unique platform for interaction among the agricultural businessmen.

Speaking further, he said the symposium was blessed with about 200 scientists from over 30 countries willing to share experiences, build collaborations and develop strategies to contribute to sustainable root and tuber development, saying the agricultural and industrial sectors of the economy were key to the Transformation Agenda of President Goodluck Jonathan.

Vice Chancellor of Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Professor Olusola Oyewole, in his welcome address said the major issue of climate change will be rainfall variability, seasonality and rise in sea level.

In his goodwill message, Ogun State Governor, Senator Ibikunle Amosun, who was represented by his deputy, Prince Segun Adesegun, emphasised the importance of root crops, giving the merits of cassava as a root crop.

"In Ogun now, our agriculture has been upgraded to mechanised farming. In Ogun today, our government has invested so much in mechanised farming. Ogun State is the largest producer of cassava and we hope to support the production of tropical root crops," Adesegun said.

Tubers, roots workshop tomorrow. Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, Monday, September 17 2012

<http://www.newspday.co.tt/news/0,166342.html>

Full article

Trinidad and Tobago will be the site for a three-day regional workshop that starts tomorrow on "Enhancing the value added processing of roots and tubers in the Caribbean through the transfer of improved technologies".

This workshop is being held as part of the collaborative efforts of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and its partners including the Ministry of Food Production in Trinidad and Tobago (MFP), the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), the Trinidad and Tobago Agribusiness Association (TTABA), and CLAYUCA (Latin American and Caribbean Consortium to support Cassava Research and Development) of Colombia.

The workshop is an integral component of a project funded through the IICA Competitive Fund for Technical Cooperation (FonTC) which seeks to transfer improved production and processing technologies specifically for cassava and sweet potato. The project is being pursued against the background of the vast potential in the region for increasing the production and value added processing of roots and tubers as a means of increasing the local availability of staple foods and thus reducing the region's high and increasing food import bill.

It is widely accepted that if the Caribbean region is to exploit the potential for the development of local industries based on the processing of roots and tubers, significant capacity building and training targeted particularly at small and medium sized processors is required.

The workshop will be held until Thursday at The Cascadia Hotel and Conference Centre, Port-of-Spain and it is expected that 45 participants including processors and personnel from development institutions from across the region will be in attendance.

Livestock

Livestock sector development and poverty reduction by FAO, 10 September 2012

<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/155275/icode/>

Full Article

FAO publication says targeted policies and capacity building crucial

A new FAO publication says carefully tailored policy and institutional changes can help to unlock the livestock sector's poverty reduction potential.

"Although an estimated 750 million poor have a major stake in the livestock sector, only a small minority of them have so far been able to take advantage of the opportunities provided by livestock sector growth" the authors write.

"In most instances, governments do not deliberately formulate policies that are anti-poor; rather they fail to realize that economic growth, although necessary, is not always sufficient for poverty reduction," they explain.

The book, *Livestock sector development for poverty reduction: an economic and policy perspective*, collates evidence from a broad array of sources and perspectives showing that investing in livestock can sustain livelihoods and spur economic growth. It illustrates that good policies and institutions are essential to the support of equitable livestock sector development.

But it equally warns that the specific context of each country means that a blueprint approach to policy and institutional change does not work: Identifying the most appropriate institutional and policy reform requires making space for experimentation and learning from the associated successes and failures.

The authors also argue it is important for governments, donors and others to make a distinction between livestock sector-related policies that lead to economic growth, and policies and institutional change which help the very poorest families to survive or improve their livelihoods.

This is especially critical in areas where the depth of poverty among livestock keepers is particularly high. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa it is estimated that more than 85 percent of poor livestock keepers live in extreme poverty.

For people living in extreme poverty, the authors note, "livestock may not provide many growth opportunities, but are more likely to act as safety nets - tools for survival, rather than tools for development."

The book, subtitled *Livestock's many virtues*, is the last in a series of publications written under FAO's decade-long Pro-poor Livestock Policy Initiative (PPLPI), a global endeavour funded primarily by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) to improve livestock sector policy in ways that increase the benefits to poor people.

Climate Change

Landmark Survey Finds Adaptation to Climate Change on Smallholder Farms Taking Root by CGIAR

Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), press release 7 sep 2012

<http://ccafs.cgiar.org/news/press-releases/landmark-survey-finds-adaptation-climate-change-smallholder-farms-taking-root>

Excerpt

Smallholder farmers across East Africa have started to embrace climate-resilient farming approaches and technologies, according to new research recently published by the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS). At the same time, the survey evidence suggests that many of the changes in farming practices are incremental, rather than transformative in nature, and that high levels of food insecurity prevent many from making all of the changes needed in order to cope with a changing climate

The study—released one year after East Africa's worst drought in 60 years hit its peak—is based on a survey of over 700 farming households in four East African countries carried out by CCAFS, part of a larger effort covering 5,040 households in 252 villages across 36 sites in 12 countries in East Africa, West Africa and South Asia. It [appeared online before publication](#) in the journal *Food Security*.

“For generations, farmers and livestock keepers in East Africa have survived high levels of weather variability by testing and adopting new farming practices. As this variability increases, rainfall patterns shift, and average

temperatures rise due to climate change, they may need to change faster and more extensively,” said Patti Kristjanson, a CCAFS Theme Leader who co-led the comprehensive study and works at the Nairobi-based [World Agroforestry Centre \(ICRAF\)](#).

“We are seeing that agricultural diversification strategies are key to improved household well-being,” Kristjanson added. “Improved access to good crop, livestock, soil, land and water management information and options for different environments is needed now more than ever.”

The survey found that farmers have embraced a wide range of strategies to improve crop production: [\[click to view this as an infographic\]](#)

- 55 percent of households have taken up at least one shorter-cycle crop variety, and 56 percent adopted at least one drought tolerant variety. These practices help farmers work around periods of heat and water scarcity.
- 50 percent of households are planting trees on their farms, a practice known as [agroforestry](#). These trees help stabilize eroding landscapes, increase water and soil quality, and provide yields of fruit, tea, coffee, oil, fodder, medicinal and energy products.
- 50 percent introduced intercropping—alternating different plants in the same plot—and 25 percent started rotating their crops during the last decade. These and other techniques help maintain and improve soil fertility and enhance crop yields.

Other proven agricultural productivity improvement strategies have yet to take root widely, however, as the findings show that:

- Only 25 percent of households have begun using manure or compost and 23 percent are now mulching. These techniques help improve soil and alleviate the need for more costly practices, such as applying petroleum-based fertilizer.
- 16 percent of the surveyed households have introduced improved soil management techniques such as terracing, building ridges or other techniques that reduce water and soil organic matter losses.
- 10 percent have begun trying to store or manage agricultural water. As demands on fresh water resources multiply, farmers need to embrace ways in which they effectively use what they have, for example through rainwater harvesting.

In livestock management, farmers have implemented a number of methods to improve productivity and reduce emissions:

- 34 percent have reduced livestock herd sizes and 48 percent are managing their resources better, for example by growing crops for animal feed. These changes can help farmers adjust to changing weather patterns; and better diets can also lower methane emissions per kg of meat and milk produced.
- One-third of agropastoral households in Ethiopia, and one-fifth in Tanzania are managing pasture lands better— actions such as planting better forage varieties and fencing off grazing areas. According to researchers, these changes will be key to feeding livestock in a changing climate, as well as, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, but few in Kenya and Uganda have adopted such practices.

Food insecurity remains a barrier to climate adaptation

According to the study, a key factor that limited adaption is food insecurity. Farm families at all five study sites had to confront this issue; they faced food deficits on average for two months in Nyando, Kenya, and for more than half the year in Borana, Ethiopia.

“Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? It stands to reason that households struggling to feed their families throughout the year are not in a good position to invest in new practices that include higher costs and risks,” said

Kristjanson. “Yet not adapting is certainly contributing to food insecurity. Food insecurity means lower adaptive capacity to deal with all kinds of change.”

“So it is critical that we learn more about both the factors that enable and facilitate innovation, and how to lower the often hidden costs and barriers associated with changing agricultural practices,” she added.

This survey of African smallholder farmers is part of systematic effort by CCAFS to better understand the levels of food security among smallholder households, what actions and adaptation strategies farmers have already been pursuing, what information they are getting and how they are using it, and what services they have been receiving.

“CCAFS is interested in identifying and evaluating the trade-offs farmers face as they attempt to deal with risks from increasing climate variability. While warmer temperatures can in fact increase yields for some crops—particularly in the tropics—the overall implications of climate change for food security for families and the region as a whole is an immense concern,” said James Kinyangi, CCAFS’ regional program leader for East Africa.

Organic Farming

Belize works for the establishment of local organic certification in Toledo by IICA Connection, September 2012, no.19 <http://www.iica.int/eng/prensa/iicaconexion/IICAConexion2/2012/N19/secundaria5.aspx>

Full Article

IICA and the Belize National Organic Council Provide Technical Assistance provide technical assistance for the project.

On the 13th and 14th August, 2012 The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Belize National Organic Council (BNOC) spearheaded a two days training session targeting technical staff from various organizations working in organic agriculture in southern Belize. This activity was carried out in Punta Gorda Town, with the attendance of 20 participants from 6 organizations from the Toledo and Cayo districts. Representing BNOC was Sustainable harvest International (SHI) and Maya Mountain Cacao.

The main objective of the course was to establish a satellite BOA scheme for local organic crop certification. A new committee, the BOA PG, was formed and five members from the different participating organizations were appointed to serve on this certification committee to ensure compliance to standards. Also, technical staffs from all organizations were selected to serve as inspectors and coaches for this local scheme. Once the structure was established, training was given in standards, carrying out field inspections and making certification decisions.

The first day of the training consisted of a very intensive theory sessions where all aspects of organic certification in line with production practices were reviewed. On the second day, participants received training in carrying out field inspections. The participants were taken to one of the organic cacao farms in the neighboring community of Indian Creek, where they had the chance to conduct an actual field inspection. They had the opportunity to look at the production processes and determine whether they comply with standards.

The day ended with the BOA PG certification committee meeting with all participants and reviewed all non-conformities found on the farm. Recommendations on dealing with these non-conformities were also discussed. After a lively and informative discussion a decision was made by the BOA PG Committee to certify the farm in “transition to organic”.

The BOA PG and trained inspectors and coaches can now begin using the BOA scheme for locally certifying organic produce in Toledo.

Food Security

Increase in prices on agricultural products is temporary by Rafael Trejos, IICA Connection, September 2012, no.19, September 2012 <http://www.iica.int/Eng/prensa/IICAConexion/IICAConexion2/2012/N19/secundaria1.aspx>

Full Article

IICA report calms fears that the hike in the prices of corn, soybeans, and wheat will cause a food crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean similar to the one that occurred in 2007-2008.

The current increase in the international prices of corn, soybeans, and wheat is a temporary phenomenon and limited to three crops. Nevertheless, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) need to monitor the evolution of the situation and analyze domestic and international price transmission mechanisms in order to adopt measures to counteract the negative effects and ensure their farmers take advantage of the opportunities created.

Those are the conclusions of the latest report delivered to the ministers of agriculture of the hemisphere by the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Víctor M. Villalobos.

The price increase is due mainly to a fall in production caused by the drought in the United States, and, to a lesser extent, by the reduction in rainfall in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Turkey, a delay in the start of the monsoon season in India, and high precipitation in China and the Koreas. Additionally, several regions of Central America have experienced dry conditions, which have affected their agricultural production.

The document explains that the impact of greater climatic variability on agriculture will continue to be felt in the years ahead, making it increasingly necessary for the countries to implement policies to adapt to climate change and mitigate its effects on the agricultural sector.

“...it is recommended that the countries proceed with caution and not overreact to the current situation of the prices of agricultural products, in order to avoid trade-distorting policies that, rather than helping, would merely push up prices further and increase volatility,” says the note sent to the ministers.

According to the technical report, it is to be expected that the current price levels will spur producers in LAC and other regions of the world to plant more corn, soybeans, and wheat. Increased production would then push down prices in international markets. In LAC, the grain harvest could rise by 4%.

The current situation is similar to the crisis in 2007-2008. The prices of corn and soybeans are even higher than the peak levels observed on that occasion, but the structural and cyclical elements that threatened food security during those years are not present. For example, the international prices of commodities like rice have remained stable, as have those of oil and fertilizers, while cacao, sugar, and coffee prices are falling.

Another important difference between the two situations is that global corn and soybean reserves are larger than last time, the most developed economies are growing slowly –or are in recession– and the emerging economies have lost steam, which suggests an easing of world demand for commodities and less pressure on the markets.

The technical note adds that the hikes in the international prices of corn, soybeans, and wheat will have two main effects on LAC: one direct (on consumption), and another indirect (on food chains).

“From the consumption standpoint, the first point that has to be considered is the importance of the products whose prices are rising in the diet of the population, especially the most disadvantaged groups,” says the document. In this instance, it is the price of yellow corn that is rising the most, which has less impact on hunger and poverty than higher rice or wheat prices, except in Mesoamerica.

The impact is greater in the case of wheat. According to IICA’s technical note, “Most of the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries depend heavily on imports of wheat; hence, the international prices of this grain are transmitted rapidly to domestic markets, affecting the prices of flours and pastas. This may lead to higher consumption of substitute products, such as rice and potatoes, whose prices are bound to rise as well, though only slightly, because local supplies of those products are relatively plentiful.”

The evolution of the prices of grains and oilseeds will depend on the weather in the U.S. and the south of the hemisphere in September. The LAC countries’ vulnerability to the effects of price increases will depend on the importance of each product in the national diet, and on the source of imported items.

The document goes on to explain that “... countries that import their agricultural products from the United States ... will be more vulnerable than those that import them from Argentina, Brazil, or other countries where production has not experienced a sudden fall. Furthermore, countries that are net exporters of corn, soybeans, and wheat would benefit from higher prices.”

Uruguay: committed to achieving food price stability by FAO, 20 September 2012

<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/157315/icode/>

Full Article

Uruguay's Minister of Industry, Energy and Mining of Uruguay, Roberto Kreimerman, met yesterday with FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva at the Organization's headquarters in Rome.

During their meeting, Graziano da Silva and Kreimerman agreed on the need to address volatility of global agricultural prices. The Director-General noted the importance of existing international coordination mechanisms for the stabilization of commodity prices.

For his part, Kreimerman described Uruguay's experience in the area of cooperatives, highlighting the need to strengthen the industrialization of agricultural products. "A greater complementarity and diversification of the work of cooperatives in the production of food products are key factors of the Uruguayan experience in this field", the Minister said.

Graziano da Silva agreed with the Minister that the industrialization of primary products is a strategy that can contribute to the stabilization of international prices and highlighted Uruguay's vast experience in fields such as dairy and meats.

Another issue addressed by the Director-General and Minister Kreimerman was Uruguay's experience in tracking information on the purchase and sale of private land. In this regard, the Director-General noted that "Uruguay has a very sophisticated and advanced information system on land purchase and sale operations". He stressed the importance of sharing this experience in discussions on the **Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment** which take place in the framework of the Committee on World Food Security.

Finally, Graziano da Silva and Kreimerman addressed the issue of South-South cooperation, highlighting Uruguay's extensive experience in agricultural issues as "soil seeding", soil management and biofuels. The Director

General underlined FAO's role in facilitating such activities and referred to Uruguay's experience in the field of dairy products.

Maize

Argentina to increase Maize exports by FAO, 14 September 2012

<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/156449/icode/>

Full Article

Argentina will export an additional 2.75 million tonnes of maize from its 2011/12 crop, the country's Minister of Agriculture Norberto Yauhar confirmed here today.

This will increase the amount of maize to be exported by Argentina from that harvest to 16.45 million tonnes, Yauhar told FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva when they met at FAO Headquarters.

"The additional shipments, together with recent better-than-expected figures from the US Department of Agriculture, should help ease tight international markets," Yauhar said.

Argentina, the world's second biggest maize exporter, was responsible for roughly of 15% of the world's maize exports in the last three years.

"This goes to show that there is no threat of a global food crisis at present, although we must continue to be vigilant and monitor the situation closely," Graziano da Silva added.

The Minister spoke about the prospects for the upcoming harvest, noting that the outlook for both rainfall and plantings of maize and soybeans were very positive. He added that Argentina has already earmarked 15 million tons of maize and 5 million tons of wheat for export for the 2012/13 season.

Minister Yauhar also noted that Argentina maintains reserves of one million tons of maize and one million tons of wheat.

"For FAO, maintaining food security reserves is a very good strategy that contributes to the stability of domestic prices of food," said Graziano da Silva.

Yauhar added that during an official mission to China this week he and the Chinese Minister of Agriculture discussed the possibility of having strategic food security reserves at the regional and international levels.

The Director-General expressed interest and support for this proposal and said that he would discuss this issue in his upcoming visit to China in early October.

Coping with volatile prices

Graziano da Silva and Yauhar also noted that the world is now better placed to cope with higher food prices than during the crisis of 2007-2008. One reason is Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS).

Established in 2011 by the G20, AMIS contributes to increase market transparency and reduce price volatility and includes the Rapid Reaction Forum (RRF), which makes it possible for countries to coordinate action and respond faster to volatile food price situations.

The FAO Director-General and the Minister of Agriculture of Argentina agreed it was important that countries use international mechanisms such as AMIS instead of taking unilateral action.

They also noted that there was also better coordination within the United Nations System through the UN High Level Task Force on Global Food Security.

International food prices remain steady

This summer's drought in the United States - the worst in over 50 years - fuelled fears of a food crisis when the FAO Food Price Index, which measures the prices of internationally-traded commodities, surged six percent in July. The Index was unchanged last month, however.

Among other issues, Graziano da Silva and Yauhar discussed the possible contribution of speculation to increased food price volatility. Improved, coordinated regulation of trade and financial markets should be central to the international community's response, they agreed.

They also voiced concern at the possible impact of price volatility on national food security and concurred on the need for strengthening social protection, including social safety nets and support to local crops production. In this context, they highlighted that diversifying diets to consume more local produced food such as beans, cassava and quinoa - 2013 is the International Year of the Quinoa - were strategies that help poor populations cope with high food prices.

Graziano da Silva and Yauhar also stressed the need for the international donor community to increase its immediate and long-term support to poor countries. According to WFP, every 10 percent increase in the price of its food basket means finding an additional US\$200 million a year to buy the same amount of food. In the longer term, it is important to strengthen programmes that enable poor families to buy or produce their own food to reduce their dependency on direct assistance.

But they also noted that the recovery of food prices could play a positive role in stimulating agricultural investment and production in developing countries. However, that would only happen if farmers received appropriate support and countries provided the enabling environment for investment, they underlined.

Agricultural Development

ADB, NSDSL in partnership by Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, 25 September 2012

<http://www.newsday.co.tt/business/0,166718.html>

Full Article

FOOD Production Minister Devant Maharaj has praised the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) for the launch of its School Nutrition Caterers Loan initiative in collaboration with the National Schools Dietary Services Limited (NSDSL).

At the launch, on the weekend at the Centre Point Mall in Chaguanas, Maharaj said the ADB has assisted in delivery of the Prime Minister's mandate to all government ministries and its agencies, to "serve the people".

The ADB and the NSDSL has developed a comprehensive loan product that will contribute significantly to the further development and expansion of the country's School Feeding Programme.

This programme falls under the purview of the Ministry of Education and is responsible for supplying over 150,000 nutritious meals daily to our children at various schools across the country.

The Ministry of Food Production, and its agencies, recognised the important socio-economic role of a school feeding programme and aggressively pursued a strategy to enhance its success.

The School Feeding Programme is built on the promise of healthy, safe and nutritious meals for the future leaders of our nation, as well as creating a greater guaranteed market opportunity for our food and fruit farmers and processors.

“In considering our nation’s children, especially the middle class-poor, rural brothers and sisters and those with disparate and unique needs, the effectiveness of the School Feeding Programme cannot be underscored, and is fully supported by my ministry, since we are founded in the food baskets and rural communities of Trinidad and Tobago,” Maharaj told the gathering.

The number of people, he said, who continue to live under the poverty line is about 15-20 percent in TT. “And for an energy-rich nation, this is totally unacceptable. Over the last two years, we have observed that social justice demands that abject poverty be reduced and ultimately eradicated,” Maharaj added.

“My personal interest in the success of initiatives such as these is to be able to directly touch and improve the lives of our nation’s children. Especially those in our farming families, who would have been side-lined for decades, as the focus of development relied on other areas and projects, with the exception of agriculture,” Maharaj said.

The minister said that the target group of the School Feeding Programme has a clear nutritional deficiency, usually inadequate energy intake, and is oriented to correcting this rather than for short-term hunger relief.

The Ministry of Food Production and the ADB has partnered in this initiative to increase agri-business activities and investments, as well as the use of local ingredients and cooking methods.

Economic and Social Aid

Caribbean Region: Concerns over EC differentiated approach. CTA- Brussels Office Newsletter no. 335, 17 Sep 2012

http://brussels.cta.int/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=7018:caribbean-members-of-the-acp-concerns-over-the-ec-differentiated-approach-

Full Article

Sir Ronald Sanders, consultant and former diplomat raises awareness of likely aid cuts to all the Caribbean countries that are members of the ACP group, with the exception of Haiti. In line with the concerns of the ACP Group, which have been raised in the light of a differentiated approach on EU aid that is being considered by the European Commission, Mr Sanders points out: “the differentiated approach would make the status of Caribbean states as Middle Income Countries the basis for reducing aid to them”.

Speaking of the EU assistance to Caribbean's productive sector and infrastructure, he says that this is “an essential component of government revenues”, as it allows them to spend on social welfare programmes. “If EU assistance is reduced, Caribbean countries can expect to see an expansion of poverty and a reduction of social welfare programmes, with an attendant increase in unemployment and violent crime.”

Agriculture and Media

CARDI/CTA announce media awards on climate change reporting by Observer Media, 15 September 2012

<http://www.antiguaobserver.com/cardi-cta-launch-media-awards-on-climate-change-reporting>

Full Article

St. John's Antigua- An opportunity has presented itself for climate change reporters of the Caribbean to be awarded for their work.

The Caribbean Agricultural and Research Development Institute (CARDI) and The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA) have teamed up for a second consecutive year to launch a Caribbean-wide Media Awards on climate change, a release said.

Under the theme "Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation and Sustainability" the initiative's organisers seek to encourage broader and in-depth reporting, particularly on adaptation to the adverse impact of climate change in the Caribbean.

The competition targets full-time and freelance journalists and photojournalists working with print, new media, radio and television and covers work published or broadcast from August 2011 to August 2012. Submissions for entries close on Friday, September 28, 2012.

"There will be one overall winner in each category. The winners will each receive a cash prize of US\$1,200 and a trip to Antigua to participate in Caribbean Week of Agriculture activities during the first week of October, 2012," the communiqué read. "Separate arrangements will be made for winners from Antigua."

The awards categories cover: print news and features (newspapers, journals and magazines); new media articles (blogs, social media, websites); radio productions and news stories (traditional and online); and television – news and features no longer than five minutes in duration (including online content).

A special category, Citizen Journalist, has been created to encourage youth participation in representing climate change creatively in arts and culture or essays, the release noted.

"This can be published or recorded material or new material specifically created for this competition," the release read. "Young people between the ages of 18-35 years old are encouraged to apply."

Submissions via print, online must be made through email (live links or scanned pages in pdf or jpg, soft copy versions in Ms Word and jpegs) while radio and television submissions must either be downloadable as mp3, mpeg or avi files, streamed via the Internet or submitted as a CD in mp3, mpeg or avi formats or in DVD format.

Entrants are not entitled to submit more than two pieces of work per category.

"Participants must, along with the submission, present a signed statement from the relevant authorised person/media house as copyright holder allowing use of the submission by the organisers on its websites or other outreach materials or methods," the release said. "All submissions will be judged on the following values: Style – 25%, Content – 50%, Objectivity and Balance – 25%."

Send queries, links, media files and scanned submissions to: agrimediaawards@gmail.com

All winning entries will be published on the CARDI and CTA websites at: www.cardi.org and the websites of partners.

Climate Change is defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as the “adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities.”

ICT and Agriculture

Growing more maize - with a mobile phone by New Agriculturalist, 12 September 2012 <http://www.new-ag.info/en/focus/focusItem.php?a=2755>

Full Article

The numbers on the keypad of Eric Owandu's mobile phone have been completely worn away, but that hasn't stopped it from being one of the most important tools on his farm. Six months ago Eric, from Gem District, western Kenya, signed up to a regional trial of the new E-Farming text message service that provides him with advice on crop management, fertiliser use and which maize varieties to plant. "My mobile phone is now like a piece of farm equipment," he says. "It's key in determining my productivity in the field."

Established in 2011, E-Farming is run by the African Soil Information Service (AfSIS), a CIAT-led initiative, which has spent the last four years collecting and analysing thousands of soil samples in an effort to create a comprehensive soil map of sub-Saharan Africa. In its pilot phase, the text messaging service - run in conjunction with the Africa Soil Health Consortium led by CABI-Africa and Fibre Link Communications Ltd - is being assessed to see whether agronomic advice can be effectively disseminated to farmers via mobile phone.

Agronomic advice

When registering for the service through SMS, farmers are able to indicate their crop of interest and whether they want information on soils, fertiliser application, agronomy, markets or pesticide use. Farmers also have the option to send a separate SMS requesting specific information, to which AfSIS and Fibre Link Communications respond on an individual basis. Eric is one of currently around 1,600 farmers to have subscribed to the trial, which aims to reach 50,000 farmers across Kenya by the end of 2012, in association with Kenya's national farmers' organisation. If successful, the service could be extended to include very precise, site-specific advice for boosting food production, based on the new AfSIS soil maps.

Here are two examples of what the messages - limited to 159 characters - say:

- If your maize crop is about 3 weeks from planting time it is time to weed your field. Weeds compete with plants for water and nutrients, affecting their growth
- Weeding of maize should be completed by now. After this, top-dress with CAN or UREA fertilizers*. Use one 50k bag/acre of UREA or two 50Kg bags of CAN/acre

Each text message Eric receives costs 10 Kenyan Shillings (US\$0.12), and he receives, on average, three messages per month. While the cost is roughly double that of a standard text message in Kenya, Eric is very happy with the service, describing it as 'affordable'. He is also in no doubt that it is effective: "I would urge other farmers to join," he continues, with this season's maize crop towering several feet above him. "Now, you can see what my shamba [field] looks like; this service has helped me a lot to improve my production." He even has some suggestions for additional services: "I would request the AfSIS project to go further and tell us when the rainfall is due, where we can access farm inputs and where to sell our harvests."

Dr Peter Okoth, senior scientist at CIAT and AfSIS, explains why the scheme has become possible: "Three or four years ago, farmers in Kenya didn't have mobile phones. Now almost every farmer or household in the country has one. You can buy a phone for as little as 800 KSH (US\$10), thanks to low-cost handsets from China. It's an unprecedented opportunity to reach farmers with important crop management information. Of course, the smart farmers will subscribe to the service, and then organise group meetings with their neighbours to share the information by word-of-mouth!"

Boosting yields

So far, farmers have reported that E-Farming enabled them to purchase the correct seed and fertilisers, on time. Many are expecting to double their maize yields. An extra advantage of the service is that the information reaches farmers much more quickly than if an extension adviser had to visit each farm in person. This is particularly important when heavy rains make road travel in rural areas difficult.

Ambrose Ogwayo, an extension officer at the Kenyan Ministry of Agriculture, was approached by AfSIS in 2011 to help recruit farmers in Gem District into the scheme. He has personally helped the service reach an additional 250 maize producers. "The farmers used to plant late, but now they plant on-time with the onset of the rains," he explains. "From my observations, many more farmers would like to join the service."

But Ogwayo also believes the service has some limitations. "In many places farmers are illiterate and they would not be in a position to read most of the messages. Also, when there is no face-to-face contact, it becomes difficult for farmers to raise questions." To address this, AfSIS is investigating the possibility of sending text messages in local languages, and is also looking at establishing a voice-activated advice hotline for farmers to call with specific questions.

Agricultural Research

African researchers face omission from lucrative EU Science projects by Paula Park for SciDev, part of the Guardian development network guardian.co.uk, The Guardian, Friday 7 September 2012

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2012/sep/07/african-researchers-left-out-eu-science>

Full Article

African scientists could become more likely to be left out of lucrative collaborations with EU researchers from 2013, according to some policy experts.

A mandate for EU research groups to include African partners in projects was dropped from the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) 2013 calls for proposals for EU competitive research grant issued on 9 July. The calls cover 11 themes, including agriculture, water and energy, and are worth 8.1bn euros (\$10.2bn). In the FP7 grants for the period 2010–2012, researchers engaged in investigating a number of themes, including fisheries and biotechnology, were required to collaborate with at least one international group from Africa.

Some fear that in the absence of a specific mandate, EU researchers will be unwilling to collaborate with African peers. There are also concerns that the decision could affect calls for grants for Horizon 2020, the EU's 2014–2020 framework programme for research and innovation to replace the FP7, worth around \$100bn.

François Stepman, European co-manager of the Platform for African-European Partnership on Agricultural Research for Development, told SciDev.Net that without requirements for African collaborations, many EU researchers will be reluctant to work with African scientists, believing it will not help their careers to do so.

"There's a decline [among EU researchers] in trying to include African researchers," Stepman said. Young scientists keen on building careers are more likely to collaborate with US researchers, because this is more likely to lead to publications in international journals, he explained.

Stepman said EU scientists also worry that African researchers can lack the administrative support available in developed countries, leading to challenges in "getting the reports in on time and in getting the finance". He said: "You have to do too much work to get them on board."

The decline in partnerships will affect the ability of scientists to research subjects of mutual interest, including food security and price hikes, climate change, biofuels and genetically modified organisms, he added.

For African scientists, the fallout could be severe. "Many African experts don't have access to research funding from their [own] countries," said Kevin Chika Urama, executive director of the Africa Technology Policy Studies Network in Nairobi, Kenya. "The EU research funding has been a pivotal avenue to partnership with EU researchers."

"A lot of African issues, such as the needs of the poor in rural areas, are under-researched. Some of these issues are not of interest [to European researchers]," he said, adding that a solution may be for the EU to set up a specific grant programme aimed at African researchers.

The move to drop the mandatory collaboration with Africa from 2013 calls for proposals reflects European political leaders' disquiet about the use of funds outside the EU generally, said Andrew Cherry, co-ordinator for the Network for the Coordination and Advancement of Sub-Saharan Africa-EU Science & Technology Co-operation.

However, Daan du Toit, minister-counsellor for science and technology at the South African Mission to the EU, said the move does not mean fruitful co-operation is not possible.

"All topics of this year's FP7 calls for proposals are open for African participation," he said. "African researchers have to identify which ones are relevant for them, and which are ones where they can add value to the work of the European or international consortia – then participation will follow. In many of the topics in this year's calls, African researchers are well placed to play an important part."

Michael Jennings, a European Commission spokesman for research, innovation and science, said there was a need "to better articulate science and technology capacity-building initiatives" to be supported with "collaborative research activities that can be selected and funded through FP7 and the upcoming Horizon 2020 programme".

Cherry said it remains to be seen how African researchers can participate in Horizon 2020.

Renewable Energy

Third Caribbean sustainable energy forum opens in St. Kitts and Nevis by CARICOM website, Press release 247/2012, 11 September 2012 http://www.caricom.org/jsp/pressreleases/press_releases_2012/pres247_12.jsp

Full Article

(CARICOM Secretariat, Turkeyen, Greater Georgetown, Guyana) More than 150 persons from across the Region and beyond are expected in St. Kitts and Nevis Thursday and Friday for the Third Caribbean Sustainable Energy Forum (CSEF) and Exhibition.

Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, the Rt. Honourable Dr. Denzil Douglas, will deliver the keynote address and set the tone for the event which will be held at the St. Kitts Marriot Resort.

CSEF3 is organized by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat in collaboration with St. Kitts and Nevis. The Governments of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Finland, Germany and the United Kingdom, along with the European Union, have generously contributed to the hosting of the event. The previous two of editions were organized by the German component of the Caribbean Renewable Energy Development Programme, in collaboration with the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute (CEHI) and were held in St Georges, Grenada in 2008, and Montego Bay, Jamaica in 2010.

The Forum this year will be convened under the theme 'Advancing Energy Integration and Energy Access through Renewable Energy (RE) and Energy Efficiency (EE) in CARICOM', and will be held against the backdrop of the United Nation's designation of 2012 as the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All.

The objective of the CSEF is to facilitate dialogue and actions towards more robust policies, and transfer of appropriate technologies in renewable energy and energy efficiency. It aims ultimately to contribute to the diversification of the regional energy supply from its current fossil fuels base to renewable energy. It is envisioned that the diversification will be supported by effective energy demand management, as a means of addressing the high of cost of energy that is linked to over-dependence on petroleum-based energy importation in most Member States.

CSEF3 also seeks to broaden the platform for engaging the regional energy stakeholders on sustainable energy issues, as well as fulfill mandates by CARICOM Energy Ministers and policymakers related to supporting energy integration. Through a series of panels of experts and regional practitioners in various areas of renewable energy and energy efficiency, issues related to technological options, financing and risks, in the CARICOM context, will be explored.

Special focus will be placed on the integration of energy systems in the Eastern Caribbean based on geothermal resources. Improving access to appropriate financing of renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, which still remains relatively expensive, will be explored through a panel of representatives from the leading multilateral financing agencies. Attention will also be paid to possible regional approaches to address the special cases of energy poverty and lack of energy access in the Community.

The Forum will also seek to examine the outcomes of the recent Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development with regard to sustainable energy,, particularly in the context of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the Region's capacity to maximize benefits for the development of the energy sector.

The recommendations from CSEF3 will be considered for action at the Community level.

Upcoming Events

October 2012

Caribbean Week of Agriculture

Date: 14- 20 October 2012

Venue: Antigua and Barbuda

Website: <http://www.caribbeanweekofagriculture.ag/>

Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development 2012: Second Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD II)

Date: 29 October – 1 November 2012

Venue: Punta del Este, Uruguay

Website: <http://www.egfar.org/gcard-2012>