### In This Issue June 9 - 15, 2013

1. Cassava  
2. Climate Change  
5. Biotechnology  
8. Agricultural Development  
15. Agricultural Trade  
17. Upcoming Events


BRIDGETOWN, Barbados—Caribbean countries are looking to China to help develop their agricultural sector and are seeking to take advantage of a US$50 million fund established by Beijing.

---

**For more information see page 8**

**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

“Game changing technologies” needed to fight cassava diseases by Neil Palmer, 9 June 2013

Full Article

Alarming outbreaks of two devastating cassava diseases in Africa have prompted an alliance of experts to make an unprecedented international commitment to tackle them.

Members of the Global Cassava Partnership for the 21st Century (GCP21) announced plans for the sweeping set of measures to impede the spread of the flesh-eating cassava brown streak disease (CBSD) and cassava mosaic disease (CMD) both within the continent and beyond.

According to an official statement released by the group following its conference in Bellagio, Italy, last month, measures include the development and deployment of “game changing technologies” to produce more disease-resistant plants, to better understand cassava viruses and the whiteflies that transmit them, and to improve systems for monitoring outbreaks and distributing virus-free plants. The statement, endorsed by GCP21 participants, also calls for critical gaps in research funding and information to be addressed in order to improve the resilience of cassava – a vital staple crop that feeds close to 300 million Africans, and relied on by hundreds of millions more in Asia and Latin America.

In terms of specific threats, conference participants agreed the challenge of the rapid spread of CBSD – relatively obscure until a decade ago – as the highest priority for research and awareness-raising. The disease, which destroys cassava roots underground – sometimes wiping out entire harvests – has already spread from Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania to parts of DR Congo and possibly Angola, en route for the world’s largest producer and consumer of cassava, Nigeria, as reported on the CIAT blog recently.

Participants agreed to redouble efforts to: raise awareness of the risks of spreading CBSD through moving uncertified cassava stakes for planting; establish a detailed surveillance program to track the spread of CBSD; and deploy some of the most promising technologies for controlling the viruses and whiteflies in areas with new outbreaks and those at imminent risk. Developing a system for producing and distributing high quality, virus-free cassava cuttings through national and international research centers, NGOs, the private sector and village communities, was identified as a top priority.

“These diseases constitute a crisis of enormous proportions with the potential to unleash severe human suffering,” said GCP21 director Claude Fauquet. “If CBSD reaches Nigeria it would cause a human catastrophe of unforeseen magnitude; if it reaches Thailand or India it would jeopardise economic sectors worth billions of dollars a year. That’s why an agreement of this nature and scope is unprecedented in the history of cassava research and clearly reflects the growing recognition of the huge importance of cassava in Africa – for food security, for incomes, and for development.”

The agreement will be the basis for a formal road map for tackling cassava pests and diseases, which is expected to be finalised in July.

CIAT will have a crucial role, as coordinator of a global initiative to sequence the cassava genome. Partly funded by the CGIAR’s Roots, Tubers and Bananas research program (RTB), and with the
support of a host of international partners, work is already underway to sequence the entire collection of global cassava varieties, as part of a multi-million dollar search for valuable traits including sources of resistance to cassava diseases and the insects that transmit them. CIAT’s gene bank at its headquarters in Colombia is one vital source of cassava varieties to be sequenced, and all 5,000 varieties known worldwide should be sequenced by 2017.

“When it comes to finding the genes responsible for resistance to these diseases, it’s not a matter of if we get the call, it’s a matter of when,” said CIAT’s Luis Augusto Becerra, leader of CIAT’s cassava genome sequencing work. “Then we can begin the process of developing improved cassava varieties for farmers to grow, safe in the knowledge that the threats of brown streak or mosaic disease will be a thing of the past. That makes the work tremendously exciting because it will benefit hundreds of millions of people.”

CIAT will also work on tackling diseases not currently present in Africa, but which pose a threat if introduced, such as frog skin disease, a major cassava constraint in Latin America.

“Cassava diseases are the main obstacle in the way of cassava fulfilling its enormous potential, so this is a landmark agreement,” said Joe Tohme, leader of CIAT’s Agrobiodiversity research area, and joint founder of GCP21. “If you want to have a serious impact on rural livelihoods in Africa, you have to be working with cassava and cassava producers, and tackling these diseases is one of the most effective ways. But this must include work outside Africa to make sure we are well-prepared as possible for new pest and disease threats.”


Climate Change

New report identifies 'regret-free' approaches for adapting agriculture to climate change by CCAFS, 14Jun, 2013
http://environmentalresearchweb.org/cws/article/yournews/53765
Full Article

Whether it's swapping coffee for cocoa in Central America or bracing for drought in Sri Lanka with a return to ancient water storage systems, findings from a new report from the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) chart a path for farmers to adapt to climate shifts despite uncertainties about what growing conditions will look like decades from now.

As this week's UN climate talks in Bonn continue to sideline a formal deal on agriculture, the study, Addressing uncertainty in adaptation planning for agriculture, which was published recently in the Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences (PNAS), finds that the cloudy aspects of climate forecasts are no excuse for a paralysis in agriculture adaptation policies.

"Climate projections will always have a degree of uncertainty, but we need to stop using uncertainty as a rationale for inaction," said Sonja Vermeulen, head of research at CCAFS and the lead author of the
study. "Even when our knowledge is incomplete, we often have robust grounds for choosing best-bet adaptation actions and pathways, by building pragmatically on current capacities in agriculture and environmental management, and using projections to add detail and to test promising options against a range of scenarios."

The CCAFS analysis shows how decision-makers can sift through the different gradients of scientific uncertainty to understand where there is, in fact, a general degree of consensus and then move to take action. Moreover, it encourages a broader approach to agriculture adaptation that looks beyond climate models to consider the socioeconomic conditions on the ground. These conditions, such as a particular farmer's or community's capacity to make the necessary farming changes, will determine whether a particular adaptation strategy is likely to succeed.

"Getting farmers, communities, governments, donors and other stakeholders to embrace various adaptation strategies can end up being equally or more important than seeking higher levels of scientific certainty from a climate model," said Andy Challinor, a professor at the Institute for Climate and Atmosphere Science, School of Earth and Environment at the University of Leeds, who co-leads research on climate adaptation at CCAFS and was also an author of the study. "There is no question that climate science is constantly improving," he added. "But scientists also need to understand the broader processes involved in agriculture adaptation and consider how we can better communicate what we do know in ways that are relevant to a diverse audience."

The CCAFS study uses examples from the program's recent work in the developing world to illustrate how some countries have pursued climate change adaptation strategies that will help them prepare for shifts in growing conditions in the near-term and long-term.

Some of the strategies involve relatively straightforward efforts to accommodate changes in the near-term that will present growing conditions that are not significantly different from what farmers have experienced in the past. For example, faced with climate models that predict above normal precipitation and others that predict it will be below normal, the Sri Lankan government is working with farmers to revisit traditional approaches to water storage to provide insurance against what, at the very least, will be climate variability.

The authors also explore how, in other parts of the world, adaptation planning must consider long-term changes that exceed historical experience and require "wholesale reconfigurations of livelihoods, diets, and the geography of farming and food systems." For example, while various climate models offer different assessments of changes expected in Central America, they agree that over the long-term, higher temperatures are likely to render Arabica coffee production unsuitable at lower altitudes. "No regrets" strategies could involve shifting some production to higher altitudes and, at lower altitudes, switching to a different, but similarly lucrative crop, like cocoa.


In Sri Lanka, agriculture accounts for almost one-third of employment and one-eighth of the gross domestic product (GDP). However, the sector faces uncertainty in the near-term as projections for precipitation and temperature vary dramatically. Instead of delaying a decision until more certainty emerges, government planners looked at the frequency of historical exposure to climate hazards (droughts, floods, cyclones, et. al.) and identified the need for improved water management as an agricultural adaptation strategy that would be beneficial regardless of how climate changes shaped the precipitation in the future.

The government then worked with smallholder farmers on a range of adaptive measures that have addressed agriculture water usage for centuries. Ancient Sri Lankan kingdoms used large above-
ground tanks to collect and store rainwater for use in drier times; farmers implemented this solution with great success. Farmers also utilized systems that recycled their household wastewater and scaled back groundwater use to sustainable levels.

"In Sri Lanka, adapting without regrets started with knowing farmer capabilities and vulnerabilities," noted Challinor. "Despite limited resources, the government's adaptation plan is giving farmers a head start because of its practical approach. Better water capture and management on the farms is translating to better preparation for more extreme weather conditions; better food security for the nation is the result."

Long-term Adaptation in Nicaragua: Climate Change Brews a Dark Forecast for Coffee Farmers
In the mountains of Nicaragua, coffee constitutes roughly one-quarter of national agriculture revenues. Growing the popular Arabica coffee bean requires a very specific climate – between 19 to 22 degrees Celsius with little variation and ample rainfall.

While future climate scenarios for Nicaragua differ, scientists helped policy-makers see that all scenarios for 2030 and 2050 showed Arabica's climate niche would be significantly affected. The zones suitable for the crop would move upwards to higher elevations, and in many places the mountains would not be tall enough to host the crop in the future.

Rather than move three quarters of the current Arabica cropland, a shift that would mean disrupting the local ecosystem for new farmland, policymakers urged farmers to introduce new shade-grown coffee varieties or switch to cocoa—a crop identified as having similar cash value and suitable for future growing conditions.

"In Nicaragua, 'no-regrets' adaptation started with the details that science could provide, which is more than enough to keep policy-makers up at night," said Peter Laderach, a climate scientist at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), based in Managua. "In planning for climate change, we face all of these variables and uncertainties, but sometimes what we do know what matters most. By embracing these certainties, we can help these farmers weather the coming storm and protect a vital source of income."

Other Nations Step Forward as Vulnerabilities Take Shape
As short-term and long-range agriculture forecasts reveal disturbing trends, especially in developing countries, many decision-makers acknowledge the critical importance of moving forward with climate adaptation.

For example, in Kenya, rain-fed agriculture contributes more than one-quarter of the GDP. Recent droughts have left millions without access to adequate food and slowed the nation's economic growth by an annual average of 2.8 percent between 2008 and 2011. In March 2013, after an extensive consultation process engaged most sectors of society, Kenya formally launched its national climate change action plan.

"In Kenya, as well as in many countries in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world, climate change is a critical policy priority," said James Kinyangi, regional program leader for CCAFS in East Africa. "It is imperative for developing nations to embrace the adaptation planning process and for industrialized countries to unlock much-needed funding support so that this planning fast tracks climate adaptation actions."

"Some farmers and countries are going to need to make big transitions in what food they produce," concluded Vermeulen. "Science is now reaching a point where it will be able to provide advice on
when – not just whether – major climatic shifts relevant to agriculture will happen. Helping governments and farmers plan ahead will make all the difference in avoiding the food insecurity and suffering that climate change threatens.”

Biotechnology

**Strong Legal Framework Required for Biofuels Production - Minister Paulwell.** Jamaican Information Service, 10 June 2013

**Full Article**

Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mining, Hon. Phillip Paulwell says a robust legal framework is necessary for the sustainability of biofuels development and production in Jamaica.

He was addressing a function on sustainable biofuels in Jamaica, held on Wednesday, June 5, at the Jamaica Pegasus hotel in New Kingston.

Biofuels are any liquid, solid or gaseous fuels produced from organic matter. The extensive range of organic materials used for biofuel production includes starch and sugary plants such as corn, wheat or sugar cane; oily plants such as rapeseed or soya beans; vegetable oils and animal fats; wood and straw; algae and organic waste and others.

The fuel source is considered one of the most promising alternative energy sources of the new millennium, and Jamaica is looking at biofuels production for use in the transport sector.

As the Government seeks to add biofuels to the local energy mix there is recognition that there could be possible negative impacts on the environment and the economy.

“But this provides a remarkable challenge for the policy-makers to design a legal framework that avoids the impacts and takes advantage of the well-known benefits provided by biomass energy,” Minister Paulwell stated.

“A strong legal framework will prevent, for example, the issues related to land use changes, particularly the matter of fuel versus food. It is wrong to claim that biofuels are either bad or good for the environment. Everything exclusively depends on the management criteria,” he noted further.

The Minister cited the Sustainable Life-Cycle Analysis (SLCA) as one approach that could assist Jamaica to make the right decisions towards its fuel security, diversification and environmental sustainability goals.

SLCA, he explained, is a qualitative assessment, which implies that everyone involved in the entire chain of a product’s life cycle has a responsibility and a role to play, taking into account all the relevant impacts on the economy, the environment and the society.
It allows for focus on areas where the most impact can be made; communication of fairly complex biofuels benefits to consumers; and fosters transparency with stakeholders.

The results of the exercise, the Minister said, would not only benefit Jamaica, but will be shared with CARICOM partners and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) that are also facing the challenges of energy security and looking to provide energy for all within the medium to long-term.

Mr. Paulwell said the country’s biofuels programme has received tremendous support from international partners over the years, such as the United States, Brazil and the EU.

The function, which focused on the legal and technical components of sustainable biofuels in the island, was held in collaboration with the Organization of American States (OAS) under the US/Brazil Memorandum of Understanding for biofuels development in the island.

Biotech Crops Vs. Pests: Successes and Failures from the First Billion Acres by Science Daily, 10 June 2013
http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/06/130610152127.htm

Full Article

June 10, 2013 — Since 1996, farmers worldwide have planted more than a billion acres (400 million hectares) of genetically modified corn and cotton that produce insecticidal proteins from the bacterium Bacillus thuringiensis, or Bt for short. Bt proteins, used for decades in sprays by organic farmers, kill some devastating pests but are considered environmentally friendly and harmless to people. However, some scientists feared that widespread use of these proteins in genetically modified crops would spur rapid evolution of resistance in pests.

A team of experts at the University of Arizona has taken stock to address this concern and to figure out why pests became resistant quickly in some cases, but not others. Bruce Tabashnik and Yves Carrière in the department of entomology at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences together with visiting scholar Thierry Brévault from the Center for Agricultural Research for Development (CIRAD) in France scrutinized the available field and laboratory data to test predictions about resistance. Their results are published in the journal Nature Biotechnology.

"When Bt crops were first introduced, the main question was how quickly would pests adapt and evolve resistance," said Tabashnik, head of the UA department of entomology who led the study. "And no one really knew, we were just guessing."

"Now, with a billion acres of these crops planted over the past 16 years, and with the data accumulated over that period, we have a better scientific understanding of how fast the insects evolve resistance and why."

Analyzing data from 77 studies of 13 pest species in eight countries on five continents, the researchers found well-documented cases of field-evolved resistance to Bt crops in five major pests as of 2010, compared with only one such case in 2005. Three of the five cases are in the United States, where farmers have planted about half of the world's Bt crop acreage. Their report indicates that in the worst cases, resistance evolved in 2 to 3 years; but in the best cases, effectiveness of Bt crops has been sustained more than 15 years.
According to the paper, both the best and worst outcomes correspond with predictions from evolutionary principles.

"The factors we found to favor sustained efficacy of Bt crops are in line with what we would expect based on evolutionary theory," said Carrière, explaining that conditions are most favorable if resistance genes are initially rare in pest populations; inheritance of resistance is recessive -- meaning insects survive on Bt plants only if they have two copies of a resistance gene, one from each parent -- and abundant refuges are present. Refuges consist of standard, non-Bt plants that pests can eat without ingesting Bt toxins.

"Computer models showed that refuges should be especially good for delaying resistance when inheritance of resistance in the pest is recessive," explained Carrière.

Planting refuges near Bt crops reduces the chances that two resistant insects will mate with each other, making it more likely they will breed with a susceptible mate, yielding offspring that are killed by the Bt crop. The value of refuges has been controversial, and in recent years, the EPA has relaxed its requirements for planting refuges in the U.S.

"Perhaps the most compelling evidence that refuges work comes from the pink bollworm, which evolved resistance rapidly to Bt cotton in India, but not in the U.S.," Tabashnik said. "Same pest, same crop, same Bt protein, but very different outcomes."

He explained that in the southwestern U.S., scientists from the EPA, academia, industry and the USDA worked with growers to craft and implement an effective refuge strategy. In India, on the other hand, the refuge requirement was similar, but without the collaborative infrastructure, compliance was low.

One of the paper's main conclusions is that evaluating two factors can help to gauge the risk of resistance before Bt crops are commercialized. "If the data indicate that the pest's resistance is likely to be recessive and resistance is rare initially, the risk of rapid resistance evolution is low," Tabashnik said. In such cases, setting aside a relatively small area of land for refuges can delay resistance substantially. Conversely, failure to meet one or both of these criteria signifies a higher risk of resistance.

When higher risk is indicated, Tabashnik describes a fork in the road, with two paths: "Either take more stringent measures to delay resistance such as requiring larger refuges, or this pest will probably evolve resistance quickly to this Bt crop."

Two leading experts on Bt crops welcomed publication of the study. Kongming Wu, director of the Institute for Plant Protection at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Beijing said, "This review paper will be very helpful for understanding insect resistance in agricultural systems and improving strategies to sustain the effectiveness of Bt crops." Fred Gould, professor of entomology at North Carolina State University, commented: "It's great to have an up-to-date, comprehensive review of what we know about resistance to transgenic insecticidal crops."

Although the new report is the most comprehensive evaluation of pest resistance to Bt crops so far, Tabashnik emphasized that it represents only the beginning of using systematic data analyses to enhance understanding and management of resistance.
“These plants have been remarkably useful and in most cases, resistance has evolved slower than expected,” Tabashnik said. “I see these crops as an increasingly important part of the future of agriculture. The progress made provides motivation to collect more data and to incorporate it in planning future crop deployments. We've also started exchanging ideas and information with scientists facing related challenges, such as herbicide resistance in weeds and resistance to drugs in bacteria, HIV and cancer.”

But will farmers ever be able to prevent resistance altogether? Tabashnik said he doesn't think so. "You're always expecting the pest to adapt. It's almost a given that preventing the evolution of resistance is not possible."

Agricultural Development

Agricultural sector seeks China aid by the Trinidad Guardian, 13 June 2013

Full Article

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados—Caribbean countries are looking to China to help develop their agricultural sector and are seeking to take advantage of a US$50 million fund established by Beijing.

Caribbean agriculture ministers joined their counterparts from Latin America and China for two days of talks this week, and according to an official statement issued here, they have adopted a declaration in which they “pledged to deepen and expedite cooperation among their countries, making full use of scientific and technological developments as well as a US$50 million fund made available by the Chinese government”. The meeting was held under the theme “Mutually beneficial cooperation and win-win development”.

Barbados Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and Water Resource Management Minister, Dr David Estwick, noted that the ambitions of the meeting coincided “with the plans of… government to reform the agricultural sector of Barbados, and to promote the sector for the 21st century that is modern, competitive and responds to the reality that our nation is one of the most food-insecure in the Caribbean region”.

Estwick said Barbados was developing a project with the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies for a Centre for Food Security and Entrepreneurship aimed at promoting research and training in sustainable food production and entrepreneurship in the Caribbean in collaboration with international partners such as China. Antigua and Barbuda’s Agriculture Minister Hilson Baptiste said he intended to make an application on behalf of farmers in his country to benefit from the US$50 million fund.

He said he would be seeking funds to acquire new technologies to assist farmers who are losing an estimated 80 per cent of their onion crop due to inadequate harvesting equipment. “Farmers are suffering tremendously and it really concerns me that thousands of pounds of food are lost each day because of lack of post-harvesting technology. I’m praying that after my presentation at the meeting that I will obtain the assistance to help the farmers; that’s my concern,” he added.
Modern Agricultural Station Being Constructed in Portsmouth by the Government Information Service of Dominica, 10 June 2013

Full Article

The Government of Dominica with assistance from the Chinese Agricultural Mission is in the process of constructing a modern Agricultural Station in the North of the island.

This project came about when the former station which was located in Hillsborough was severely damaged in 2011 by flooding.

The Hillsborough facility was then re-located to a property in “One Mile” Portsmouth.

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture Eisenhower Douglas, in an interview with the Government Information Service (GIS) on Monday said the US $2.1 Million state of the art agricultural station is expected to be ready by the end of July.

“We actually expect that the construction of that facility will be completed by the end of July. The facility is still under construction, and we are expecting to have an opening ceremony soon after, possibly in August. Based on the work going on there now we know that the facility will be ready,”’PS Douglas confirmed.

He said the facility when complete will boast a modern green house among other amenities.

“The Green House that is being established there will be the most modern one in the English speaking Caribbean, and we will be able to provide a major boost to the agricultural sector” he said.

The new agricultural station in “One Mile”, Portsmouth will be equipped with a number of state of the art agricultural equipment and technology which will be available for use by the island’s farmers.

Minister Baptiste Bats For Farmers At China Meeting. Government of Antigua and Barbuda Press Release, 11 June 2013

Full Article

Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and Environment Hon. Hilson Baptiste has placed securing funding that will assist farmers high on the agenda for his trip to China, for the inaugural session of the China-Latin America and the Caribbean Agricultural Ministers Forum.

In addition to minister of agriculture, there will be participation from agricultural research institutes and China’s General Office of the State Council, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Commerce.
Talking points for the June 8 and 9 meeting include policy propositions on agricultural cooperation among China, Latin America and the Caribbean by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao; establishing platforms for agricultural exchange between government departments, research institutions and businesses; and promoting sustainable development of agricultural investment and trade cooperation.

Minister Baptiste said while in Beijing, China he will make application, on behalf of the famers in Antigua and Barbuda, to access money from a special fund of over US $50 million set aside for cooperation among the regions.

The minister listed the acquisition of an onion dryer, noting that 80 percent of the local onion crop is lost due to inadequate harvesting equipment, as one area he will explore.

Technical assistance and soil fertility mapping are other areas the minister said he would broach. “Farmers are suffering tremendously and it really concerns me that thousands pounds of food are lost each day because of lack of post-harvesting technology,” Minister Baptiste said.

“I’m praying that after my presentation at the meeting that I will obtain the assistance to help the farmers; that’s my concern,” he added.

The theme for the meeting is “Mutually beneficial cooperation and win-win development.

Agricultural sector needs innovative thinking by the Barbados Advocate 11 June 2013

Full Article

The answer to reviving the nation’s flagging agricultural sector lies in innovation.

With this in mind, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and Water Resource Management has launched its Agricultural Science, Technology and Innovation Competition.

“The role of research and innovation must play in the repositioning of Barbados’ agriculture industry in the twenty-first century can never be overstated,” noted Deputy Chief Agricultural Officer Charleston Lucas.

Making remarks at the launch of the National Council on Science and Technology and the Enterprise Growth Fund’s National Innovation Competition at Savannah Hotel yesterday, he stated that a thriving agricultural sector could redound to the country’s benefit.

“There are many opportunities that research and innovation can have on our sector, particularly as it relates to improving competitiveness and productivity and stimulating economic activity and economic growth,” he stressed.

Lucas argued that in recognition of this fact, countries around the world were busily at work seeking to find sustainable systems to return the industry to a key pillar.
“Cognisant of these realities, the Government of Barbados is committed to improving livelihoods and maintaining economic sustainability through agriculture,” he noted, saying this was embraced in the competition’s theme ‘Improving lives through Innovation in Agricultural Science and Technology.’

According to him, the competition would call for innovative thinking persons to find meaningful solutions to the very real threats to this sector.

“New products, processes and systems can come to the fore. It is hoped that after that competition the cadre of researchers and interested participants will be greatly enhanced,” he said, adding that it would help to fill the void of agricultural research.

The event was held at the Savannah Hotel.

Caribbean And China To Work Together In Agriculture. Barbados Embassy in Beijing/Aisha Reid, 11 June 2013

Full Article

The Caribbean and Latin America and the People's Republic of China are set to embark on a new phase of enhanced cooperation in the field of agriculture.

This came as a result of the first Latin America and Caribbean-China meeting of Ministers of Agriculture which was held in Beijing, China, from Friday, June 7 to Sunday, June 9.

The Ministers adopted a declaration in which they pledged to deepen and expedite cooperation among their countries, making full use of scientific and technological developments as well as a US$50 million fund made available by the Chinese Government.

Speaking during the ministerial segment of the meeting, Barbados' Minister of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and Water Resource Management, Dr. David Estwick, noted that the ambitions of the meeting coincided: "with the plans of... government to reform the agricultural sector of Barbados, and to promote the sector for the 21st century that is modern, competitive and responds to the reality that our nation is one of the most food-insecure in the Caribbean region," he said.

Minister Estwick also told the meeting that Barbados was developing a project with the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies for a Centre for Food Security and Entrepreneurship. He added that the Centre aimed to promote research and training in sustainable food production and entrepreneurship in Barbados and the Caribbean in collaboration with international partners such as China.
**A Call for The Banana Industry to be Treated as a Business** by the Government Information Service of Dominica, 11 June 2013


**Full Article**

A major paradigm shift in the way farmers do business at it relates to bananas may be the solution to increasing Dominica’s banana productivity and exports.

That’s the suggestion coming out of a recent meeting called by the Ministry of Agriculture involving key stakeholders in the industry.

The meeting called on May 28th, 2013, was attended by representatives of WINFRESH, the company responsible for marketing Dominica’s bananas, the Dominica Agricultural Producers and Exporters Limited (DAPEX) and the Dominica National Fair Trade Organisation (DNFTO).

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Dr. Eisenhower Douglas, who chaired the high level meeting, said there is consensus, that a more scientific approach should be embraced as a means of sustaining the island’s banana industry.

“We have much more competition now and the core message from WINFRESH is that at the production level, the changes that need to take place to match that at the market level are slow to take place. We need to be much more scientific in production at the national level” stated Douglas.

“We need to treat agriculture more like a business, as it relates to input, output, productivity, and yield per acre. We have a problem with the average age of farmers, we need to get more young energetic people in the industry,” Douglas said.

He continued “We have a number of challenges that we have to concern ourselves with and seek to address and we want to do it in collaboration with DAPEX and WINFRESH because they have an important role to play”.

The Permanent Secretary added that in recent years, Dominica has experienced a significant decline in banana exports and there is consensus that the country can do much better.

“WINFRESH still believe that Dominica can do much better in the area of bananas. Our peak year of banana exports was 1988, where we earned over a hundred million dollars in bananas. Now here we are in 2013, several years later, our banana exports is less than 10% of what it was at the peak” he explained.

Douglas said while there has been some fluctuations in the volume of exports over the years, the general trend in banana exports have been on the decline.

“WINFRESH believe we can do much better in banana exports”.

Douglas cautioned that there continues to be a call for DAPEX and the National Fairtrade Organization to work collaboratively in the interest of the industry.

“We also want to see DAPEX and FAIRTRADE work much more harmoniously together. There are certain institutional arrangements that have predisposed them to be at loggerheads in the past and we
believe the time has come to bury the hatchet and work more collectively in the public interest” he suggested.

The Government of Dominica recently launched the Banana Accompanying Measures (BAM) where EC$54 million from the European Union (EU) was injected into the island’s agriculture sector as a means of boosting that sector.

The (BAM) is a series of measures aimed at “strengthening the viability of agriculture and increasing its productivity and competitiveness”.

It’s About Dollars and Cents by Yolande Simmons, 9 June 2013

Full Article

Port of Spain -- Farmers can no longer be in agriculture simply for the love of it. If you are to be successful, it must be about dollars and cents; you must see it as a business’, so says Mr. Carlos Dillon, President of the sixty-five member strong Trinidad and Tobago Tropical Growers Association and a member of the Tobago District of the Agriculture Society of Trinidad and Tobago. This Workshop identifies the challenges in forming a group and gives you the opportunity to strengthen your organisation'.

He was speaking at the recently concluded two-day EU-funded Group Dynamics Symposium, facilitated by the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), held on Thursday 6th and Friday 7th June, 2013 at the Student Administration Building, UWI St Augustine Campus. The Symposium, titled 'Improving the viability and competitiveness of agricultural industry through stronger farmers groups' saw the active participation of some twenty-five agricultural stakeholders.

Mr. Mahadeo Rambharose, President of the seven year old Mayaro Greenhouse Growers Association, a fifteen member strong group, said of the Symposium, 'It is really important in helping us as a group to clear the path in terms of helping us to understand the business of agriculture'. Mr. Rambharose is a career farmer of more than forty-five years and decided to take the plunge into protected agriculture and now his Association enjoys a long-term contract to supply sweet peppers to a local processor.

Building cohesion within farming groups represents a critical step for developing viable and competitive industries within the agricultural sector. Specifically, stronger groups assist farmers to collectively position themselves to capitalize on opportunities as it relates to effective production and marketing and hence increases the potential for livelihood improvement. Moreover, stronger groups allow for greater advocacy for policy development and strategic alignment of the value chains. Dr. Janet Lawrence, Head of the CARDI Trinidad Unit says that this programme was welcomed by all participants, and is demonstrable evidence of CARDI's commitment to ‘building the capacity of farmers groups, to ensure sustainability and profitability'.

The objectives of the Symposium were to introduce participants to the principles and practices of “good” group management and performance; provide participants with practical tools and techniques to develop group cohesion and alleviate common problems/issues which may arise in the group development process; and highlight the role and function of groups in the development of agri-business clusters. With key outcomes for the participants to have a clearer understanding of the
fundamentals of group dynamics; understand the basics for mediation of conflict and key techniques for sustaining groups; and understand the role of groups in the development of sustainable industries.

Presenters included Mr Robert Reid, Specialist in Agribusiness and Commercialization, IICA; Dr Ronald Dyer, CARDI CFC Group dynamics Specialist/Consultant, Trinidad; and Ms Kaye Trotman, CARDI CFC Group dynamics Specialist/Consultant, Tobago.


Full Article

Guyana is listed among 18 countries to receive an award on June 16 from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for progress in reaching the Millennium Development Goals to curtail hunger and undernourishment.

The honour goes to countries that have satisfied the MDG target of halving the proportion of hungry people and have reached World Food Summit (WFS) goal of reducing by half the absolute number of undernourished people between 1990-92 and 2010-2012.

The presentations are expected at a high-level ceremony at the FAO headquarters during the week-long meeting of the FAO Conference. Among the other honourees are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cuba, Djibouti, Georgia, Ghana, Guyana, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Venezuela and Vietnam.

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva congratulated the aforementioned countries for taking the lead by demonstrating strong political will, coordination and cooperation, keeping in mind the aim to 2012 challenge by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to eradicate hunger.

With the vast majority of the hungry (about 852 million) living in developing countries (according to the State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012), agriculture plays a pivotal role in providing access to food, especially for the 70 percent of the poor who live in rural areas and depend directly or indirectly on agriculture, the FAO stated. In Guyana, the agriculture sector contributes 30 percent to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and has over the years been boosted with heavy investments in efforts to promote diversification, incentives for farmers and drainage and irrigation.

The Government is also managing a robust school feeding programme which facilitates the distribution of either juices and fortified biscuits or a hot meal to nursery students. A total of $1.1 billion is budgeted for the School Feeding Programme which will see over 64,000 school children benefitting.

President Donald Ramotar who announced the impending award on the occasion of World Food Day assured that it meant Guyana was on the right track to be receiving such honours.
Agricultural Trade

No to food imports by the Barbados Advocate 6/9/2013

Full Article

Barbadian farmers must speak up loudly against the practice of franchises importing foods that are produced here.

This was the strong assertion of Chief Executive Officer of the Barbados Agricultural Society, James Paul, as he urged the group to speak out against any action that would create unfair competition. “Call in on the call-in programmes and let your voice be heard too... I want you to stand behind us because we are fighting on your behalf,” he maintained.

Addressing yesterday’s Barbados Association of Pig Farmers seminar, Paul continued to apply pressure against this practice.

“This fight on behalf of the BAS in respect to that particular product category is one I want all farmers to recognise that is important for us. We cannot allow and we will not allow, a situation where persons seek to undermine the livelihood of farmers in this country. We cannot have a situation where supermarket operators, franchise operators from wherever they come, feel that they can come into Barbados and instead of buying the local product, seek to import that product which we are producing the same here.

“We also have spoken to them because there are some people who are saying that we cannot produce the products here. What we are saying is that for those people to work with agencies such as Hipac to see how we can do it, because it is not technology that we cannot do,” he said.

Pointing to local fast food restaurants that use home-grown foods, Paul argued, “If they can do it. I do not see why, whether we are a Burger King or Subway or whatever, they cannot also do it. That is the point we are making.”

In addition, he pointed to the willingness of local producers to invest in making the foods needed by these franchises.

Irish Potato Imports to Cease in Three Years by the Jamaica Information Service, 12 June 2013

Full Article

The Government plans to cease importing Irish potatoes within the next two to three years, as part of the thrust to reduce the country’s high food import bill.

This was disclosed by Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Donovan Stanberry on Tuesday, June 11, during a ceremony to officially launch the Denbigh Agricultural, Industrial and Food Show 2013, at the Ace Supercentre in White Marl, St. Catherine.
“We have put in place the necessary policy and support systems to ensure that within the next two to three years we can stop importing table Irish potatoes all together,” Mr. Stanberry said.

The Permanent Secretary is optimistic that this target can be achieved within the time frame as the Ministry is working to sustain the current production level of locally grown Irish potatoes, which is currently between 80 and 85 per cent.

Mr. Stanberry said that for this year in particular, farmers have benefitted greatly from the production of the crop, noting that the farm gate price “has not gone below $45 per pound of Irish potato”.

The Permanent Secretary said the Ministry also intends to replicate the “Irish potato experience” with onions, which also contribute to the huge import bill, noting that it is “just mind blowing in terms of the amount of onions we consume and we are importing” on a yearly basis.

“In the same way that we have treated with Irish potato, we are also going to treat with onions by providing the necessary support through the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), by arranging financing through the Peoples’ Cooperative (PC) Banks and Development Bank of Jamaica (DBJ),” he stated.

He said further that “we will also be making a significant portion of the 8,000 acres of lands in our agro parks (available) to onion farmers and by managing the imports to ensure that in a similar way, we can increase significantly, the amount of onion we consume from local production and in the process our farmers make a little money.”

Mr. Stanberry noted that in its drive for Jamaicans to eat more locally produced crops, the Government will seek to ensure that consumers do not pay excessively high prices for local produce.

“But I think that in those two products, we are competitive and I think over time, as the production stabilizes, you will see the prices also stabilise,” Mr. Stanberry assured.

The Permanent Secretary also cited the success of ginger and turmeric, noting that ginger production has doubled over the last year due principally to the “one acre and half acre farmers, who collectively were able to give that kind of a bumper production and we are going to continue to support them with a $120 million programme this year.”

“The only way to get success is to be deliberate. What we have realized in the Ministry is that pronouncing policy is necessary but not sufficient. If we want the production, we have to literally go out there in the field with the farmers, roll up our sleeves …in the Ministry we have to be on the ground with the farmers, putting in the financing, helping them with the extension with the farmer field school and I can guarantee if you do that, our farmers always respond,” he said.

The 61st staging of the Denbigh Agricultural, Industrial and Food, will be held from August 4 to 6 in May Pen, Clarendon. The event will feature displays of crops and livestock, culinary arts exhibits, seminars, conferences and lectures.
Upcoming Events

June 2013

**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/](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/](http://isrc.in/internationalconference2013/)  

**21th Annual International Mango Festival**

*Date:* 13 -14 July 2013  
*Location:* Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in the Coral Gables, South Florida, USA  
*Website:* [http://www.fairchildgarden.org/Events/?date=2013-07&eventid=748](http://www.fairchildgarden.org/Events/?date=2013-07&eventid=748)

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”  
October 2013

12th Caribbean Week of Agriculture (CWA)
Date: 4-12 October, 2013
Location: Guyana International Conference Centre, Guyana
Theme: Linking the Caribbean for Regional Food and Nutrition Security and Rural Development
Email: cwaguyana2013@gmail.com