
GOVERNMENT’S Caroni Green Initiative has attracted regional investors, with one company looking to cultivate Genetically Modified (GM) Giant King Grass on former canefields, for use as fuel by the energy sector.

**For more information see page 10**

**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.

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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
Cereals and Grains

Corn, soybeans finish weaker by Mike McGinnis, 14 November, 2013
http://www.agriculture.com/markets/analysis/corn/cn-soybes-remain-mixed_9-ar35433

Full Article

DES MOINES, Iowa (Agriculture.com)--Pressure from lack of fresh news and some farmer-selling closed the CME Group's corn, soybean and wheat markets lower Thursday.

The Dec. corn futures contract closed 3 1/4 cents lower at $4.26. The Nov. soybean futures contract ended 1 1/2 cents lower at $13.13. Dec. wheat futures are 3/4 of a cent lower at $6.44 per bushel. The Dec. soymeal futures contract settled $1.30 per short ton higher at $424.60. The Dec. soyoil futures are trading $0.01 higher at $40.97.

In the outside markets, the NYMEX crude oil is $0.06 per barrel lower, the dollar is higher and the Dow Jones Industrials are 55 points higher.

Jack Scoville, PRICE Futures Group vice-president, says the markets still await fresh news to trade.
"Corn is waiting on EPA's fuel standard decision and beans and SBO got support from the India buying," Scoville says.

There's talk of supposed farmer-selling in beans, he says.

Wheat is up on ideas that Brazil bought another 60,000 tons of HRW yesterday and waiting on Egypt, he says.

"Some short covering going on the lower prices in corn, beans as I say not a lot of selling interest on big demand ideas. That might be the big feature in beans. I think I am most interested in buying wheat as it is near a support area now and the demand seems to be picking up."

Aflatoxins - finding solutions for improved food safety. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 2013
http://www.ifpri.org/publication/aflatoxins

Full Article

Aflatoxins are a naturally occurring carcinogenic byproduct of common fungi on grains and other crops, particularly maize and groundnuts. They pose a significant public health risk in many tropical developing countries and are also a barrier to the growth of domestic and international commercial markets for food and feed. In recent years the aflatoxin problem has garnered greatly increased attention from both policy and donor communities around the globe.

What can be done to reduce the detrimental impacts of aflatoxins? Because growth of the molds that produce aflatoxins is caused by multiple factors, and because they must be controlled along the entire value chain from production to consumption, only a robust multifaceted approach to controlling aflatoxins is likely to be effective.
The nineteen briefs in this set thus provide different perspectives on aflatoxin risks and solutions. The analyses fall under four broad themes: (1) what is known about the health risks from aflatoxins; (2) how to overcome market constraints to improved aflatoxin control by building new market channels and incentives; (3) what is the international policy context for taking action in developing countries; and (4) what is the state of research on new aflatoxin control technologies, including new methods for aflatoxin detection, crop breeding, biological control, food storage and handling, and postharvest mitigation.

These briefs collectively provide a much clearer picture of the state of current efforts at combatting aflatoxins. They also identify what gaps loom particularly large—including the need for country-specific risk analysis and for testing integrated solutions for the entire supply chain—in our global efforts to effectively reduce human exposure to aflatoxins and increase the economic returns to smallholders in agriculture.

Banana

Banana and Plantain Farmers to Benefit from EU Assistance. JIS, 12 November, 2013
http://jis.gov.jm/banana-plantain-farmers-benefit-eu-assistance/  

Full Article

Over 1,400 banana and plantain farmers, and other sector interests, will benefit from a $660 million (€4.73 million) European Union (EU)-funded Banana Accompanying Measures (BAM) special assistance programme, over the next four years.

The programme, which forms part of the Government’s poverty eradication strategy, targets small farmers and other beneficiaries totaling approximately 3,000, in the banana growing parishes of St. Thomas, St. Catherine, Clarendon, St. James, Portland, and St. Mary, whose crops and, by extension, livelihoods have been affected by factors such as severe weather.

They will be provided with assistance to enhance crop production and productivity.

An initial sum of nearly $400 million (€3.6 million) is being provided in two tranches for inputs and interventions accruing to the beneficiaries. The remainder of the funds is slated to come on stream later in the programme’s implementation.

Contracts for the provision were signed by Agriculture and Fisheries Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke, and Head of the EU Delegation in Jamaica, Ambassador Paola Amadei, among other stakeholders, during a brief ceremony at the Ministry’s offices at Hope Gardens, St. Andrew, on November 12.

One of the contracts, valued approximately $200 million (€1.171 million), which was signed by the EU and the implementing agency, Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), covers actual implementation of the BAM, and makes provisions for the 1,400 beneficiary banana and plantain farmers, who are members of the All Island Banana Growers Association (AIGBA).

The allocation will be used mainly to provide capacity building and technical assistance to the AIGBA; support the establishment of a commercial entity for the association; provide infrastructural...
improvement for AIBGA stores and facilities; and strengthen district branches into production clusters.

The second contract for approximately $230 million (€1.9 million), signed by the EU and the Banana Board, earmarks grant allocations to provide technical services.

This undertaking will entail: updating and transferring production, diagnostic and technology protocol; updating and delivering an extension methodology package; implementing a public awareness campaign; preparing an institutional and financial framework for future delivery of extension services; preparing a financial framework for the delivery of applied research and technology transfer services; developing and expanding nursery operations for the production of new and conventional banana varieties; and reinforcing the system for distributing the plant seedlings.

The remaining $200 million (just over €1 million) will be allocated to the AIBGA in the form of a grant contract during the second year of implementation.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Clarke described the provision as a “major investment.”

He said the Government facilitates these interventions in the sector, “because we believe, soundly, in the future of the banana industry”, which he contended is the “mainstay of the socio-economic activities of thousands of Jamaican farmers and their families.”

Mr. Clarke noted that the Ministry recently concluded implementation of the EU Banana Support Programme, which benefitted over 30,000 banana and plantain farmers and interests, in traditional banana dependent communities.

Activities under that programme, he outlined, included: construction of roads, bridges, weather stations, and banana databases. Additionally, he said the programme provided institutional support to the AIBGA as well as new technologies and extension services through the Banana Board and RADA.

The Minister pointed out that Jamaica’s food and nutrition security is continually threatened annually by hurricanes, drought, and floods, and the “spectre’ of climate change, with the banana industry among the sectors susceptible to these threats.

“Projects funded by the European Union continue to assist us, not only to recover production in the affected areas in the wake of a storm, but also to strengthen the resilience of farmers against future shocks and provide them with the livelihood-coping strategies and more sustainable production methods ,” he said.

Mr. Clarke expressed optimism that with the latest provision of resources, and the enhancement of the infrastructure, extension services, and management structure that they facilitate, there will be increased production for both local consumption and for export.

“We hold fast to our commitment to move production levels to 100,000 tonnes over the next couple of years,” the Minister added.

In her remarks, Ambassador Amadei said the BAM programme is designed to help Jamaica’s banana sector “adjust” to a changing global market.

“Bananas and plantains remain important for Jamaica. It is essential for food safety and production as well as for income and livelihood. The EU’s involvement in the sector shows that we have been
Ambassador Amadei urged all stakeholders to take the necessary steps to ensure the banana industry’s long-term sustainability.

Meanwhile, AIBGA Chairperson, Grethel Sessing, in expressing gratitude for the EU’s intervention, said the association is “fired up and ready to go.”

“I offer my commitment to make the funds received via the BAM, work for the good of the industry and Jamaica, in general. Thank you EU…for the faith you have in the farmers of Jamaica and, moreso, the banana farmers. Thank you for your coverage, bold vision, insight, understanding, and for the power and reach of our actions,” Mrs. Sessing said.

Africa, Latin America put on alert over Panama disease. FreshFruitPortal.com, November 4th, 2013

Full Article

With Panama disease now detected in Jordan, researchers from Wageningen UR warned of the global spread of the devastating banana disease.

“Panama disease is becoming increasingly widespread and major banana-producing countries in Africa and Latin America are also under threat. A concerted international approach is needed to safeguard the food security of millions of people,” the Dutch university reported Friday.

The study published in scientific journal Plant Disease explained that although Panama disease has been kept under wraps by the resistant Cavendish variety, an aggressive strain of fungus *Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. cubense* is wreaking havoc in Southeast Asia.

“Tropical Race 4 (TR4) is starting to have a huge effect on the Cavendish cultivar in Southeast Asia and there is currently no way to protect the banana,” the university said.

In Jordan, where banana production is relatively low, it is unclear how the disease arrived. Around 80% of the nation’s 1,000-1,500 hectares of plantations are now reportedly infected. The strain in Jordan has been found to be identical to TR4.

Wageningen UR researcher Gert Kema warned that the unclear cause of the disease’s spread creates concern for Africa, where bananas are a staple part of many diets.

“It is unclear how Panama disease spread from Southeast Asia. Gert Kema argues that it is only a question of time before TR4 reaches Africa. In Africa, bananas are an important part of people’s diet, and the introduction and spread of Panama disease would threaten the food security of millions,” the university said.
A new sorrel harvesting machine, which could significantly boost local production, was unveiled at the offices of the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Hope Gardens, in St. Andrew, on November 12.

The machine, which was developed by St. Elizabeth farmers and entrepreneurs, Oral and Allison Turner, is designed to, among other things, increase the volume of sorrel harvested, while reducing the time and manpower needed to do so.

Agriculture and Fisheries Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke, who was among the persons witnessing the unveiling of the prototype, endorsed it as a welcomed innovation, capable of revolutionizing and enhancing the sorrel sub-sector.

“I am pleased to see this. A machine like this (once) properly put in place and running efficiently…will enable us to get the volume of sorrel that we need,” he said.

Noting that the sorrel industry’s potential is “enormous”, Mr. Clarke said maximum outputs can only be achieved if technology is incorporated into the harvesting process.

“We have been working to see how (best) we can develop the industry,” the Minister noted, citing a plant that was recently commissioned into service in Westmoreland.

He commended the Turners for their determination to improve on the machine’s initial design, which the Minister said was “impressive”.

“You could see the entrepreneurial spirit exuding from them. I told them that the Ministry and I would be there with (them) all along the way,” the Minister said.

“The step that you have taken, you have to be congratulated. And I want to say to you that RADA is there to support you, and the Ministry of Agriculture stands ready to give whatever support that we can to make sure that this venture succeeds,” Mr. Clarke added.

Meanwhile, Senior Director for RADA’s Technology, Training and Technical Services Division, Marina Young, said the agency has been working closely with the Turners to provide the necessary linkages that can best facilitate the machine’s advancement to the stage where it can be fully streamlined for commercial use.

“It is very important for RADA that sorrel production consistently increases, because it is a tremendous crop. However, there are a lot of constraints in terms of the cost of production, especially labour, which is required to (harvest) sorrel. If we are to look at the production of sorrel in commercial quantities and to increase the volume, not only for local consumption, but for export, there is no way we can handle it (harvesting) by manual labour,” she noted.

In this regard, Mrs. Young said RADA is anticipating that the Turners will be successful in efforts to introduce their innovation into the industry.
For his part, RADA’s Chief Executive Officer, Lenworth Fulton, described the machine’s development as “one other step in the right direction in agriculture.”

“It is one step further up the value chain; one step in making our agriculture more efficient; and one step in getting more farmers involved and getting more for their (dollar), by using technology to drive the sector,” he said.

Climate Change

Global Warming Heating Up in the Caribbean? By CCCCC, 16 November, 2013

Full Article

Dr. Jason Polk, Associate Director of Science at Western Kentucky University’s the Hoffman Environmental Research Institute says, the increased spotlight placed on the Caribbean by recent high profile climate change reports should help leaders and citizens alike to warm up to the fact that climate change is not only coming, but may be here sooner than anticipated. Read his exclusive contribution to Caribbean Climate.

The topic of climate change is ever-present in the media in recent times, and continues to be a strong conversation piece throughout the world, particularly in the Caribbean region. The newest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report (Working Group I contribution to AR5) points toward unprecedented and continued climate change, with clear evidence of human influences on changes in temperature from carbon emissions. Changes in sea level induced by melting ice sheets, induced by increasing temperatures from global warming, threaten popular coastlines. The ability of tourist destinations like Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, and the Bahamas, among others, to provide not only for their residents, but for the many thousands of visitors demanding water, energy, and other natural resources, is in jeopardy. As severe storms, drought, hurricanes, and other climate challenges rise to the forefront of issues being addressed by CARICOM countries, emerging data sheds new light on the future challenges in store for the islands and coastal nations throughout the region.

Some of the hottest average annual surface air temperatures in recorded history will be reached by 2047 if no action is taken.

In October 2013, a report released in the leading scientific publication Nature by Mora et al. from the University of Hawaii presents evidence of departures from historical temperatures that will occur around the world from a detailed analysis of almost 40 different climate models and measured ecosystem responses from historical data analysis. The novel aspect of this study is that it provides a time-frame and location for these temperature changes predicted to occur, and indicates that by 2047 some of the hottest average annual surface air temperatures in recorded history will be reached if no action is taken. The geographical focal point of these major and rapid temperature increases is the tropics, which is particularly troublesome for many developing countries in the Caribbean that directly fall within the danger zone, including those with sensitive ecosystems that cannot tolerate even small changes in climate if they occur at such a rapid pace.
The Caribbean is at high risk

Kingston, Jamaica to be among the first places on Earth (2023) to see a significant increase in temperature from the historical average. Haiti (2025), Dominican Republic (2026), Bahamas (2029), Guyana (2029), and Belize (2034) will follow.

Based on the data presented in the report, the Caribbean tropics is at high risk, with Kingston, Jamaica to be one of the first places on Earth to see a significant increase in temperature from the historical average, which could occur as early as 2023. This means that every year after 2023 will produce higher average temperatures than any previous year on record in the past 150 years. This marks a real and serious threat to human society and ecosystems alike, and the news is similar for other Caribbean countries whose worse case temperature scenarios could also be reached within a few decades, including Haiti (2025), Dominican Republic (2026), Bahamas (2029), Guyana (2029), and Belize (2034).

The report cites greenhouse gas emissions as the primary driver of these increasing temperatures, and calls for immediate reduction of continued emissions for there to be a chance of possibly preventing negative consequences to human and ecological welfares. In addition to stresses these temperature increases will cause to agricultural, water, and energy resources, the report acknowledges the possibility of additional threats in the form of water-borne disease, food supply shortages, geopolitical conflicts, and heat-related illnesses.

Also read: “The latest IPCC Assessment Report should serve as a further wakeup call to our region,” ~5Cs

This new report echoes the recent IPCC AR5 preliminary assessment of the need to reduce human-induced greenhouse gas emissions immediately in order to mitigate continued global warming. Caribbean nations have just cause to be concerned with these new data, and to start taking action now in working to develop plans for mitigating possible temperature increases. In addition, leaders in the region will need to persist in calling for global support to help in addressing these issues and finding adaptation solutions for both the current impacts from climate change and preventative measures for future scenarios. The Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) actively promotes the call for keeping the global temperature rise below 1.5°C to prevent detrimental effects to the livelihood of Caribbean countries. In developing new tools, such as the Caribbean Community Online Risk and Adaptation Tool (CCORAL), they are making positive steps toward providing information and region-wide tools to address urgent and necessary adaptation and mitigation challenges.

Also Read: CCORAL Is Here! Endorsed by the IPCC Chair

As new data and reports such as the Mora et al. article continue to emerge, everyone in the Caribbean should be aware of the sharper focus on countries within the region. If the predicted temperature increases do not heat things up enough, the increased spotlight on cities like Kingston should help leaders and citizens alike to warm up to the fact that climate change is not only coming, but may be here sooner than anticipated. Action is needed now, and fortunately groups like the CCCCC have already begun to implement adaptation protocols and encourage conversations on the topic, but only time will tell just how “hot” this topic will become as temperatures continue to increase.
UEA research reveals how farmers could mitigate nitrous oxide emissions. University of East Anglia, Press Release 19 Nov 2013
http://www.uea.ac.uk/mac/comm/media/press/2013/November/copper-fertilisation

Full Article

Farmers may be able to help reduce emissions of the greenhouse gas nitrous oxide (N2O) by incorporating copper into crop fertilisation processes – according to new research from the University of East Anglia.

Global agricultural emissions of the gas have increased by 20 per cent in the last century as a result of widespread use of nitrogen-based synthetic fertilizers.

But new research into the processes of nutrient cycling published today reveals how farmers could mitigate the effects of this harmful gas by boosting copper levels in fields.

Lead researcher Prof David Richardson, from UEA’s school of Biological Sciences, said: “The increase in nitrous oxide in the atmosphere is largely the result of changing agricultural practices to more intensive, large scale production systems. Rapid population growth and the constant need for greater crop yields have fuelled the change.

“Agricultural N2O emissions have increased significantly and continue to rise. It is a big problem because it is a potent greenhouse gas. Molecule for molecule its potential to cause global warming is 300 times more than carbon dioxide. And it is behind almost one tenth of global radiative forcing by greenhouse gasses. But how to regulate these emissions has been poorly understood until now.”

The research team investigated a process called denitrification – a series of chemical reactions in bacteria that happen in conditions where oxygen levels are low and quantities of nitrate are high.

“Farmed soil is a prime example of such a condition, and what happens is that bacteria respire nitrate as a substitute for oxygen. We found that the gene in nitrate-utilising soil bacteria, responsible for the destruction of nitrous oxide, can be regulated when copper is added.

“So farmers could control N2O emissions by judicious use of copper in fertilizer regimes. Copper fertilizer is already used in areas where soil is copper deficient so it is already on the market.

“The next stage of research will be to compare N2O emissions from soil that is naturally high in copper, with that which is naturally low. We will also look at quantity and frequency of application.”

The next stage of the project will be part of a recently announced five million euro study into nitrous oxide production and consumption in bacteria. The Nitrous Oxide Research Alliance (NORA) is a trans-European group, of which UEA is a member.

‘Copper control of bacterial nitrous oxide emission and its impact on vitamin B12 dependent metabolism’ by Matthew John Sullivan, Andrew J Gates, Corinne Appia-Ayme, Gary Rowley and David J Richardson is published in the journal PNAS on November 18. It was funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).
Food and Nutrition Security

Transformation of food systems needed for better nutrition. FAO, 13 November, 2013

Full Article

FAO/WHO host expert meeting on improving nutrition, setting the stage for major 2014 conference
Severe nutrition problems afflict more than half the world's population and food systems will need to undergo significant changes to improve people's diets and lives, speakers told country representatives and experts as they opened a meeting organized by FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The 13-15 November event is a preparatory technical meeting designed to lay the groundwork for the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), scheduled to take place in 2014, from 19 to 21 November. The aim is to boost coordination of international efforts to tackle the agricultural, economic, health, food system and other factors that negatively influence what and how people eat, especially in developing countries.

"It is clear that the ways in which food is managed today are failing to result in sufficient improvements in nutrition. The most shocking fact is that over 840 million people still suffer from hunger today, despite the fact that the world already produces enough food for all, and wastes one-third of it" said José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of FAO.

"But that is only part of the story," he continued. "Today, over half of the world's population is affected by some form of malnutrition, be it hunger, micronutrient deficiencies or excessive consumption."

"The total amount of food produced but not consumed would be enough to feed an additional two billion. The truth of the matter is that, today, consumers are not receiving the right signals from current policies about how to eat healthily. That is what we need to address," Graziano da Silva added.

While 842 million people are chronically hungry, many more die or suffer the ill effects of inadequate nutrition. Around 2 billion people are affected by micronutrient deficiencies. Close to 7 million children die before their fifth birthday every year, 162 million children under five are stunted while at the same time, 500 million people are obese.

Considering the magnitude of malnutrition and its impact in broader sustainable development, the Director-General reiterated the support of FAO and the other two Rome-based food and agriculture agencies - the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) - for inclusion of a stand-alone goal on food security and nutrition in the post-2015 Development Agenda, as recommended by the High Level Consultation on Hunger, Food Security and Nutrition that took place last April in Madrid.

Dr Hans Troedsson, Executive Director of WHO's Director-General's Office, also called for a rethinking of the way in which the food system is managed, saying diet was a key factor in tackling the global burden of disease, and that the multi-faceted challenges of nutrition would need to be addressed on many levels, from infancy to maturity.
"If we, in the past, were mainly challenged by malnutrition in children, we are today facing an epidemic of poor diets and low physical activity, leading to high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and overweight," Troedsson said.

"The nutrition and health threats have actually expanded and worsened and this will not go away by itself. We need to address it urgently now and in the future," Troedsson added. "The health sector and the food sector need to work together."

Setting clear goals

"Aware of the enormous burden that it poses for millions of individuals and the development of their countries - the development of their societies - the EU and the Commission have placed the fight against undernutrition very high on the development agenda," said Roberto Ridolfi, European Union Commission Director for Sustainable Growth and Development.

Ridolfi added that the EU was pushing for "measurable and time-bound targets" to reduce child stunting and other consequences of malnutrition, and that the Preparatory Technical Meeting could play a crucial role in spelling out similar indicators.

Ridolfi lauded the meeting's organizers and other international agencies as "strategic allies, at global and country level, to support advocacy efforts for nutrition."

Around 300 experts and country representatives are gathered for the preparatory meeting, along with participants from other United Nations agencies and intergovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, researchers and consumer associations.

ICN2 will be a follow-up to the first such conference, which was held in 1992. Its aim is to take stock of progress made so far in improving nutrition and discuss how international coordination can be strengthened to improve the impact of national policies and programs that influence diets and health. The ICN2 will amplify the Secretary General's call to leaders gathered at the Rio+20 Summit to take up the "Zero Hunger Challenge."

ICN2 is also expected to contribute to the overall direction of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and to the focus of EXPO 2015 in Milan, whose theme will be "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life.

Agriculture Development

Devant: Food Ministry signs $310m MOU ...$200m more expected next month  By Kim Boodram Trinidad Express Newspaper, 16 November, 2013  

Full Article

GOVERNMENT’S Caroni Green Initiative has attracted regional investors, with one company looking to cultivate Genetically Modified (GM) Giant King Grass on former canefields, for use as fuel by the energy sector.
St Lucia-based company Emunite Energy Solutions yesterday signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Food Production to cultivate up to 3,500 acres of the fast-rotation crop, to be processed into biofuel. The project will be done with the participation of former cane farmers of Caroni (1975) Ltd.

The crop is non-invasive and high-yielding and is modest in its need for fertiliser and pesticides. It can be harvested several times per year, said Emunite president, Claudia Emmanuel, at yesterday’s signing at the Hilton Trinidad in St Ann’s.

The Caroni Green Initiative has recently been turned into a company of the same name, of which Deosaran Jagroo is now CEO, and has been overwhelmingly subscribed to by organisations and individuals, Food Production Minister Devant Maharaj said.

His ministry sealed a $310 million memorandum of understanding with potential investors and participants and Maharaj said a further $200 million is expected to be invested in the next month with a similar MOU signing.

Caroni Green was an initiative of the State that sought to utilise former lands of the company, Caroni (1975) Limited, outside of that pledged to former workers.

Launched in June, the programme has attracted over 500 interested organisations and persons.

Under yesterday’s MOU, a multi-space agricultural supply retail outlet—which Maharaj said could eventually be the largest in the Caribbean—is to be set up by Ramlagan’s Hardware and Electrical Supplies of Couva, which Caroni Green participants will be obliged to patronise with the promise of reduced costs.

General manager of Ramlagan’s, Nateram Ramlagan, said he is aware that farmers are now operating with a negligible margin of profit, due in part to the high costs of agricultural supplies. He hopes to reduce these costs significantly, he said.

The ministry has also signed on with Baron Foods Ltd of St Lucia, a food processing company that includes banana, ketchup, icing sugar, concentrate juices and salad dressings among its products.

Baron Foods CEO, Ronald Ramjattan, said the company is interested in setting up one of the largest and “most modern” food processing facilities in Trinidad, at an approximate cost of $100 million, over a three-year period.

The company is also committed to investing in the cultivation of 100 acres of crops, for the purpose of processing.

The investment by the company is expected to create over two hundred permanent jobs, Ramjattan said.

As its looks to export up to 200,000 pounds of dasheen weekly to New York, the ministry has also signed an MOU with farmer and entrepreneur, Daran Soondarsingh.

Maharaj said the estimated value of this export will be $320,000 per week.

“This investment is estimated to be $10 million, would create approximately 40 permanent jobs and will generate revenue of approximately $16 million per annum,” Marahaj said.
New systems being put in place as country prepares for December/January rainy season. By GINA, 14 November, 2013

Full Article

Through the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA), the Ministry of Agriculture is implementing new measures to address some challenges faced during the rainy season. Among these is a programme of active surveillance by specially appointed officers to monitor D&I structures, and equipment and machinery.

One of the difficulties that the Ministry has encountered in the past is that often, pump stations run out of fuel. Minister of Agriculture Dr. Leslie Ramsammy in a recent interview with the Government Information Agency disclosed that there is at present at the NDIA, an officer, whose job is to ensure that supplies are up to date for the pump stations.

“This is all that this person will do. This person ensures that they are in touch with all the regions; the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) and with those who are operating the pump stations, so that we know they have at least 48 hours of supply at any time… since checks are being done on a daily basis, if we working on a 48 hours supply at all times, it means we should never run out,” he pointed out.

The Ministry has also appointed officers to exclusively monitor all the ministry’s excavators and bulldozers. The officers’ duties are to ensure there is an adequate amount of fuel and lubricant for the machines, and that they are repaired in a timely manner.

“They are going to ensure that they are daily checking these things, because in the past we would discover that excavators and bulldozers have been sitting for several days because of a part missing or because of supplies,” Minister Ramsammy said.

A designated officer will now maintain daily contacts with regional officials to garner reports on the conditions of the secondary and tertiary drains that fall under the local officers’ charge.

Meanwhile as the country gears for the rainy, all primary D&I structures, which are under the purview of the NDIA, are functioning, Minister Ramsammy said.

The NDIA will be increasing and accelerating outfall dredging in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, and as well ensuring that all pumps are ready for continuous operation.

Minister Ramsammy said that all pumps are functional, even though the NDIA is executing rehabilitation on the pump at Charity, Region Two and another at Lusignan, Region Four. The NDIA is working to place at Lusignan a new mobile pump to supplement the capacity that currently exists at the pump station, the Minister said.

Over the next several weeks, the NDIA will be deploying a minimum of 20 mini-excavators into various communities to help with maintenance of secondary and tertiary structures, Minister Ramsammy said.

He said too that several of the 57 excavators that the NDIA has been using to maintain primary structures are also being deployed to help with the secondary structures.
“I would want to think that should we have above normal rainfall in the upcoming rainy season that we should be a very good position to response to any threat of flooding,” Minister Ramsammy said. He said however, that the country will experience flash floods, particularly if there is above normal rainfall in any 24-hour period.

“If we have 30 to 50millimeters of rain in a 24- hour period, the structure may not be enough to remove all the water quickly, particularly depending on tide levels,” said.

Haitian president says Jamaican agricultural enterprises worth copying by the Jamaica Observer, 16 November, 2013

Full Article

ST CATHERINE, Jamaica - President of the Republic of Haiti Michel Martelly says two agricultural enterprises he visited in Jamaica on November 15, are worth replicating in his country.

The President and Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Roger Clarke toured the Jamaica Broilers production facility in Spring Village, and the Government’s Agro Park in Amity Hall, both in St Catherine. A section of the park is used by Caribbean Broilers to grow sorghum (a replacement for imported animal feed).

President Martelly told journalists that the employment of 1,600 people at the Spring Village plant was of particular interest to him. He also took special note that the enterprises reduce the need for imports. “This is a good way to bring money into the country, instead of importing all goods,” he said.

“I was very happy to see that, and the fact that Jamaica Broilers is investing in Haiti. The enterprise down there is much smaller, but we expect to grow bigger and allow more people to get jobs in Haiti,” the President said, while outlining the effort that he will be making to establish agro park-type facilities in Haiti.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Agriculture said he and his Haitian counterpart, Jacques Thomas, have met and identified areas of collaboration between the two countries.

The Haitian minister, according to Clarke, has pointed to specific ways in which Jamaica can help their agro-sector.

“We can share our experience with him, and he has already noted some of the things that he would like me to move forward with him, and we are going to be working very closely to make sure that something concrete happens,” the minister said.

President Martelly and his 11-man delegation, who were in the island on a three-day State visit, left the island on November 15.
‘Farmers must not depend on governments’ By Michelle Loubon, Trinidad Express Newspaper, News 15 November, 2013

Full Article

St Vincent Prof Leonard O’Garro, says Caribbean farmers must limit their dependency on governments.

He also lamented the decline in production in the agricultural sector which produced crops like cocoa, citrus and sugar cane.

O’Garro was the 2012 ANSA McAL laureate for Science and Technology at the Anthony N Sabga Caribbean Awards for Excellence.

He was speaking during a lecture on “Vanishing Food Production in the Caribbean and how to reverse it” at the Central Bank Auditorium in Port of Spain on Wednesday.

O’Garro said: “The banana industry in St Lucia and the arrowroot industry in St Vincent can be mistaken as public state enterprises. The industry has to wait on governments to tell them what to do. There is this dependency on the legislation and control by government for the use of subsidies and grants and the overwhelming use of technical personnel employed and deployed by the government. The government technicians possess the highest level of training in the agricultural sector.”

He added: “It is clear there are problems with the level of dependency. I suggest it is time for the agricultural society to take a greater responsibility for developing their business.”

On the flipside, O’Garro said governments had to provide incentives to boost and improve performance and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

Surveying Caribbean countries, he said there was “progressive decline” in production.

“Agriculture has now become a relatively small economic sector. In T&T primary agriculture is still a small economic sector. In Jamaica, there has been progressive decline. In Jamaica, food security is a major concern. In Jamaica, there is the steady decline in farmland. This is accompanied by a dramatic increase in the fragmentation of smaller plots and underutilisation of land for agriculture.

“There was a decline in arrowroot production in the post-Independence era in St Vincent and the Grenadines and banana production in St Lucia. Agriculture is a more important contributor to Dominica’s economy.”

Among the problems he identified which impacted negatively on agriculture and its profitability were the underutilisation of land, competition with agricultural land for commercial purposes, lack of significant investment and best practices.

To compound it, erosion and degradation of agricultural soils were also impacting negatively on agriculture.

He said the agricultural sector had to adopt measures which will promote food security and ensure the conservation and protection of the environment.
Upcoming Events

November 2013
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

December 2013
3rd Global Conference on Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security and Climate Change
Date: 3-5 December 2013
Location: Johannesburg, South Africa
Description: High-level discussions on a Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance. The Conference is organized by the governments of the Republic of South Africa, the Netherlands, and in collaboration with other partners, including FAO and the World Bank. The 3rd Global Conference in South Africa will provide the platform for global leaders; practitioners; scientists; farmers; organized agriculture; civil society; the private sector; and NGOs to discuss and share experiences on successes, and to deliberate the challenges and threats to food and nutrition security under the impact of climate change
Website: http://www.egfar.org/sites/default/files/files/Conference%20Announcement%2020%20September%202013.pdf
Further information will be published at: http://www.arc.agric.za/