## Caribbean Week of Agriculture highlights use of agriculture as enterprise development, generation of wealth – Agri Minister

Guyana Government Information Agency, 28 September 2013

Guyana will be hosting, for the second time, the 12th Caribbean Week of Agriculture from October 4th-12th, 2013; Guyana hosted its first CWA in 2003. The week-long activities tie in with that of Agriculture Month 2013 and CWA is the main attraction. Theme for CWA is “Linking the Caribbean for Regional Food and Nutrition Security and Rural Development.” Meanwhile, the theme for Guyana’s Agriculture Month is “Proud to host Caribbean Week of Agriculture: Linking the Caribbean for Regional Food and Nutrition Security and Rural Development.”

For more information see page 9

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**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

New Methods Increases Food and Bioenergy Production from Cassava by Science Daily, 24 September 2013
http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/09/130924091327.htm

Full Article

New ways to utilize starch from cassava can provide food to an additional 30 million people without taking more arable land than today. By 2030 the figure will be 100 million. In addition, the same land can also contribute to an increased production of bioenergy. This is shown in a new study from researchers at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and China Agricultural University (CAU).

Cassava or manioc (Manihot esculenta Crantz.) is grown for its high starch content. The large tubers are very starchy and processed into flour or semolina (tapioca). This is the staple food for between 0.5-1 billion people in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The plant is grown on about 19 million hectares of land.

There are also strong interests to increase the use of cassava starch for industrial use. This can reduce the amount of food or result in even more land being utilized for production. Researchers at SLU and CAU have found that discarded stems contain surprisingly large amounts of starch, up to 30% of dry mass. In today's production the stems are removed from plantations and are considered a waste problem.

With simple water-based technologies, up to 15% of starch stem dry weight can be extracted. If this starch can be used for industrial purposes, root starch previously used industrially can provide food for an additional 30 million people in the world today and close to 100 million in 2030.

The study also shows that residues and process for the extraction of stem starch can be used for the production of biofuels (solid fuel and biogas) and provide substantial added values. Without land use increases, the researchers show that food and bioenergy in combination can contribute to sustainable development and to combat malnutrition and poverty globally.

- There is great potential with the new ideas about using cassava stems as an industrial commodity, rather than as today a waste problem. We were actually surprised to find such large amounts of nutritious starch in a biomass residue, mostly stored in xylem tissues of the stems, says Associate Professor Shaojun Xiong, who is leading the research in this field.

The study is published in the latest issue of the journal Global Change Biology Bioenergy.
Cocoa farmers get tools to combat impacts of climate change. The Jamaica Observer, 25 September, 2013

**Cocoa**

**Full Article**

ONE hundred and five cocoa farmers from the parishes of St Mary and Portland recently received tools, valued at $2.5 million, from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The purpose of the donations is to support the rehabilitation and livelihoods diversification initiative being implemented by ACDI/VOCA in partnership with the Government of Jamaica under the Jamaica Rural Economy and Ecosystems Adapting to Climate Change (Ja REEACH) Project.

The two-year project focuses on, among other things, protecting rural lives, livelihoods and ecosystems in targeted Jamaican communities that are affected by climate change, through interventions that drive adaptation and build resilience.

The tools were handed over to the cocoa farmers, who were drawn from seven groups between the two parishes, at a ceremony that was jointly organised with the Rural Agriculture Development Programme (RADA) in Portland on September 13.

Dianne Dormer of ACDI/VOCA, who spoke on behalf of Malden Miller, project management specialist at the USAID, said the provision of the tools to the farmers was seen as important given the reputation of Jamaica's cocoa.

"Efforts to improve the resilience and productivity of the Jamaican cocoa industry will go a far way in boosting Jamaica's overall agriculture sector and food security," she emphasised.

Under the Ja REEACH Project, an additional $3.5 million will be spent to support livelihood diversification opportunities as part of the resiliency building strategy for these farmers, bringing the total value of the support being provided to $6 million.

The environmental impacts of climate change are dire and include an increase in the frequency and intensity of hurricanes, droughts, flooding, environmental degradation, soil erosion, watershed degradation, and deforestation.

The farmers have been trained in how to use the tools to protect their farms from the negative effects of climate change under the Ja REEACH Project's Climate Change Farmer Field School Programme, and with the requisite tools now have an opportunity to practise what they have learnt in the field. For example, they will use pruning tools to reduce the height of trees so that the trees won't be damaged by heavy winds.

Additionally, the farmers are being taught various resilience-building agricultural skills to protect their farms, such as integrated pest management techniques like the use of barrier crops to reduce pest infestation; use of drains in fields where there is tendency for water-pooling or flooding; planting of drought-tolerant crop varieties; use of mulch to retain soil moisture; installation of water harvesting, conservation and irrigation systems to address the changes in water availability; adjusting crop establishment to encourage peak production outside of hurricane or heavy rain periods; plant nutrition.
techniques to increase plant resilience: and how to plant trees for shade management and to increase carbon sequestration.

As part of Ja REEACH's two-year response to the impacts of climate change, the Climate Change Farmer Field School Programme is working with select cocoa farmers to transfer the skills and best practices needed to rehabilitate the cocoa fields, particularly post natural disaster events such as Hurricane Sandy in 2012. These rehabilitated fields will serve as community-level demonstration plots where other farmers can see and learn the benefits of applying rehabilitation best practices.

Of great significance is that the Ja REEACH Project is also facilitating the creation of alternative livelihoods for the cocoa farmers, so that they will no longer be solely dependent on their cocoa crops for income. Under this alternative livelihoods initiative, the cocoa farmers will also plant other crops such as dasheen, yam and pepper, thereby reducing their dependence on cocoa as a single income source.

Rice

Modifying Rice Crops to Resist Herbicide Prompts Weedy Neighbors' Growth Spurt by Science Daily, 23 September, 2013
http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/09/130923143528.htm

Full Article

Rice containing an overactive gene that makes it resistant to a common herbicide can pass that genetic trait to weedy rice, prompting powerful growth even without a weed-killer to trigger the modification benefit, new research shows.

Previously, scientists have found that when a genetically modified trait passes from a crop plant to a closely related weed, the weed gains the crop’s engineered benefit – resistance to pests, for example – only in the presence of the offending insects.

This new study is a surprising example of gene flow from crops to weeds that makes weeds more vigorous even without an environmental trigger, researchers say.

The suspected reason: This modification method enhances a plant’s own growth control mechanism, essentially making it grow faster – an attractive trait in crops but a recipe for potential problems with weedy relatives that could out-compete the crop.

“Our next question is whether this method of enhancing plant growth could be developed for any crop. We want to know whether growers could get higher yields in the crop and then, if it happened to cross with a related weed, whether it might make the weed more prolific as well,” said Allison Snow, professor of evolution, ecology and organismal biology at The Ohio State University and a lead author of the paper.

“It’s unusual for any transgene to have such a positive effect on a wild relative and even more so for herbicide resistance,” she said. “But we think we know why: It’s probably because the pathway regulated by this gene is so important to the plant.”
The work is the result of Snow’s longtime collaboration with senior author Bao-Rong Lu, a professor at Fudan University in Shanghai. Their publication appears online in the journal New Phytologist. The weed-killer glyphosate, sold under the brand name Roundup, kills plants by inhibiting a growth-related pathway activated by the epsps gene. Biotech companies have inserted mutated forms of a similar gene from microbes into crop plants, producing “Roundup Ready” corn and soybeans that remain undamaged by widespread herbicide application.

But in this study, the researchers used a different method, boosting activation of the native epsps gene in rice plants—a process called overexpressing—to give the plants enough strength to survive an application of herbicide. Because companies that genetically modify commercial crops don’t fully disclose their methods, Snow and her colleagues aren’t sure how prevalent this method might be, now or in the future.

“This is a relatively new way to get a trait into a crop: taking the plant’s own gene and ramping it up,” Snow said. “We don’t know yet if our findings are going to be generalizable, but if they are, it’s definitely going to be important.”

To overexpress the native gene in rice, the scientists attached a promoter to it, giving the plant an extra copy of its own gene and ensuring that the gene is activated at all times.

The researchers conducted tests in rice and four strains of a relative of the same species, weedy rice, a noxious plant that infests rice fields around the world. By crossing genetically altered herbicide-resistant rice with weedy rice to mimic what happens naturally in the field, the researchers created crop-weed hybrids that grew larger and produced more offspring than unaltered counterparts—even without any herbicide present.

In regulated field experiments, the hybrids containing the overexpressed gene produced 48 percent to 125 percent more seeds per plant than did hybrid plants with no modified genes. They also had higher concentrations of a key amino acid, greater photosynthetic rates and better fledgling seed growth than controls—all presumed signs of better fitness in evolutionary terms.

“Fitness is a hard thing to measure, but you can conclude that if a gene gives you a lot more seeds per plant compared to controls, it’s likely to increase the plants’ fitness because those genes would be represented at a higher percentage in future generations,” Snow said.

When Snow and Lu set out to study this new genetic engineering method, they didn’t know what to expect.

“Our colleagues developed this novel transgenic trait in rice and we didn’t know if it would have a fitness benefit, or a cost, or be neutral,” Snow said. “With most types of herbicide resistant genes, there’s no benefit to a wild plant unless the herbicide is sprayed. A lot of transgenes in crop plants are either selectively neutral in wild plants or, if they have a benefit, it depends on environmental factors like insects, diseases or herbicides being present.”

Snow has a history in this area of research. She has found that genes from crop plants can persist in related weeds over many generations. In 2002, she led a study that was the first to show that a gene artificially inserted into crop plants to fend off pests could migrate to weeds in a natural environment and make the weeds stronger. She also has served on national panels that monitor and make recommendations about the release of genetically engineered species into the environment.
She is interested in identifying new possible outcomes of the growth of crop-weed hybrids that contain genetic modifications, but she doesn’t take sides about possible risks and benefits of genetically modified crops.

“It’s not always the end of the world if a weed starts to become a lot more common after acquiring a new trait – there may be effective ways to manage that weed,” Snow said. “You just can’t make sweeping generalizations about genetic engineering, and knowledge from ecological studies like ours can help inform risk assessment and biosafety oversight.”

### Plant Nutrition

**First Step to Reduce Plant Need for Nitrogen Fertilizer Uncovered** by Science Daily, September 27, 2013


**Full Article**

Nitrogen fertilizer costs U.S. farmers approximately $8 billion each year, and excess fertilizer can find its way into rivers and streams, damaging the delicate water systems. Now, a discovery by a team of University of Missouri researchers could be the first step toward helping crops use less nitrogen, benefitting both farmers' bottom lines and the environment. The journal *Science* published the research this month.

Gary Stacey, an investigator in the MU Bond Life Sciences Center and professor of plant sciences in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, found that crops, such as corn, are "confused" when confronted with an invasive, but beneficial, bacteria known as rhizobia bacteria. When the bacteria interact correctly with a crop, the bacteria receive some food from the plant and, simultaneously, produce nitrogen that most plants need. In his study, Stacey found that many other crops recognize the bacteria, but do not attempt to interact closely with them.

"The problem is that corn, tomatoes and other crops have a different response and don't support an intimate interaction with the rhizobia, thus making farmers apply larger amounts of nitrogen than might otherwise be necessary," Stacey said. "Scientists have known about this beneficial relationship since 1888, but it only exists in legume crops, like soybeans and alfalfa. We're working to transfer this trait to other plants like corn, wheat or rice, which we believe is possible since these other plants recognize the bacteria. It's a good first step."

When legumes like soybeans sense a signal from the bacteria, they create nodules where the bacteria gather and produce atmospheric nitrogen that the plants can then use to stimulate their growth. This reaction doesn't happen in other plants.

"There's this back and forth battle between a plant and a pathogen," said Yan Liang, a co-author of the study and post-doctoral fellow at MU. "Rhizobia eventually developed a chemical to inhibit the defense response in legumes and make those plants recognize it as a friend. Meanwhile, corn, tomatoes and other crops are still trying to defend themselves against this bacteria."

In the study, Stacey and Liang treated corn, soybeans, tomatoes and other plants to see how they responded when exposed to the chemical signal from the rhizobia bacteria. They found that the plants did receive the signal and, like legumes, inhibited the normal plant immune system. However,
soybeans, corn and these other plants don't complete the extra step of forming nodules to allow the bacteria to thrive.

"The important finding was that these other plants didn't just ignore the rhizobia bacteria," Stacey said. "They recognized it, but just activated a different mechanism. Our next step is to determine how we can make the plants understand that this is a beneficial relationship and get them to activate a different mechanism that will produce the nodules that attract the bacteria instead of trying to fight them." The study was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy. For more information about this research, please visit: http://decodingscience.missouri.edu/2013/09/the-secret-of-the-legume.

Livestock

Sustainable Livestock Production Is Possible by Science Daily, September 25, 2013
http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/09/130925102841.htm

Full Article

Consumers are increasingly demanding higher standards for how their meat is sourced, with animal welfare and the impact on the environment factoring in many purchases. Unfortunately, many widely-used livestock production methods are currently unsustainable. However, new research out today from the University of Cambridge has identified what may be the future of sustainable livestock production: silvopastoral systems which include shrubs and trees with edible leaves or fruits as well as herbage. Professor Donald Broom, from the University of Cambridge, who led the research said: "Consumers are now demanding more sustainable and ethically sourced food, including production without negative impacts on animal welfare, the environment and the livelihood of poor producers. Silvopastoral systems address all of these concerns with the added benefit of increased production in the long term."

Current cattle production mostly occurs on cleared pastures with only herbaceous plants, such as grasses, grown as food for the cows. The effects on the local environment include the removal of trees and shrubs as well as the increased use of herbicides, all of which result in a dramatic decrease in biodiversity. Additionally, there is also contamination of soil and waterways by agricultural chemicals as well as carbon costs because of vehicles and artificial fertiliser necessary to maintain the pasture. The researchers advocate that using a diverse group of edible plants such as that in a silvopastoral landscape promotes healthy soil with better water retention (and less runoff), encourages predators of harmful animals, minimizes greenhouse gas emissions, improves job satisfaction for farm workers, reduces injury and stress in animals, improves welfare and encourages biodiversity using native shrubs and trees.

Additionally, shrubs and trees with edible leaves and shoots, along with pasture plants, produce more food for animals per unit area of land than pasture plants alone. Trees and shrubs have the added benefit of providing shade from hot sun and shelter from rain. It also reduces stress by enabling the animals to hide from perceived danger.

"The planting as forage plants of both shrubs and trees whose leaves and small branches can be consumed by farmed animals can transform the prospects of obtaining sustainable animal production," said Professor Broom. "Such planting of 'fodder trees' has already been successful in several countries, including the plant Chamaecytisus palmensis which is now widely used for cattle feed in Australia."
Another success has been in Colombia where a mixed planting of the shrub Leucaena with a common pasture grass resulted in a 27% increase in dry matter for food and 64% increase of protein production. When ruminants, such as cows, goats and sheep, are consuming the plants from a silvopastoral system, researchers have seen an increase in growth and milk production. Milk production in the tropical silvopastoral system mentioned above was 4.13 kg per cow when compared with 3.5 kg per day on pasture-only systems. As the numbers of animals per hectare was much greater, production of good quality milk per hectare was four to five times greater on the silvopastoral system.

One of the additional benefits of using the silvopastoral system is that it increases biodiversity. Biodiversity is declining across the globe, and the main culprit is farming -- 33% of the total land surface of the world is used for livestock production. If farmers were to switch to sustainable livestock production methods, such as the silvopastoral system, the result would be much greater biodiversity with no increase in land use.

Professor Broom added: "It is clear that silvopastoral systems increase biodiversity, improve animal welfare and provide good working conditions while enabling a profitable farming business. The next step is to get farmers to adopt this proven, sustainable model."

Climate Change

Climate change exhibition. By Tecla Fontenard, 24 September 2013
http://www.grenadabroadcast.com/news/other/16298-four-day-exhibition

Full Article

OECS Secretariat, Castries -- School students in Anguilla can expect an educational treat next week when the OECS Secretariat hosts its first ever climate change exhibition at the Public Library in the Valley.

The official ceremony and exhibition opening has been scheduled for 10:00 A.M. at the auditorium of the Library on September 30, 2013. Following the opening and first viewing by specially invited guests, the exhibition will be opened to the public and will continue for a period of four days until Thursday October 3rd, during which time students and the general public can see various display pieces, informational spreads, educational posters and banners on climate change related topics.

The exhibition gallery, which will be set in the lobby and other distinct areas of the library, will also include promotional material, assorted give-aways and branded merchandise which students and other visiting members of the public can benefit from.

During the four day exhibition, visiting persons can expect to learn about the impacts of climate change that are already being felt in OECS islands; for example on coastlines, water resources and on the major industries of tourism and agriculture. The exhibition will also provide information on coping strategies for climate change, providing tips on how to minimize impacts on our lives, health, livelihoods and property.

The exhibition is being held on the occasion of the annual meeting of OECS Ministers of Environment, which is scheduled for October 3rd also in Anguilla.
Soil and water management

http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/10/131001124022.htm

Full Article

As food security becomes an increasingly important global issue, scientists are looking for the best way to maintain the organic matter in soils using different methods of fertilization and crop rotation. Increasing the organic matter in soils is key to growing crops for numerous reasons, including increased water-holding capacity and improved tilth. Scientists have recently used the Canadian Light Source (CLS) to evaluate the effects of various sources of supplemental nitrogen fertilizer on the chemical composition of soil organic matter. Results of their experiments to study this question were recently published in the journal Biogeochemistry.

"The big question I had when we started this research was how different nitrogen fertilizer supplements affected the overall soil organic matter composition," says Dr. Adam Gillespie, a post-doctoral fellow working with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). "We also wanted to look at how we could optimize the use of nitrogen, since nitrogen fertilizers can be a solution, but also a problem."

Gillespie and his colleagues from AAFC, the University of Saskatchewan, St. Francis Xavier University, Lakehead University, and the CLS tested the hypothesis that the chemical composition of SOM would be different if the supplemental nitrogen originated from a synthetic fertilizer product, animal manure or a legume source.

The invention of synthetic fertilizer, where nitrogen is taken from an inert chemical form in the air and turned into ammonia, has had a profound effect on nitrogen cycling. In fact, astonishingly, humans have doubled the amount of available nitrogen in the biosphere.

According to Gillespie, 40 per cent of people alive today derive their nitrogen nutrition from synthetically-fixed fertilizer.

"Indeed, fertilization has had a profound effect on humanity as a whole. The downside of nitrogen fertilization is that run-off of nitrates to the surface waters or leaching of nitrates to groundwater cause problems with water quality and eutrophication in lakes. The recent algal blooms on Lake Winnipeg are a prime example of this nitrogen pollution. Secondly, nitrogen can be converted to nitrous oxide, which is an extremely potent greenhouse gas. Before fertilizers, nitrogen was introduced into the soil through rainfall or native pulse crops, so when fertilizer was developed, it revolutionized farming."

He cites three common ways for producers to introduce nitrogen into soil: synthetic fertilizer; manure or other organic amendments; and through cultivation of nitrogen fixing pulse crops. For all these methods, the nitrogen comes in different forms. Synthetic fertilizer is available as a variety of commercial products, with different nitrogen-release times, whereas manure and pulse crops need to be broken down by microbial decomposition before nitrogen becomes available.

Gillespie explained that fungi is great at breaking down lignin in plants and bacteria can help break down the rest, but adds, "nitrogen shifts the ability of bacteria to compete, so we are hoping to find out more about the role of fungi in the decomposition of organic matter in soil." Manure and pulse crops also add more organic matter to the soil, a benefit not realized using synthetic fertilizers.
The results of the experiment showed that organic matter in soil was heavily influenced by the type of supplemental nitrogen added.

"The overall trend showed that N additions allowed crop residues to decompose more completely. Specifically, we found less plant-type compounds in soils receiving nitrogen. In addition, we found that among the different nitrogen treatments, manure-enriched soil had the highest amounts of compounds related to microbial turnover," said Gillespie. The findings will prove important for farmers and scientists alike as they work to maximize the potential growth of food while maintaining healthy soils.

Agricultural Development

Caribbean Week of Agriculture highlights use of agriculture as enterprise development, generation of wealth – Agri Minister. Guyana Government Information Agency, 28 September 2013

Full Article

Guyana will be hosting, for the second time, the 12th Caribbean Week of Agriculture from October 4th-12th, 2013; Guyana hosted its first CWA in 2003. The week-long activities tie in with that of Agriculture Month 2013 and CWA is the main attraction.

Theme for CWA is “Linking the Caribbean for Regional Food and Nutrition Security and Rural Development.” Meanwhile, the theme for Guyana’s Agriculture Month is “Proud to host Caribbean Week of Agriculture: Linking the Caribbean for Regional Food and Nutrition Security and Rural Development.”

While announcing the activities that will be held, Agriculture Minister, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy emphasized that the theme for CWA gives an idea of the anticipated gains. “Agriculture is always the number one pillar on which rural development is built and even as the economy of the Caribbean, particularly countries like Guyana, Suriname, Belize, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, particularly as these countries further diversify their economy, rural economy will still largely depend on agriculture development,” he said.

Further, this is one the features the Ministry wants to highlight and CWA is taking a step forward. “This Caribbean Week of Agriculture is saying to our people in Guyana and the Caribbean that we want to use agriculture as enterprise development and to generate wealth… we are not using this CWA to do the old message which was agriculture for subsistence livelihood…In fact we are using this CWA to propel us forward and reject the notion that agriculture is just for subsistence livelihood,” he stressed.

He further illustrated that the development of Santa Fe in Region 9 is an example of what agriculture can do and how the Regional entrepreneurs can be marshalled in developing individual ventures. Additionally, the products from Santa Fe will not contribute to food and nutrition security in Guyana since the country has already achieved that outside of Santa Fe; however, it demonstrates how Guyana can contribute to food and nutrition security in the Caribbean.
The Minister noted that the Caribbean grows enough corn for human consumption/table top usage. However, the region imports a lot of corn for the stockfeed industry.

“What we want to highlight at Caribbean Week of Agriculture is that we can produce all the corn that we require for the stockfeed industry and how that helps in food security is that in the poultry industry we could lower the cost of production...it is no secret that the Caribbean is self-sufficient or has the capacity to be self-sufficient in the production of poultry, and in countries like Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, among others, we are already meeting our poultry demands but we do it at a cost that is high,” he said. The high cost has an impact on the quality of meat that is imported.

The Ministry also announced some of the activities that will be held during the nine days of activities. Some of the events include the official opening on October 2, 2013, forty-three workshops, much of which are science and research related, that will target technical persons in the agriculture field and farmers. Minister Ramsammy emphasized that special provisions are being made for farmers to participate in the various workshops.

The intention of the workshops is to improve the agriculture industry and trade in the Region. The topics that will be covered include sanitary and phytosanitary standards, the coconut industry, pest control in a climate changing environment and projects that are supported by Canada’s Ministry of Agriculture.

Some of the other events include a COTED Ministerial Meeting for Ministers of Agriculture, the Ministerial Caucus of Ministers of Agriculture for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), a meeting of the CRFM, field trips to Santa Fe in Region 9 and the Hope Canal, and open days at the Guyana School of Agriculture and the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary drainage scheme.

The workshops will be held at the Guyana International Conference Centre (GICC) while the Ministerial meetings will be held at the Caricom Secretariat.

Importantly, on Wednesday the three-day agriculture exhibition will commence where 40 groups are expected to participate; some of which are from the wider Caribbean and others from Canada and the Pacific.

Minister Ramsammy noted that some of the dignitaries expected, apart from the Ministers of Agriculture, are the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Regional Director, Director General and senior officials of Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture (IICA) and Caricom representatives.

“We are also hoping to sign a number of agreements and MOUs during Caribbean Week of Agriculture including an agreement with IICA and the European Union...IICA has received a grant of $11M EURO to implement a capacity strengthening programme in the Caribbean region relating to sanitary and phytosanitary standards Guyana is one of the countries in which the IICA/EU project is being implemented,” he stated.

The Minister recalled that earlier this year IICA signed an agreement with the EU to implement an $8M EURO project in the Caribbean that consists of three components, the first will be co-ordinated by IICA, another by Caricom and the final one by CARI. These initiatives will also be highlighted through a seminar during CWA.
Bajans told to grow local: High food import bill remains a critical concern. The Barbados Advocate, 28 September, 2013


**Full Article**

WE NEED to reduce our high food import bill by growing our own food.

This is according to Chair of the Graham Gooding Trust, Professor Sean Carrington, who spoke at a press conference to launch Eat Bajan Day 2013 recently at the Barbados Manufacturers’ Association (BMA).

He said that it is obvious that there are some foods that would have to be imported, but there are also a lot of foods that can be grown locally and this is something that Barbadians need to consider, especially if we want to reduce this high food import bill, which is around “seven hundred million dollars”.

Carrington said that this is especially important as Barbados still joins the rest of the world in trying to grapple with this global economic recession. Furthermore, there are numerous other benefits to eating locally grown foods.

“There are a lot of reasons for that. I mean the food is fresher; it also supports local jobs and our economy; the food is more nutritious; environmentally, that food is travelling less far so all of the energy used to bring frozen foods from thousands of miles away is not contributing to global warming; and lastly, I guess, we are an independent country and what kind of independent country are we if can’t even feed ourselves? So it is those kinds of arguments that we want to get across to people, that we really need to eat more of what we grow.”

Therefore, this initiative supports this cause. “For Eat Bajan Day, we are really encouraging everyone to have a meal which is made of food which is grown in Barbados or fish which is landed by our fisherman or meat that are raised here by our farmers.”

The Professor said that it is not so much about eating Barbadian cuisine, as it is about eating locally grown and produced foods.

“So it is really not so much about eating Bajan dishes in terms of cou cou and salt fish or whatever, but it is about eating food that is locally produced and hopefully, this would continue throughout the rest of the year and not just for one day. So, Friday October 11 is the day when we want everyone to make a conscious effort to really focus on eating local foods.”

The Graham Gooding Trust Fund is a charity set up in 1990 to continue the work of this agriculturist who promoted sustainable development and environmental conservation in Barbados. Their focus now is on food security and they conceptualised this event four years ago and have partnered with the BMA in order to educate Barbadians to think about the origin of the food that they eat, stated Carrington.
Production not affected by rains significantly. The Barbados Advocate 25 September 2013

Full Article

Some farmers in Barbados claim that the heavy rains recently have caused water log fields and it could affect production of specific crops.

James Paul, CEO of the Barbados Agriculture Society (BAS) told the Barbados Advocate that, “I have not heard reports about areas that are heavily water logged and travelling through the country we have not observed areas that are severely water logged so far.

“Therefore, it is premature to make that statement generally that we do have issues with rain and fields being water logged. This might be a localised challenge, therefore it affects particular areas, but to say it is a general problem in Barbados at this time is premature,” he explained.

Furthermore, he maintained that, “It is way too early to make statements that we will have to import more of certain produce, as the waterlog challenge may be in certain areas but not overall at this time.”

Paul also added his voice to the support of the drive toward the development of the Honey Bee Indus. Recently, it was reported that Barbados currently imports over $500 000 in honey annually.

The CEO explained, “We have an association to promote the keeping of bees and we want to promote this actively. During this particular year this is something we are actively seeking to push and hopefully we will get more people getting involved in this area. Also, Bee keeping will actually assist in plant pollination which we can see gains in productivity. We import a lot of honey from other countries, this would make a significant impact because we could reduce that cost which is important to our economy.”

Govt Focussed On Reducing Food Import Bill. The Jamaica Information Service, 28 September 2013

Full Article

Minister without Portfolio in the Ministry of Finance and Planning, Hon. Horace Dalley, says the government is continuing its efforts towards reducing the country’s food import bill by US$300 million per year.

Speaking at the annual Jamaica Chamber of Commerce (JCC) Customs seminar yesterday (Sept. 26), at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel in New Kingston, Mr. Dalley said this is being done through initiatives such as the agro parks project.

“The numbers up to December 2012 was that we import about US$1 billion worth of food. We have to incrementally reduce that, that is why we are embarking on the agro parks,” he said, while soliciting the assistance of importers in achieving the target.

Through a partnership involving the Government, farmer/investor and the private sector, some 3, 237 hectares (8,000 acres) of land is being engaged in the production of a number of critical crops across nine agro parks.
Three agro parks are currently in operation – Plantain Garden in St. Thomas; Amity Hall, St. Catherine; and Ebony Park in Clarendon. Another two parks are expected to come on stream by the end of the year.

The Minister further lamented that the country is too dependent on imports of sometimes inferior, cheap consumer goods “that our people can produce and produce better.”

President of the JCC, Francis Kennedy, said his organisation is willing to work in partnership with the Government and multilaterals “to change the way in which we do business in Jamaica.”

“We have got to become as quickly and as early as possible, an export-oriented country, and we have to change our rules, our laws, our regulations and our legislation to achieve this,” he said.

Agri Ministry has active surveillance system. Guyana Government Information Agency, 28 September 2013

Full Article

In an effort to effectively monitor diseases that affect plants, the Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy noted that one of the strategies used since going to the Ministry was to implement some of the same surveillance techniques used by the Health Ministry to detect diseases that are present and those that might arise in the future.

He explained that in the past and in many countries it is only when a problem arises that programmes are put in place. “We are being overtly opportunistic in our approach so that we can stop something in its tracks rather than deal with in post-mortem,” the Minister said.

With regards to appearance of the coconut red mite, Minister Ramsammy stressed that the Ministry always had a surveillance programme and to verify claims of the outbreak, a specific programme was set in motion, “This saw coconut farms across the country being visited and indeed there are locations where the pest has been identified. Actions were taken to ensure that where it exists it was eliminated so as to make sure it does not spread”. “So we do not have a large-scale coconut mite problem in Guyana at this time; like every other country you will occasionally find things but what is good about the present situation is that we did not have to find out after major damage,” he added. The Minister indicated that the coconut red mite is a big problem for many countries around the world hence the importance of the surveillance programme. Due to the raising importance of coconut and its products to the country, farmers are encouraged to wash the nuts before transporting it.

Minister Ramsammy illustrated that with the paddy bug it has not appeared to be a problem in this crop so far since one would expect that it would have been at a crisis level.

Further, the Ministry has changed the weekly reports of extension officers to twice per day. Using this method, if a couple of bugs are seen anywhere a rapid response team can be sent out. “And that is what allowed us to bring it under control,” he emphasized.

He added that once the surveillance efforts continue, the pest will not affect the industry in any way.
Agricultural Education

Aspiring agriculturist tops Digicel back-to-school promotion. The Jamaica Observer, 25 September, 2013

Full Article

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD aspiring agriculturist Venessa Miller is the grand prize winner of telecoms company Digicel back-to-school promotion.

The level two student at the Ebony Park HEART Academy in Clarendon won a cash prize of $100,000 which she plans to use to offset the cost for level three of the agriculture programme in which she is currently enrolled at the institution.

"I feel excited about winning this prize because I can put away my tuition for Level 3 from now. I chose to study agriculture because I have a passion for it and I am happy that I can further this passion by moving on to level 3," she said.

"We import a lot from other countries and if we start producing more we can benefit more from export revenue," she added.

Miller, who grows yam, sweet potato and cabbage in her backyard, is hoping to further her studies at the College of Agriculture, Science and Environment (CASE) after completing her programme at HEART.

Neil Lawrence, Digicel's Diaspora manager, sees Miller's success as "good news for Jamaica".
"It is comforting to see that a youngster is in tune with what is happening in the country and has taken a career path to help the nation, economically.

"[Her] success in the promotion is great for Jamaica as she can study further in a field that will undoubtedly help the country move forward," Lawrence remarked.

The back-to-school promotion was launched in early July and has seen more than seven Digicel customers winning weekly prizes of $20,000 each, culminating with Miller winning the grand prize. Customers were required to top up their prepaid accounts online with $1,500 or more for a chance to win.
Upcoming Events

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/

CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB) Annual Meeting
Date: 26 September - 28 September 2013
Location: Montpellier, France
Website: http://www.rtb.cgiar.org/

First International Conference on Global Food Security
Date: 29 September - 2 October 2013
Location: Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands
Website: http://globalfoodsecurityconference.com/index.html

October 2013

First Global Yam Conference “Yams 2013”
Date: 3-6 October, 2013
Location: Accra, Ghana
Description: First Global Yam Conference “Yams 2013” will be held in conjunction with the 12th Symposium of the International Society for Tropical Root Crops (ISTRC)-African Branch, from 3 to 6 October 2013 in Accra, Ghana
Website: http://www.iita.org/web/yams2013

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

Global Water Partnership-Caribbean - 9th High Level Session (HLS 9) Ministerial Forum
Date: 10 - 11 October 2013
Location: Hilton Barbados Resort, Barbados
Description: Ministers with responsibility for Water in several Caribbean countries will gather at the 9th High Level Session (HLS 9) Ministerial Forum which takes place on 10 - 11 October 2013 at the Hilton Barbados Resort. This Ministerial Forum is part of the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association’s (CWWA’s) 22nd Annual Conference and Exhibition, which is being hosted by the Barbados Water Authority (BWA). Ministers with responsibility for Water in several Caribbean countries will gather at the 9th High Level Session (HLS 9) Ministerial Forum which takes place on 10 - 11 October 2013 at the Hilton Barbados Resort. This Ministerial Forum is part of the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association’s (CWWA’s) 22nd Annual Conference and Exhibition, which is being hosted by the Barbados Water Authority (BWA).
Website: http://www.gwp.org/en/GWP-Caribbean/
Cassava–Based feed system in Africa: Roadmap to a commercial feasibility
Date: 28-30 October 2013
Location: IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria
Description The Global Cassava Partnership for the 21st Century, the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), the CGIAR research programs – Roots, Tubers and Bananas, Livestock and Fish, Humid Tropics, and the feed private sector, having common interests in the development of a cassava-base feed system in Africa are partnering to organize a workshop in IITA, Ibadan, Oct 28-30, 2013, to ask the question: What is the best way to develop a cassava-based feed system in Africa? http://livestockfish.cgiar.org/2013/08/19/cassava-feed/
Contact: Dr. Claude M. Fauquet, Director GCP21, CIAT. Email: c.fauquet@cgiar.org

November 2013
International Conference on ICT4ag
Date: 4-8 November 2013
Location: Kigali, Rwanda
Website: http://www.ict4ag.org/en/

Entomology 2013: Entomological Society of America (ESA) 61st Annual Meeting
Date: 10-13 November 2013
Location: Austin, Texas, USA
Theme: Science Impacting a Connected World
Website: http://www.entsoc.org/entomology2013