Agriculture research and training bodies join forces to host ‘hot pepper training’ for farmers. Trinidad and Tobago Government Information Services Limited, 6 May 2013

The programme will be hosted at the Ministry of Food Production’s Extension Office in Chase Village, Chaguanas from 8:45 am – 4:10 pm.

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.
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
Cassava

Sectoral Debate - Clarke wants more focus on cassava by Daraine Luton. Jamaica Gleaner, 9 May 2013
http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20130509/lead/lead7.html

Full Article

DESPITE A massive decline in the production of cassava on the island, Agriculture Minister Roger Clarke is talking up the potential of the tuber, saying it can be a main ingredient in food for consumption.

The production of bitter cassava declined from 7,522 tonnes in 2011 to 6,036 tonnes last year, a 19.8 per cent fall-off, data from the latest Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica has indicated.

At the same time, the production of sweet cassava fell by 7.9 per cent from 13,011 tonnes to 11,984 over the same period.

"The Trinidadians came here the other day and they brought bread for me and they told me that 30 per cent of that bread had cassava in it, and you would never discern that cassava was in it," Clarke said.

He suggested that it could be used alongside other crops in the school-feeding programme.

In 2008, the then government encouraged mass cultivation of cassava saying it had tremendous potential to boost economic growth and improve food security. The production of sweet cassava moved from 8,250 tonnes in 2008 to 13,011 tonnes in 2011. In the case of bitter cassava, its production moved from 6,741 tonnes in 2008 to 7,522 in 2011.

In the meantime, Clarke, who was speaking in the Sectoral Debate in the House of Representatives yesterday, said the country was moving in the right direction to grow agriculture.

He said the exports of food increased by 22.3 per cent from US$224 in 2011 to US$274 million last year.

The minister said the current economic conditions present an opportunity for players in the sector.

"Our high unsustainable food import bill provides a significant opportunity for import substitution. The devaluation of the Jamaican dollar need not be a death knell, but should serve as an encouragement for more export," Clarke said.

The food-import bill last year was measured at US$959 million, up from US$938 million in 2011.

The minister, however, boasted of a massive reduction in the importation of several food items, chief among them being cucumber, pork, carrot, sweet pepper, lettuce and watermelon.

Estates fall off

According to Clarke, in the past year the importation of cucumber fell by 69.4 per cent, pork by 37.4 per cent, carrot 41.5 per cent, watermelon 20.5, sweet pepper 28.5 and lettuce 67.8 per cent.
Meanwhile, Clarke has said the Chinese-owned sugar estates have fallen off in the production of sugar.

The minister said sugar is this year projected at 125,000 tonnes compared with 131,589 tonnes last year.

He said the factories, owned by the Chinese, produced 65,000 tonnes of sugar last year but this year production fell to 54,000. According to Clarke, the agronomic practices on the Complant-operated farms are less than desirable. He said the Government was committed to working with the company to help it improve production.


**Full Article**

The T&T Agribusiness Association (TTABA) yesterday signed agreements with local bakeries to produce bread and 38 farmers to supply cassava using 240 acres of land. Addressing the signing ceremony at the Hotel Normandie, St Ann’s, TTABA chairman Joe Pires Jr said the group has set a budget of $3 million a month to achieve its goals 2013. The TTABA is on a mission to reduce T&T’s high food import bill by providing consumers with local alternative.

The cassava bread will be the first product offered by the association to the T&T market through supermarkets and other retailers. “The product we are launching is a new health-orientated bread made with locally-grown cassava, sweet potatoes and plantain,” said Pires.

“We actually started with cassava today and we signed a contract with 38 farmers to grow the equivalent of 240 acres of cassava which we would require in the next four to five months, based on the contracts that TTABA has already signed (with)—HiLo, Tru Valu, Unipet, NP, other institutions like that,” he said.

Pires said five bakeries, including one in Tobago, have been contracted to produce the bread based on conditions set by TTABA and supply it to the retailers the TTABA has signed contracts with. He said the TTABA has no plans to get into manufacturing but will link various stakeholders to launch the products on the shelves of local retailers. The other items which TTABA plans to develop into products include coconut water, paw paw, pepper mash and pommecythere juice.

The TTABA is a not for profit organisation and does not receive funding from the Government. Established in 2006 by private sector agri-business stakeholders and previously supported by the Government, the group was given a mandate to accelerate national economic and social development through expansion of the agri-business sector.

Membership and 13-member Board of Directors comprise representatives from farmers groups, commodity associations, the Supermarket Association, The Hotel and Restaurant Association, the Agro-processors Association, the Agricultural Exporters Association, the Housewives/Consumers Association and the Input Suppliers Association. Government representatives from the Ministry of
Agriculture, the Agricultural Development Bank and the Tobago House of Assembly also sit on the TTABA board.

The group’s core business is the provision of technical services the development of selected agricultural commodity/industry value-chains and provision of high quality agro-processing services. The TTABA is also working to develop agro-industry value-chains and provide agro-processing services to support three critical pillars of national development—health/nutrition security, bio-energy security and environmental security.

Cereals and Grains

Agriculture Ministry signs agreement for 800 acres of sorghum by the Jamaica Information Service, 10 May 2013

Full Article

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, on Thursday, May 9, signed an agreement with Caribbean Broilers to immediately put 800 acres of land into sorghum production, at Amity Hall in St. Catherine. Planting began on Thursday under the project, which is among the first initiatives being undertaken in the establishment of the Ministry’s flagship Agro Parks concept.

Speaking at the signing and post-Sectoral press briefing at the Ministry’s Hope Garden’s location, portfolio Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke, said the collaboration came about after observing Caribbean Broilers successful cultivation of sorghum. The company also needed more land for production. “The opportunity presented itself… and we can provide some of those lands. Over the past few weeks, we have done quite a lot of land preparation in readiness for their beginning to sow the seeds almost immediately,” he explained.

“This is going to be a real fillip to our being able to substitute some of that US$300 million that we spend to bring in grains…this is going to be able to make a dent in that,” Mr. Clarke asserted. Sorghum is one of a numerous species of grasses, which is raised for grain and many of which are used as fodder plants.

Basic infrastructure will be put in by the Ministry, such as drainage and irrigation, with the land being leased by Agro Invest Corporation, an agency of the Ministry.

The Ministry will be implementing nine agro parks over the next three years at a cost of US$8 million. The parks will contribute to employment; increase agricultural output; reduce the national food import bill, and stimulate food exports.

The project is being funded in part by the European Union, with the Agro Investment Corporation and the National Irrigation Commission providing infrastructure development and irrigation facilities, respectively.
Among the crops being contemplated for production include some 1,700 acres of sorghum to reduce grain imports for animal feed, which is currently underway. Some 689 acres of onions are to be planted shortly, to reduce the import bill for onions by approximately 45 per cent. Additionally, 550 acres of legumes, vegetables, tubers and condiments will be cultivated.

In his contribution to the 2013/14 Sectoral Debate in the House of Representatives on May 8, Minister Clarke noted that significant production activities are already taking place at New Forest/Duff House and Yallahs, as two new irrigation schemes have been completed for these areas.

“The value that these agro parks will add is to orientate production to defined markets by linking existing farmers to private sector buyers. This work is currently being done, and therefore, for all intents and purposes, these two agro parks will come on stream this year,” Mr. Clarke said.

Agro Parks, targeted specifically at import substitution, are being developed through a tri-partite partnership involving the Government, farmer/investors, and the private sector.

The Government is making the lands available with the requisite infrastructure for leasing to farmers/investors, who will be responsible for working capital and agricultural production.

The Agro Parks concept is aimed at putting some 8,000 acres of idle lands into production, and are being sited at: Plantain Gardens and Yallahs, St. Thomas; Amity Hall and Hill Run, St. Catherine; Ebony Park and Spring Plain in Clarendon; New Forest/Duff House, St. Elizabeth/Manchester; Ettingdon, Trelawny; and Meylersfield in Westmoreland.

Environmental review to delay two engineered crops by Andrew Pollack, 10 May 2013
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/11/business/energy-environment/environmental-review-to-delay-two-engineered-crops.html?_r=0

Full Article

Genetically engineered crops that could sharply increase the use of two powerful herbicides are now unlikely to reach the market until at least 2015 because the Department of Agriculture has decided to subject the crops to more stringent environmental reviews than it had originally intended.

The department said on Friday that it had made the decision after determining that approval of the crops “may significantly affect the quality of the human environment.”

The crops in question are Dow Chemical’s corn and soybeans that would be resistant to the herbicide 2,4-D and Monsanto’s dicamba-resistant cotton and soybeans. Many farmers say they would welcome the new crops because it would give them a way to kill the rapidly growing number of weeds that have become resistant to their main herbicide — Roundup, known generically as glyphosate. Most of the corn, soybeans and cotton grown in the United States are genetically engineered to tolerate glyphosate, allowing farmers to spray the chemical to kill weeds without hurting the crops.
But opponents all say that approval of the crops would spur big increases in the use of 2,4-D and dicamba, which they say are more damaging to the environment and possibly human health than glyphosate.

Some fruit and vegetable growers and canners have been concerned that their crops would be damaged by 2,4-D or dicamba drifting over from nearby corn or soybean farms. The Agriculture Department said Friday that both chemicals had “been safely and widely used across the country since the 1960s.” The department had already prepared shorter environmental assessments on two of the Dow crops and put them out for public comment. It did not say how long the more complete environmental impact statements would take, though past experience suggests it could be 15 months to more than two years. Dow had initially hoped to have its 2,4-D-resistant corn on the market this year, though it then pushed it back to 2014. On Friday, it said approval was now not likely until 2015. It had not expected its soybeans to be ready for market until 2015 anyway.

Monsanto, which called the Agriculture Department decision “unexpected,” had been hoping to start selling its soybeans in 2014 and cotton in 2015.

The department was likely to be sued had it not taken the new course.

The federal approvals of genetically engineered alfalfa and sugar beets were rescinded by a federal judge a few years ago. The judge, in response to lawsuits filed by the Center for Food Safety, said the Agriculture Department had not adequately considered the environmental impacts.

Still, the department said on Friday that, under its regulatory authority, the decision on whether to approve the crops would rest solely on whether they are plant pests. That raised questions about what influence, if any, the environmental impact statements would have.

One environmental group, the Pesticide Action Network, applauded the delay. “Farmers across the country have been voicing their growing worries about these seeds, which have been designed to be used with toxic drift-prone herbicides,” Marcia Ishii-Eiteman, a senior scientist, said in a statement. However, she said the fact that the approval decision would be based solely on the plant pest risk rather than the overall environmental impact “illustrates gaping flaws in our regulatory system.”

The Biotechnology Industry Organization, a trade group representing biotech crop developers, said the decision set a bad precedent.

These crops “have already been subjected to multiple delays in the approval system,” Cathleen Enright, executive vice president for food and agriculture, said in a statement. “No new scientific issues about potential risks have been raised.”

Dow and Monsanto said they would cooperate with the Agriculture Department and use the extra time to better prepare for the introduction of the crops.

“Glyphosate-resistant and hard-to-control weeds have spread across our nation’s farmland,” Dow said in a statement. “Twenty-five states are now affected and the number of new acres infested in 2012 increased by 50 percent over the previous year. These adverse trends will continue without new state-of-the-art solutions like the Enlist Weed Control System.”

Enlist is Dow’s name for the crops resistant to 2,4-D and the accompanying herbicide.
Corn Soya and Wheat rally by Business recorder, 11May 2013
http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/1184461/

Full Article

US grains and soyabean rallied on Thursday, with soyabean touching their highest level in nearly two months, as traders covered short positions ahead of a monthly US Agriculture Department report. Wheat and corn notched the biggest gains, surging 2.5 percent, but the bullish tone supported the entire agricultural complex.

"This looks like a short-covering rally in front of tomorrow's USDA report," said Chris Robinson, senior trader at Top Third Ag Marketing. "Nobody is expecting a lot of fireworks out of it but you just never know. We are just evening up in front of the number." Corn rose even as planters rolled across the US Midwest, allowing many farmers to make their best progress of the weather-delayed seeding season. A firmer cash market - basis values were trending near record levels at soyabean processors - provided a pillar of support to futures prices. Better-than-expected export demand added additional strength to soyabean.

"What this boils down to is just tight supplies," said Dewey Strickler, president of Ag Watch Market Advisors, a grain industry consultancy. The most-active Chicago Board of Trade July soyabean contract settled up 18 cents at $14.08-3/4 a bushel. Prices briefly passed through their 100-day moving average and settled above that key technical point for the first time since March 27.

The May soyabean contract, which is in its delivery period, was up 12-1/4 cents at $14.91-1/4 a bushel and hit its highest level since March 12. USDA said early Thursday that old-crop soyabean export sales totalled 193,800 tonnes in the latest reporting week, topping market forecasts for zero to 100,000 tonnes. CBOT July soft red winter wheat was 17-1/2 cents higher at $7.23-1/2 a bushel.

Analysts expect the USDA report on Friday to show that 2013 US winter wheat production will fall 9 percent from a year ago in its first official estimate of the 2013 crop. "Private estimates ... continue to point to a significant tightening in US hard red winter and hard red spring wheat supplies in 2013/14," said Luke Mathews, analyst at Commonwealth Bank of Australia. "This will help pull total wheat supplies lower in the year ahead, providing price support to the complex," CBOT July corn was 15-3/4 cents higher at $6.48-3/4 a bushel.

Corn Soya and Wheat rally by Business recorder, 11May 2013
http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/1184461/

Full Article

US grains and soyabean rallied on Thursday, with soyabean touching their highest level in nearly two months, as traders covered short positions ahead of a monthly US Agriculture Department report. Wheat and corn notched the biggest gains, surging 2.5 percent, but the bullish tone supported the entire agricultural complex.
"This looks like a short-covering rally in front of tomorrow's USDA report," said Chris Robinson, senior trader at Top Third Ag Marketing. "Nobody is expecting a lot of fireworks out of it but you just never know. We are just evening up in front of the number." Corn rose even as planters rolled across the US Midwest, allowing many farmers to make their best progress of the weather-delayed seeding season. A firmer cash market - basis values were trending near record levels at soyabean processors - provided a pillar of support to futures prices. Better-than-expected export demand added additional strength to soyabean.

"What this boils down to is just tight supplies," said Dewey Strickler, president of Ag Watch Market Advisors, a grain industry consultancy. The most-active Chicago Board of Trade July soyabean contract settled up 18 cents at $14.08-3/4 a bushel. Prices briefly passed through their 100-day moving average and settled above that key technical point for the first time since March 27.

The May soyabean contract, which is in its delivery period, was up 12-1/4 cents at $14.91-1/4 a bushel and hit its highest level since March 12. USDA said early Thursday that old-crop soyabean export sales totalled 193,800 tonnes in the latest reporting week, topping market forecasts for zero to 100,000 tonnes. CBOT July soft red winter wheat was 17-1/2 cents higher at $7.23-1/2 a bushel.

Analysts expect the USDA report on Friday to show that 2013 US winter wheat production will fall 9 percent from a year ago in its first official estimate of the 2013 crop. "Private estimates ... continue to point to a significant tightening in US hard red winter and hard red spring wheat supplies in 2013/14," said Luke Mathews, analyst at Commonwealth Bank of Australia. "This will help pull total wheat supplies lower in the year ahead, providing price support to the complex," CBOT July corn was 15-3/4 cents higher at $6.48-3/4 a bushel.

Soybeans finish strong by Mike McGinnis. Agriculture.com, 7 May 2013
http://www.agriculture.com/markets/analysis/corn/soybeans-finish-strong_9-ar31335

Full Article

DES MOINES, Iowa (Agriculture.com)--Despite finishing slightly higher, the CME Group corn market disappoints considering very late planting in the U.S., analysts say.

The July futures corn contract settled 3 cents higher at $6.39. New-crop Dec. futures finished 1 cent higher at $5.39. The July soybean futures contract ended 13 cents higher at $13.82, new-crop Nov. soybeans finished 7 cents higher at $12.14. July wheat futures finished 6 cents higher at $7.09 per bushel. The July soymeal futures ended $2.10 per short ton higher at $403.30. The July soyoil futures closed $0.38 higher at $49.14.

In the outside markets, the NYMEX crude oil is $0.64 per barrel lower, the dollar is lower and the Dow Jones Industrials are 69 points higher.

Peter Meyer, PIRA Energy Group senior director of agricultural commodities, says that it's really hard to draw much from today's action, except to say that the market obviously has no fear of late corn planting at this point.
"At 12% planted and no market reaction, I have to wonder what it will take to get a rally going. The action in corn is very disappointing. There’s still plenty of time to get the crop in. But, in my estimation, only 30% will be planted by May 15th. After that, the remaining 70% will be subject to yield loss. Market doesn’t seem to care," Meyer says.

Regarding soybeans, Meyer is bearish new crop and will use this rally to get short, he says. "As far as old crop is concerned, it’s pretty obvious there are very little, if any, old crop beans in the US. And the Brazilians have been slow to meet other demand. Don’t see much of a trade there," Meyer says.

Ken Smithmier, The Hightower Report analyst, says the market brushed aside the slow planting pace and is looking ahead to a more favorable 6-10 day outlook for planting progress.

"There also seems to be a few more June weather outlooks floating around that suggest cooler temperatures as compared with year ago levels. There might be some directional bias to the downside because of those forecasts," Smithmier says.

The outside markets aren’t helping with metal and energy markets failing to extend upside gains, he says. "Plus, the downside move in the CRB Index continues to suggest negative commodity sentiment is here to stay, at least for the short term," he says.

Gov’t continues to secure preferential rice market; create more opportunities for farmers. Guyana Government Information Agency (GINA) feature, Georgetown, May 4, 2013

Full Article

Against the scenario of increasing rice production and supply, it is encouraging that the Government of Guyana has assured rice markets for its farmers and millers, as it has solidified strong international relations with countries which have paved the way for Guyana’s rice and paddy to secure preferential markets in these countries.

Such effort on the part of the Government has only resulted in continued confidence of the rice farmers to increasingly cultivate, and in a larger quantity. The past two years have recorded more than 400,000 tonnes of rice and at present, Guyana is on a trajectory to surpass the 2012 record production of 422,000 tonnes; achieving the highest rice production ever, in excess of 450,000 tonnes.

Farmers can remain confident as already, a Venezuelan market has been assured for a large fraction of this production. This in line with Agriculture Minister Dr Leslie Ramsammy and Venezuelan Nutrition and Food Safety Minister Felix Osorio on Friday inking a Letter of Commitment that will see Guyana supplying 140,000 tonnes of its paddy and 70,000 tonnes of white rice to Venezuela. The agreement for this amount is expected to be signed by the middle of this month.

In two years, this Venezuelan market has become one of the more lucrative ones, and the Government has successfully sealed four rice agreements with Venezuela, from which the farmers and millers alike have gained enormously, as the subsequent agreements over time, have covered increasing shipment of rice to Venezuela.

The local farmers first benefitted from Guyana’s trade relations with Venezuela in 2009, when the first historical agreement between these two countries was inked on October 21 of that year.
Then Minister of Agriculture, Robert Persaud and Venezuelan Ambassador Dario Morandy facilitated the signing of a trade agreement that created a market for 10,000 tonnes of paddy and 40,000 tonnes of white rice. This US$18.8M or G$3.7B agreement, provided for $420 and $700 (US) per metric tonne for paddy and white rice, respectively.

Under this first agreement, the initial exportation was shipped to Venezuela in first week of November 2009. Thereafter, 10 shipments followed.

Minister Persaud went on to ink three more deals with the Venezuelans. The second deal was inked on August 27, 2010 and this one ensured 30 percent of the 2010 second crop, a secure market. This was about 1.2 to 1.3 million bags of paddy.

Under this second rice deal, valued at US$38M, 50,000 tonnes of paddy and 20,000 tonnes of white rice were shipped from Guyana from October 2010 to Venezuela. Under this deal, suppliers were again, like the first agreement paid US$420 per tonne of paddy and US$700 per tonne of white rice.

The third agreement however, saw a shipment going to Venezuela, higher in quality and value as to the previous contract. Wherein, in the second contract 20,000 tonnes of white rice and 50,000 tonnes of paddy were exported, in the third, 30,000 tonnes of white rice at the cost of US$800 per metric tonne and 50,000 tonnes of paddy at the cost of US$480 per metric tonne were exported to Venezuela.

This third contract; a US$48M deal was signed almost one year later, in May 2011.

A few months later, in October, Minister Persaud signed the fourth rice agreement with Venezuela, which provided for the export of 50,000 tonnes of paddy at US$520 per metric tonne and 20,000 metric tonnes of rice at US$800 per metric tonne.

In addition to establishing this fourth deal, the three previous contracts were upgraded and or extended. The first contract: 40,000 metric tonnes of paddy for US$380 per metric tonnes was revised to US$420 per metric tonnes and 10,000 metric tonnes of white rice at US$600 per metric tonne to US$700 per metric tonne.

The second contract; 50,000 metric tonnes of paddy at US$420 per metric tonne was revised to US$480 per metric tonne for all shipments made in 2011 and 20,000 metric tonnes of white rice at US$700 per metric tonne; was revised to US$800 for shipments made in 2011.

The third contract for 30,000 tonnes of white rice at the cost of US$800 per metric tonne and 50,000 tonnes of paddy at the cost of US$480 per metric tonne was extended.

At the moment, Venezuela is the largest importer of rice produced by Guyana. Given the fact that more than 60 percent of Guyana’s rice export goes to Venezuela, the phenomenal growth that the country’s rice sector has made today can in part be attributed to Government securing this Venezuelan market.

Government’s effort in securing markets for this commodity has not been limited to Venezuela, as it has reached out to its sister Caricom countries and has secured and strengthened its market to Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, to Europe and the Eastern Caribbean.

To this end, annually 50,000 tonnes of rice is exported to Jamaica, 25,000 tonnes to Trinidad and Tobago and smaller amounts to Europe and the Eastern Caribbean.

And therefore, the latest signing of an agreement to supply rice to Venezuela is just another testament of Government’s investing in providing the requisite support mechanism to complement the performance of the industry. This in light of existing support to farmers in gaining knowledge about
new land preparation techniques and new ways of managing the crop and supplying them with better seed varieties and secure drainage.

Today, rice in Guyana is the second most important agricultural industry and in light of the country’s continued increase in production, it is encouraging that farmers can produce; secure in the knowledge that Government has paved the way for them to take advantage of markets it has established.

Hot Pepper

Agriculture research and training bodies join forces to host ‘hot pepper training’ for farmers.
Trinidad and Tobago Government Information Services Limited, 6 May 2013

Full Article

The Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) on Monday 6th May, 2013, will be joined by the Ministry of Food Production (MFP), the University of the West Indies (UWI), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Cocoa Research Centre (CRU) and the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) to host a training intervention for Trinidad and Tobago farmers, titled ‘New production and marketing technologies in hot pepper – dealing with the hot issues’. The programme will be hosted at the Ministry of Food Production’s Extension Office in Chase Village, Chaguanas from 8:45 am – 4:10 pm.

The Session will see participants exposed to technical training in the areas of:

Planning and Production
Planning production and marketing
Seedling production and transplanting
Soil, water and nutrient management systems
Crop protection (insects and mites, diseases and weeds)
Postharvest and marketing
Harvest and postharvest handling
Marketing requirements

The primary objectives of the session are to expose farmers to new and improved production and marketing technologies aimed at solving burning issues; and to sensitize farmers to emerging marketing opportunities for hot peppers.

Participants will have the benefit of the technical competence of the following experts in the field of agriculture research:

Dr. Janet Lawrence, Entomologist and Unit Head, CARDI Trinidad and Tobago
Herman Adams, Hot Pepper Breeder, CARDI
Mr. Edric Harry, IICA
Mr. Fayaz Shah, Manager, Five Star Farms
Protected Agriculture

Greenhouses can cut food import bill by Darcel Choy. Trinidad and Tobago Newsday. Business Day, Thursday, May 9 2013
http://www.newsday.co.tt/businessday/0,177437.html

Full Article

THERE is a new greenhouse initiative that can play a major role in reducing the country’s food import bill. This initiative which was launched last Friday in Wallerfield by Marketing and Distribution Limited promises a higher quality yield and uses less pesticides. Several crops can be grown with the new greenhouses including tomatoes, sweet peppers, cucumbers, bodi, herbs including parsley fine thyme and mint.

There are several aspects of the greenhouse that makes it better than the regular ones including how it controls the temperature and humidity. There are high side walls, horizontal airflow fans, extractor fans and large vents which maintains a suitable temperature for growing crops.

The produce has a longer shelf life, an improved taste and the yield can range from 14 to 24 kilogrammes, per square metre in the greenhouse.

The cost of the greenhouse can range from $250,000 to $350,000 but interested persons can seek financing from the Agricultural Development Bank as well as through Government incentives.

Chief Executive Officer of Marketing and Distribution Limited, Susan Hamel-Smith said the greenhouse was very efficient as it did not take up much space which made it easier to manage and control the production.

“It is relatively easy compared to traditional farming it is easy to get into. The consistency of production is good and because of the environment you don’t need a lot of labour. Praedial larceny is also reduced because of the environment,” she said.
She admitted this was not going to be the miracle cure for all the ills within the agriculture sector but it does make it a little bit easier for farmers. Hamel-Smith said there was a market for the type of produce that are grown in the greenhouse.

“The market is definitely there. When you consider the food import bill on things like fresh produce. When fresh produce comes here it is a week old at the very least. With produce from the greenhouse, it comes straight from the plant to the grocery shelf, it is much fresher and the shelf life is impressive so spoilage is not an issue,” Hamel-Smith said.

“There are a lot of supermarkets who are interested in being able to give them a level of certainty around the supply, government is interested in the price of food, this is a way you could provide food a little bit more consistently as it is a controlled environment,” she said.

Two farmers who currently use the greenhouse, are father son Trevor and Jemal Mark. Trevor said he worked in the corporate world for several years as a human resource manager before delving into the farming world more than six years ago.

He started off with a regular greenhouse but saw the benefits of the greenhouse Marketing and Distribution offered and decided to try it about five years ago and he loved the success he saw.

“Those extractor fans are a great feature in these greenhouses. Having those fans installed makes it much cooler than the regular greenhouse. The mesh surrounding the house has a larger opening and while there are concerns about insects getting it, it actually allows for better circulation of air. All the aspects of it helps with productivity, the plants are healthier which means greater production and the quality of the produce is high,” he said.

Trevor said while he has seen success in using the greenhouse, farmers like himself need assistance from Government.

“The fertilisers we buy are high in cost and we are competing with the middle men who bring in imported produce from abroad and sell it at lower prices. You find the playing field isn’t level and that is a serious situation. If we are talking about making agriculture a viable option, we need to look at these things and level the playing field for farmers,” he said.

The Mark family has since grown cucumbers, tomatoes, sweet peppers, pak choi and lettuce and Jemal hopes to start growing more exotic produce.

“I always tell my dad that I want to try to get the more exotic fruits and I have already ordered exotic seeds to try different stuff. I’m interested in the pink tomatoes, orange tomatoes so I could bring something different to the market,” he said.

Before he started farming, he thought of it as a lot of hard work and it still is but he enjoys it.

“The kind of feeling you get when you grow something and you see people eat it and they say it taste so good. I have a big clientele in Curepe and they look forward for my goods. Feels good when you do good things out here,” he said.
Organics


Full Article

Source: IFOAM
The World of Organic Agriculture - Statistics and Emerging Trends is published by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and IFOAM. It is now available as print copy. It costs EUR50 (excl. postage, handling and VAT), with a discount for members available. The book can be ordered here: http://shop.ifoam.org/bookstore/

The 14th edition of the yearbook documents recent developments in global organic agriculture. It includes contributions from representatives of the organic sector from around the world and provides comprehensive statistics on acreage under organic management, specific information about land use in organic systems, numbers of farms and other operators, as well as selected market data. It also contains information on the global market for organic food, the latest developments in organic certification, information on standards and regulations as well as insights into current and emerging trends in organic agriculture by region. The statistics are supported with graphs and tables.

Climate Change

Agriculture continues to get smart about climate by Garfield King. Earth Conscious Magazine, April 7, 2013
http://earthconsciousmagazine.com/?p=2924

Full Article

While the debate continues about various aspects of Climate Change – what are the causes and who/what is to blame – farmers and agriculturalists seem very clear that changes are taking place in our environment. No time to wait for the debaters to decide who the finger should be pointed at when there is a nation to be fed.

One strategy being adopted worldwide is Climate Smart Agriculture, described by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation as “an agriculture that sustainably increases productivity, resilience (adaptation), reduces/removes greenhouse gases (mitigation) while enhancing the achievement of national food security and development goals”.

The FAO notes: “Agriculture not only suffers the impacts of climate change, it is also responsible for 14 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. But agriculture has the potential to be an important part of the solution, through mitigation — reducing and or removing — a significant amount of global emissions. Some 70% of this mitigation potential could be realized in developing countries.”

While many potential tourists still view the Caribbean as a paradise of sun, sea and sand, from a food
and agriculture perspective the reality is very different. The Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) says food security in the region is threatened by low agricultural productivity, the increasing impact of climate change and changes in global food trade systems. To deal with the second threat CARDI is promoting Climate Smart Agriculture.

During a presentation delivered at the Caribbean Week of Agriculture in Antigua and Barbuda in October 2012, Maurice Wilson – head of the Institute’s Resource Mobilisation, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit – said it is hoped that high levels of food production could be sustained with the appropriate use of science and technology. CARDI is encouraging farmers to adopt practices which will allow them to adapt to the challenges likely to come from climate change. rice fields

Mr. Wilson highlighted several initiatives underway in the Caribbean. Of note is the growing of flood tolerant rice and dasheen in Guyana. This follows the extreme floods in Guyana during 2005. As a result, Guyana is now growing a flood tolerant variety of rice which survives complete submergence for up to 17 days.

In Jamaica a project is underway assessing drought tolerance in root and tuber crops through innovative technology using sweet potatoes as the test crop.

Projects are ongoing in several countries aimed at reducing the effects of drought. These include increased use of trickle irrigation; improved on-farm water management systems using solar pumps and heavy duty pond liners.

Mr. Wilson explained that training is being conducted across the region to encourage the development of alternative livelihoods in agriculture such as aquaponics. This is the closed growing system combining aquaculture with hydroponics, supplied with harvested rainwater. A project is already up and running in Jamaica as a result of collaboration between CARDI, INMED Partnerships for Children and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Another strategy is the Integrated Plant Nutrition System (IPNS) which uses the technology of nature to provide nutrients to the soil. The system utilises green manures i.e. cover crops that, when dying, add nutrients and organic matter to the soil. Integrated pest management using trapping, exclusion and biological control is also part of the Climate Smart Agriculture package.

While the policy makers and some parts of the scientific community continue to debate whether or not we really need to be concerned about climate change, those tasked with making sure we have food on the table have been putting measures in place to ensure that whatever effects manifest, the impacts would be minimal.

Some sites of interest on this topic

http://www.climatesmartagriculture.org/en/


http://climatechange.worldbank.org/content/climate-smart-agriculture

http://ccafs.cgiar.org/

http://www.cardi.org/
Soil and Water Management

**SmartIrrigation Apps for Citrus and Strawberry** by K.W. Migliaccio, G. Vellidis, C. Fraisse, K.T. Morgan, J.H. Andreis. The Vegetarian Newsletter: a Horticultural Sciences Department Extension publication on vegetable and fruit crops, issue no. 583, April 2013
http://hos.ufl.edu/newsletters/vegetarian/issue-no-583

**Full Article**

A team of researchers and extension specialists at the University of Florida and the University of Georgia have been developing new irrigation apps for smartphones and tablets. The new apps will be part of a suite of irrigation apps we hope to expand to other commodities within the southeastern United States. Detailed information on the project can be found at: [http://www.nespal.org/smartirrigation/](http://www.nespal.org/smartirrigation/).

The SmartIrrigation Apps will provide information on irrigation scheduling using real-time weather data (from Florida Automated Weather Network (FAWN) and the Georgia Automated Environmental Monitoring Network (GAEMN)) and forecast data (from National Weather Service). Specifically, rainfall, temperature, wind speed, relative humidity, and solar radiation data will be used from these sources. The data will be used to estimate a simple irrigation schedule specific to the user’s location. The field locations will be associated with the nearest FAWN or GAEMN weather station. The simple irrigation schedule will include evapotranspiration (ET) estimations using the Penman-Monteith equation. In addition to ET, growing degree days may also be used to estimate plant water needs depending on the crop. Each app is developed considering the specific crop characteristics and how the user would best benefit from the app.

Two operation systems, iOS and Android, will be developed providing apps for iphone, ipad, and Android device users. Apps will be designed with the user in mind and be adapted as needed. Currently, the citrus and strawberry apps are available in beta format and are being tested by growers. For more information on the citrus app, contact Dr. Kelly Morgan (conserv@ufl.edu). For more information on the strawberry app, contact Dr. Clyde Fraisse (cfraisse@ufl.edu). We anticipate release of apps for cotton and urban turf in 2013.

**EXAMPLE PROTOTYPE**

**Step 1: Define location**

The user can access information or input a new field by selecting a location using a list or map. Only locations with weather stations (FAWN or GAEMN) are selectable options. Weather data from the respective location will be used in the irrigation calculations. In addition, information from the National Weather Service will be used to provide forecasting information for improving irrigation.

**Step 2: Tool selection**

Depending on the app, different tools will be listed. The app also includes user preferences and documents to assist the user. The navigation menu can be used to learn more about irrigation as related to the particular production system.
Step 3: Data entry

Some information is input to the app by the user. The app uses this information to perform calculations. The information requested is crop specific and is limited to what the user can reasonably answer.

While this prototype is for an iPhone, each app will be developed for iPad and Android devices as well. Changes will be made to the different apps based on stakeholder evaluation and feedback.

Step 4: App output

App output will provide information on how to schedule irrigation based on real-time weather data and forecast weather data. The outcome is expected to reduce irrigation water that is not used by the crop or increase water use efficiency of the crop. App output will change daily to reflect daily data and predictions. The apps will be accessible through our project web site for the project life. Post-project, they will be housed with FAWN and AGROCLIMATE.

Overcoming salinity barriers to crop production in Florida IST summary by G. David Liu, Horticultural Sciences Department, IFAS, University of Florida. The Vegetarian Newsletter: a Horticultural Sciences Department Extension publication on vegetable and fruit crops, issue no. 583, April 2013
http://hos.ufl.edu/newsletters/vegetarian/issue-no-583

Full Article

In 2012, vegetable and fruit growers suffered from economic loss caused by salinity problems. Vegetable yields were reduced by 50% due to salinity in some production fields in the Hastings area. The average potato tuber yield loss was approximately $900 per acre of farm gate value. Additionally, reports of losses in broccoli, cucumber, and blueberries ranged from some yield loss in annual crops to loss of not only yield, but in the case of blueberry, entire shrubs were lost due to salinity stress. To minimize any further economic loss, we invited a salinity specialist, Dr. Stephen Grattan from the University of California at Davis and four UF-IFAS extension specialists to share their expertise in alleviating salinity problems in an In-service Training (IST#: 30688). The training was conducted in Hastings. After that, a dinner meeting with growers was held on the IFAS Research Farm and a Horticultural Sciences seminar was welcomed by the gators in Fifield Hall in March 2013. The trainings are available online at the links below.

The instructors and topics in the IST training--Strategies for Minimizing Salinity Problems and Optimizing Crop Production included:

- Dr. Jeff Ullman – Soil Salinity in Agricultural Systems: The Basics
- Dr. Mark Clark – Sources of Salinity in Irrigation Water and Strategies to Minimize
- Dr. Lincoln Zotarelli – Fertilizer as a Source of Salinity on Potato Production
- Dr. Stephan Grattan (UC-Davis) – Strategies to Minimize Crop Loss under Saline Conditions
- Dr. Brian Boman – Managing Salinity in Florida Citrus

The new techniques presented by the specialists are helpful for growers to optimize vegetable and fruit production under saline stresses. Crops vary in their tolerance to salinity. Generally, crops are
more sensitive to salinity during early vegetative growth and crop’s tolerance progressively increases as the crop matures. It is imperative to monitor irrigation water salinity and soil moisture status during irrigation season. Yield loss increases with salinity level. Yield loss is approximately 10% for an increase of every 1000 parts per million (ppm) in total dissolved solids (TDS). Irrigation well depth and pumping volume can influence the degree of saltwater entrainment. Backfilling to wells and reduced pumping volumes can mitigate salinity stress. Nutrient balancing is critical to minimize salinity problems. Calcium (gypsum) can increase calcium uptake and reduce salinity issues to some extent but gypsum itself can also increase electrical conductivity (EC) and probably exacerbate saline stress if too much gypsum is applied. Growers need careful irrigation, fertilization and cropping management to deal with salinity issues.

This IST training was video recorded and is available online. A table of contents with a complete listing of the topics and hyperlinks to those topics are available at:

http://hos.ufl.edu/faculty/gdliu/service-training#IST30688

Agricultural Research

CARDI Scientific Officer talks 'agriculture research and development' in Costa Rica. ZIZ, St Kitts and Nevis, 7 May 2013

http://www.zizonline.com/news/?FE407D06-AED4-3AE9-DC056772BD066988

Full Article

In March, 2013, one of the Institute’s Scientific Officer attended a two-day training workshop on Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI) for Central America and the Caribbean as part of the larger project: Tracking Agricultural R&D Investments and Capacities in Central America and the Caribbean, hosted in Costa Rica.

The Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI) initiative, managed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), is one of the few sources of agricultural R&D statistics in developing countries. ASTI compiles analyses and publishes data on institutional developments, investments, and capacity trends in agricultural R&D in low- and middle-income countries worldwide. Data collection, analysis and dissemination are conducted through a network of national, regional, and international agricultural R&D agencies.

Over the next few months, ASTI, in close collaboration with CIAT, IICA, and national partners will conduct a new survey round in Central America and the Caribbean to fill the existing information gap on the size, scope, and structure of agricultural R&D in the region. In preparation for the launch of this new survey round, this implementation and training workshop aimed to familiarize national focal points with the ASTI program, its methodologies, survey tools, and data collection procedures.

At the Workshop, the national focal points were given the opportunity to deliver brief presentations on their respective national agricultural research systems. During the group discussions, current challenges and capacity gaps in terms of data collection and analysis were discussed, and additional data and analysis needs assessed, both at the national and regional level.
Workshop participants were trained in ASTI systems approaches and the use of the questionnaires to collect relevant data.

Norman Gibson, Scientific Officer with the Institute said of the Workshop, ‘it reinforced the key role that CARDI plays in the Region in leading research efforts and serving as a catalyst for change and a repository for agriculture information’. He concluded that ‘CARDI is needed, and we must always be ahead of the game, providing the sector with the answers to questions that are yet to be asked’.

Quantitative information is fundamental to understanding the contribution of agricultural R&D to agricultural growth. R&D indicators are essential to measuring, monitoring, and benchmarking the inputs, outputs, and performance of agricultural R&D systems. Stakeholders need to be able to identify trends in agricultural R&D investments and capacity, as well as gaps and neglected areas to set future investment priorities, and to better coordinate and harmonize research.

Basic information on the size and scope of agricultural R&D capacity and investments, the changing institutional structure and functioning of agricultural research agencies, and underlying science and technologies policies are largely unavailable or out of date for nearly all of the countries in Central America and the Caribbean (i.e., Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Suriname, and the smaller Caribbean countries). This project will fill this gap through institutional surveys of R&D agencies in these countries. It will conduct analysis on the financial and human capacities of agricultural R&D agencies, the changing institutional structure of R&D, and how science and technology policies influence R&D incentives and performance.

The Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI) program of the International Food Policy Institute (IFPRI) is the only international initiative dedicated specifically to the collection, analysis, and synthesis of information on agricultural R&D investment, capacity, and policy in developing countries.

ASTI provides both data trends—the progress of human and financial capacity in agricultural research over time—and data comparisons—the performance of a country or a region relative to another. Over the years, ASTI has established data portfolio and collection procedures that follow internationally accepted definitions and statistical procedures for compiling R&D statistics.

CARDI has been contracted by IFPRI to conduct this study in 10 CARICOM countries, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The data generated from this exercise will be very useful to CARDI and its stakeholders as it will provide solid evidence upon which to plan and execute R&D investments in the agriculture sector.

This Project therefore affords CARDI the opportunity to use the results to strengthen its role as the premier regional Agriculture Research for Development (AR4D) organisation that initiates and influences policy dialogue in the sector.
The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with a number of tertiary institutions to formulate a joint research programme, to address critical challenges in the agricultural sector.

The institutions are: University of the West Indies (UWI); University of Technology (UTech); Northern Caribbean University (NCU), and the College of Agriculture, Science and Education (CASE).

“This will complement existing programmes with foreign based universities and regional and international organizations, such as the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute, the UN Food and Agriculture Association, Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture, and the Commonwealth of Learning,” Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon. Roger Clarke said, as he made his contribution to the 2013/14 Sectoral Debate in the House on May 8.

“I think the significant convergence of interests and collaborative research will have a greater impact on the sector, rather than having each institution operating in a silo,” the Minister added.

Mr. Clarke emphasized that the only sustainable means of increasing and maintaining agricultural productivity is through consistent innovative research and application of research findings to production.

He said countries like Jamaica cannot engage the range of research required to solve productivity problems without collaboration with academia.

“Our R (research) and D (development) programme over the years has yielded spectacular results – Jamaica Hope, Bodles Globe Pumpkin, several varieties of pepper and tomatoes, among others. We cannot halt the momentum on account of fiscal challenge,” he asserted.

All roads led to the National and Agriculture and Trade Show (NATS) Grounds on May 3rd, 4th and 5th as thousands of Belizeans converged for the sixty fifth ever Trade Show, with this one, as has long been tradition, being held near the Nation’s Capital. To befit this Year’s theme, “Stimulating Prosperity in Agriculture and Food Production through Renewed Public Private Partnership,” the three
days of activities was to highlight the work of the farming community, bringing together individuals, organizations and groups from across the Country.

To start off the activities, Deputy Prime Minister Gaspar Vega along with Chief Operations Officer Karen Bevans of BTL cut the ribbons last Friday to the main entrance and ticketing booth to the NATS Grounds for which funding had been obtained from Belize Telemedia Limited. Visitors were then taken on a brief tour to view one of the two kids’ playgrounds named ‘Kids Stop’, funded this time by Wood Stop Limited. The Deputy Prime Minister also led visitors to a tour of the newly constructed Food Court built by the Mennonite Community from Spanish Lookout and the freshly painted concrete Rodeo Gallery funded by Bowen and Bowen.

At the official opening ceremonies at the newly built multi-purpose center at the NATS Grounds, the Governor General Sir Colville Young did an inspection of the Guard of Honor after which the National Anthem was performed by the Panaritics Steel Band. Guest Speaker John Carr, the current Chairman of the Belize Livestock Association and operator of the Banana Bank Lodge, then spoke about the planned registration of some 50,000 heads of cattle and the new markets for live cattle that have recently opened in both Guatemala and Mexico. Carr reminded all those gathered that we need to be business friendly to attract more businesses to our shores.

Mayor of Belmopan Simeon Lopez welcomed all to the Belmopan Show Grounds and said that in the next few days thousands of Belizeans will be passing through Belmopan. Mayor Lopez also took time out to congratulate the specially invited Farmers of the Year 2013.

Ms. Belmopan Jasmine Arce also took the opportunity to do the sashing of all the three Farmers of the Year 2013. They were done for 17-year-old Junior Farmer of the Year Nelson Enrique Burgos, 38-year-old Woman Farmer of the Year Sharon Moody and 30-year-old Senior Farmer of the Year George Celestino Choj. Attendees were reminded that George Choj manages a small integrated farm in Cristo Rey Village, Cayo District. Choj has seamlessly integrated all his farming components to not only supply food for himself and his family but to generate a sizeable income. In addition to having a water catchment pond to provide water for his animals, and using organic wastes for his plants, Choj also has a bio-digestor which provides fuel for household use.

In the keynote address, Deputy Prime Minister Gaspar Vega, in his second ever address at NATS as Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture, spoke about the many partnerships that have been forged with the private sector in bringing about permanent infrastructure for the NATS’s sixty acre grounds. The Deputy Prime Minister also reviewed the most recent developments now occurring in both the North and Southern parts of the Country. He revealed the new prospects for the sugar industry where the Sugar Industry Research and Development Institute recently received funding for institutional strengthening from the European Union. The investments in the Belize Sugar Industry are showing positive results, he said, with a better conversion rate of sugar cane to sugar, mainly a ten percent increase in sugar for the same amount of sugar cane that was delivered last year.

The same can be said for the Shrimp Farm Industry, said Deputy Prime Minister Gaspar Vega, where thanks to the new strategic investments in all shrimp farm industry, a new momentum has been reached.

“...Output is on pace to rise by more than seventy percent to above 22 million pounds and more than doubling of foreign exchange earnings of well over 88 million Belize Dollars,” he stated.

But it was not until Saturday and Sunday that both cultural events and other activities began in earnest at the NATS Grounds. On Saturday, a variety of artists including those coming from Gilharry and
Band took to the stage at the Multi-Purpose Center and performed live for a large audience. On Saturday, there was also another award ceremony of the Farmers of the Year 2013. On Sunday, the last day of NATS, a rodeo show was featured with calf roping and bull riding.

It was during the three days at NATS that various groups and companies showed their hardware in an effort to gather market share. Universal Hardware, owning large stores in both Belize City and Spanish Lookout, came out with a variety of lawnmowers and motorcycle issuing clear warnings that motorcycles are not to be treated as bicycles on Belize’s active roads.

Food was found aplenty at NATS Grounds. It was an opportunity readily taken by budding entrepreneurs who are coming up with some of the most innovative products in the food sector.

A group of women from both the Orange Walk and Corozal District were present at NATS to showcase a Soya Bean based sauce named “WOW.” Training for the production of “WOW” was obtained from the Taiwan Technical Mission with support from the Ministry of Agriculture. Meanwhile, a group from Hopkins Village, who were present in the Cooperative Section at the NATS Grounds, is producing ‘Cerebuito’ (Good Cereal) from powdered sweet cassava, yams, plantains and rice. Cerebuito comes in small packages and needs to be pre-heated in water before it is consumed. Chairman of the Hopkins Farmers Cooperative, Francis Lews tells us that the Cooperatives Department has visited his factory a number of times to encourage production.

Long term plans for the National Agriculture and Show Grounds are to continue building durable and all weather infrastructure, allowing for the grounds to be used for 365 days a year rather than for only three days. In so doing, a national exhibition venue will be created. The multipurpose center itself, built thanks to the Government of Belize and the Venezuelan ALBA Fund, can now be used as a farmer trading center, a venue for youth work, an exhibition hall and other uses where the rental fee will be given at reasonable rates.

This year’s agriculture show had as many as 42 thousand visitors and was almost incident free. Organizers made strenuous efforts this year to deliberately zone off the grounds into alcohol free areas. Police presence was also visible at the NATS grounds making it a festive occasion for which we will now need to wait another year before it happens again.

Inspection of retail outlets to be increased to tackle praedial larceny by the Jamaica Information Service, 9 May 2013

Full Article

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries will be stepping up inspections at retail outlets, as it strengthens tracking systems to bolster the fight against praedial larceny/farm theft.

“This year we are moving to put greater emphasis on monitoring end-users…we are not convinced that the thieves can dispose of stolen goods, particularly livestock, without the collaboration of large buyers/distributors,” Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon. Roger Clarke, told the House of Representatives, on Wednesday, May 8, in his 2013/14 Sectoral Debate presentation.
The Minister explained that the authorities would invoke a number of legal provisions on the statute that regulate the movement and slaughter of animals, “and we are going to cause the registration of purveyors, as required by law.”

"Praedial larceny/farm theft is a societal issue and we err if we view it as a matter only to be tackled by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. We believe that there are enough legal provisions to deal with the matter and we will work collaboratively with our other partners in Government and the farming community to address the problem,” Mr. Clarke said.

Meanwhile, the Minister informed that extension officers were recently presented with tablet computers, as part of efforts to improve field services and ultimately, to grow the agricultural sector. Noting that the improvement of extension services is an underpinning factor to achieve this goal, Mr. Clarke said the devices would enable the officers to have greater linkages with the various services offered by the Ministry, and greatly improve field service delivery.

“It is part of our efforts to provide an enabling environment for continuous improvement in our extension services,” Minister Clarke noted. He also informed that the farmer field schools, which the Ministry has established, are “proving highly successful.”

**Domestic production up** by Stephanie Todd. Jamaica Information Service, 10 May 2013


**Full Article**

Agriculture and Fisheries Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke, is reporting a boost in the production for some 12 crops cultivated locally during 2012, and a massive reduction in imports of some of these produce. Minister Clarke was making his presentation in the 2013/14 Sectoral debate in Parliament on Wednesday, May 8, under the theme: ‘Grow Agriculture – Grow Jamaica’.

The crops, which are seeing increased yields of between three per cent and 160 per cent, include cucumber, pak choi, pumpkin, scallion, ginger, onion, hot pepper, sweet pepper, cantaloupe, corn, Irish potato and sweet potato. These crops recorded their highest outputs for the 10 year period dating back to 2003.

The level of production ranged between just over one million kilograms, in the case of ginger and onions, to just over 52 million kilograms for pumpkin.

Consequent of the increase in domestic production there was a reduction in the quantities of several of these foods imported into Jamaica.

The Minister informed that Irish potato imports fell by 9.9 per cent; pork – 37.4 per cent; cucumber - 69 per cent; cabbage – 9.3 per cent; cantaloupe – 17.6 per cent; sweet pepper – 28 per cent; carrot – 41 per cent; and iceberg lettuce – 67 per cent, while noting a two per cent increase in tomato imports. Minister Clarke, however, reported a two per cent increase in the country’s food import bill, which saw the figure moving from US$938 million in 2011 to US$959 million last year.
He attributed the “marginal increase” to a seven per cent increase in world food prices, as indicated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), particularly for cereals “which constitute the bulk of our imports.”

Mr. Clarke underscored the need to review the items that can be produced locally in an effort to reduce the quantity of imports.

“It’s not an easy thing to do. We have to go through and put some serious programmes in place. But also, we have to deal with our own eating habits, to deal with some of those difficulties that we face,” he stated.

**Significant production activity under Agro Park Project** by the Jamaica Information Service, 9 May 2013

**Full Article**

Significant work is in progress under the Government’s agro park project, with some 3,237 hectares (8,000 acres) of land already engaged in the production of a number of critical crops.

The parks are situated in Plantain Gardens and Yallahs, St. Thomas; Amity Hall and Hill Run, St. Catherine; Ebony Park and Spring Plain in Clarendon; New Forest/Duff House, St Elizabeth/Manchester; Ettingdon, Trelawny; and Meylersfield in Westmoreland.

Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon. Roger Clarke, in his contribution to the 2013/14 Sectoral Debate in the House of Representatives on May 8, noted that the agro parks, targeted specifically at import substitution, are being developed through a tri-partite partnership involving the Government, farmer/investors, and the private sector.

The Government is making the lands available with the requisite infrastructure for leasing to farmers/investors, who will be responsible for working capital and agricultural production.

“The private sector will be responsible for providing markets, that is, farmers will sell to them on a contractual basis and they (investors), in turn, will market the goods to the hotels, agro-processors, export markets or retail outlets,” Minister Clarke explained.

“In some instances the investor/farmer will market his or her own goods; but in every instance what is being produced will be tied to a specific market,” he noted further.

Providing details of the work underway, Minister Clarke informed that 48 hectares (120 acres) of lands have been identified for the agro-park in Plantain Gardens. He said that land preparation has commenced, and farmers have been engaged through leases, to produce ginger and onion on some 23 hectares (50 acres) of those lands.

The farmers are also being provided with working capital in the amount of $40 million through a loan from the St. Thomas Cooperative Credit Union Limited.

“Seeds have been procured on behalf of the farmers, and the Rural Agricultural Development Agency (RADA) and the National Irrigation Commission (NIC) are working with them to improve crop
husbandry and to provide technical assistance with the installation of on farm irrigation,” Mr. Clarke informed.

He noted that at the same time, the Ministry is in the process of rehabilitating the existing irrigation system to supply the entire 48 hectares, and main drains will be cleaned, while proper access roads will also be provided.

“All the ginger cultivated will be purchased from the farmers by the Ministry’s Export Division. An importer, who currently trades in onions, will purchase the onions produced in this agro-park through contracts with the farmers. By next year, we expect the rest of the lands in this agro-park to come into production,” Minister Clarke told the House.

At Amity Hall, the Government has provided an irrigation and drainage system that comprises some 809 hectares (2,000 acres) of land. Significant bridge/road work has also been done to allow for access to large equipment such as planters and harvesters.

Mr. Clarke also informed that land preparation activities are being finalised on some 323 hectares (800 acres) of land and the planting of sorghum by Caribbean Broilers will commence within days.

“Another 283 hectares (700 acres) of sorghum will be planted this year by other private interests. Red peas will be planted in rotation with the sorghum, and the quantum of red peas to be reaped will be sufficient to replace a significant portion of that being imported,” the Agriculture Minister said. In addition to the sorghum, another 48 hectares (120 acres) of land is being engaged for vegetables; 12 hectares (30 acres) for onion; and another 40 hectares (100 acres) for hay production in support of a private sector-led small ruminant expansion project.

Meanwhile, the focus at Ebony Park will be on the production of onions, yams, pepper, pineapple and a mixture of vegetables.

The Government is in the process of concluding discussions with a Canadian investor, who is the largest exporter of beans to Jamaica, along with a number of Jamaican interests, to grow a minimum of 600 acres of onions, which represents approximately 42 per cent of national demand.

Additionally, the Ministry is finalising discussions with two of the largest suppliers/importers of vegetables to the tourism industry to establish a 40 hectare (100 acre) vegetable farm focusing on replacing products that they now import.

“In addition, three farmers’ associations are producing vegetables, tubers, condiments and spices amounting to 101 hectares (250 acres), valued at $150 million in the 2013/14 financial year. In order to support all these production activities, the Ministry’s contribution will be the installation of a proper irrigation system in this area. This will be implemented in this fiscal year,” Mr. Clarke said.

In relation to the facilities at Spring Plain, Hill Run, New Forest/Duff House, Yallahs and Ettingdon, the Ministry is conducting the necessary assessments and preliminary work in terms of crop identification, planning of necessary infrastructure works, identification of farmer/investors and private sector partners.

The intention, Mr. Clarke said, is to bring these parks fully on stream by next year. He informed that significant production activities is already taking place at New Forest/Duff House and Yallahs, as two new irrigation schemes have been completed for these areas.
“The value that these agro parks will add is to orientate production to defined markets by linking existing farmers to private sector buyers. This work is currently being done, and therefore, for all intents and purposes, these two agro-parks will come on stream this year,” Mr. Clarke said.

Haiti - Agriculture: strengthening of the Haitian Agricultural Market Information System by HaitiLibre, 6 May 2013

Full Article

As part of the bilateral cooperation, the Dominican Republic runs a plan to support the Republic of Haiti to strengthen the Haitian Agricultural Market Information System, in order to streamline the mechanisms of commercialization of products from the field.

In this context, a mission of representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture (USDA) and of oreign Agricultural Service (FA) of the United States, which advises Haiti on how to install its system, as well as experts from the Department of Agricultural Statistics, of the Ministry of Agriculture of Haiti, went to the Dominican Republic for 3 days to know the strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities of the information system of prices of Dominican Ministry of Agriculture, to connect and share experiences of the systems of the two neighboring countries.

During their visit, to which have joined the technicians of the Department of Agricultural Economics, of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Dominican Republic, the U.S. authorities have initiated a process of training with the opening of a workshop, whose one of the objectives were to identify the need for cooperation between the two systems and the training of collectors of market prices.

During his stay, the mission visited various markets of Greater Santo Domingo, including the "Merca Santo Domingo" to share with their managers and wholesalers: the commercial movement of sales centers, particularly in terms of volumes sales and price dynamics. Haitian technicians showed great interest in the methodology used by the Dominicans during interviews with traders to gather information on prices and other essential aspects.

In addition, the mission included the observation of the functioning of the automation data system of Ministry of Agriculture, in order to adapt the Haitian system, and make recommendations for its improvement. Both committees have worked on reporting, data analysis, dissemination of information and the management of database, among other aspects.

The installation of the Agricultural Market Information System is a USDA-FA project who asked to the Dominican Republic through its representative, Rodrigo Brenes, USDA-FA, that Haitian technicians can come to the country to see how the process develops.

The mission in Haiti has highlighted the progress of the Dominican Republic including the collection and processing of data that govern agricultural markets, which according to them, contribute to streamline the commercialization system.

At the end of this mission, given the progress of the Dominican Republic in the installation and operation of its Agricultural Market Information System, it was agreed that the country continuously
advises Haiti in the installation of its system, the provision of information and exchange of experiences. The technical mission of Haiti received documentation (manuals) on the data collection system of the Dominican Republic, as well as the physical units of the measurement system used in the country.

In addition, through the development of a second phase, it is expected a visit of technical missions of the two countries to the United States to receive training in the U.S. agricultural market information system. Also, under study, the possibility to include a pilot project of information on the market within the framework of conservation project of the Artibonite River Basin, involving the two countries and to develop an action plan to gather information on the agricultural frontier.

**FAO's partnership strategies approved by Council** by the FAO Media Centre, 26 April 2013

**Full Article**

New focus on working together with civil society and private sector

26 April 2013, Rome - FAO’s governing Council today approved two new Strategies aimed at strengthening FAO's partnerships with civil society organizations on the one hand and the private sector on the other.

The Strategies provide a framework for FAO's work with private and civil society partners in pursuit of the Organization's Strategic Objectives and the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

Thanking the Council for its approval, Director-General José Graziano da Silva said, "We have repeated many times that it is possible to end hunger only if we work together. These strategies show that we are committed to working with partnerships."

FAO sees broader, improved partnerships as essential in achieving its objectives, especially in the light of its new emphasis on decentralization. "Ending hunger cannot be done by any individual organization alone,” Graziano da Silva has said on many occasions. The collaboration and support of other actors is vital.

Approval of the strategies today will allow FAO, especially in the field, to better establish partnerships with civil society and the private sector. A key element will be to ensure that key stakeholders from civil society and private sector actors in the field of food security are identified and involved at country level in support of FAO’s efforts.

Both strategies identify six main areas of collaboration (policy dialogue; normative work; technical and field programmes; advocacy and communication; joint use and mobilization of resources; and knowledge sharing) and two main levels of interaction (global level and decentralized level).

The two strategies are the result of extended consultations with Member States, key external stakeholders and FAO staff, both at headquarters and in the field. Consultative meetings, bilateral discussions and informal sessions were held to discuss the documents and are reflected in the final documents.
FAO's new, revised Strategic Framework for the next decade includes five Strategic Objectives:

1. Contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition
2. Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner
3. Reduce rural poverty
4. Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels
5. Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises.

Agricultural Education

UWI Agribusiness Society receives assistance from IICA Trinidad and Tobago for their study tour to Grenada. IICA Trinidad and Tobago Press Release, 2 May 2013


Full Article

Trinidad and Tobago, May 2, 2013 (IICA).

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is once again pleased to provide sponsorship to the UWI Agribusiness Society (ABS) in support of their Annual Graduate Study tour. IICA provided financial support to the UWI ABS for previous study tours to Guyana/Suriname and Jamaica in 2011 and 2012 respectively. This year's study tour will focus on the cocoa industry in Grenada, one of the few countries along with Trinidad and Tobago to be recognized as producers of fine flavour cocoa. The group, comprising of both undergraduate and graduate students, will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the cocoa industry in that country in order to evaluate production and management systems and make recommendations for improving the industry in the region.

IICA considers the activities in these study tours extremely beneficial and useful and can reinforce and complement the academic programs offered by the University of the West Indies.

Mr. Gregg Rawlins, IICA Representative in Trinidad and Tobago, also views the annual study tours as an essential component of horizontal technical cooperation which allows for the sharing of experiences and promoting networking among stakeholders in the region, while fostering greater understanding of selected commodity systems. Twelve (12) students are expected to participate in the study tour which is scheduled to take place from May 25 to June 1, 2013.
Upcoming Events

May 2013

10th EDF Visibility Sessions
Date: 14-15 May 2013
Location: Trinidad and Tobago
Description: Organised by the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI). Focus of the sessions will be the 10th European Development Fund (EDF) Project “Improving Caribbean Food Security in the Context of Climate Change”

CTA / CARDI Expert Working Group on Value Chains
Date: 23-24 May 2013
Location: Trinidad and Tobago
Description: Focus of meeting will be the root and tuber value chains in the Caribbean Region.

June 2013

10th International Mango Symposium
Date: 3-7 June 2013
Location: Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

Global Cassava Partnership for the 21st Century (GCP21) second meeting on cassava landraces
Date: June 2013
Location: Tanzania
Description: Global Cassava Partnership for the 21st Century (GCP21) second meeting on cassava landraces is scheduled in June 2013 at IITA offices in Tanzania. The meeting’s goal is to deliver products such as draft standard operating procedures to collect, evaluate, preserve and identify these landraces and a roadmap to start the work in East and Central Africa.

49th Annual Meeting Caribbean Food Crops Society (CFCS)
Date: 30 June to 6 July 2013
Location: Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
Description: The 49th Annual Meeting will be celebrated 30 June to 6 July in the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Trinidad. Joint meeting of the CFCS, Caribbean AgroEconomic Society (CAES) and the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS). Theme: Agribusiness Essential for Food Security: Empowering Youth and Enhancing Quality Products.
Contact: CFCS website http://cfcs.eea.uprm.edu/

July 2013

International Conference on Tropical Roots and Tubers for Sustainable Livelihood under Changing Agro-climate
Date: 9 -12 July 2013
Location: Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India
Website: http://isrc.in/internationalconference2013/

September 2013
Science Forum 2013
Date: 23-25 September 2013
Location: Bonn, Germany.
Description: Will focus on “Nutrition and health outcomes: targets for agricultural research”
Website: http://www.scienceforum13.org/