The Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration CARDI with IICA are continuing to look at ways to improve the value of sweet potato grown here. According to a release from the Ministry of Agriculture a series of taste tests will be held here from today at various locations to determine the acceptability of new varieties of Sweet Potato among consumers for the making of potato chips as well as a staple in the diet.

**For more information see page 4**

**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
Roots and Tubers

Big Boost for Cassava Production by Douglas McIntosh, Jamaica Information Service, 8 January, 2014

Full Article

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and brewing company, Red Stripe, have signed a lease agreement for land at Bernard Lodge, St. Catherine, to facilitate the multi-million dollar Project Grow cassava initiative, being undertaken by Red Stripe’s parent company, Diageo.

Signed at Red Stripe’s Spanish Town Road head office in Kingston on January 7, the agreement will facilitate the provision of an initial 36.2 acres of land to implement the pilot project.

The pilot forms part of Project Grow’s initial phase, targeting some 500 acres of land for cultivation over an 18-month period by Diageo/Red Stripe, with some US$1 million earmarked for this segment of the undertaking.

Implementation of the project forms part of moves by Diageo/Red Stripe to replace 20 per cent of imported inputs, primarily barley, used in the production of its globally renowned flagship product, Red Stripe Beer, by 2016.

Successful implementation is expected to pave the way for an increase in cassava production by Diageo/Red Stripe to some 2,400 acres over a five-year period. Approximately 2,500 stakeholders, primarily farmers, are expected to benefit from direct employment, with indirect benefits to accrue to another 3,750 persons.

Copies of the agreement were signed by officials of the Agro-Investment Corporation (AIC), which negotiated the agreement on behalf of the Ministry, and Diageo/Red Stripe.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Agriculture and Fisheries Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke, described the occasion as “historic”, noting that conclusion of the agreement has been “long in coming”.

The Minister pointed out that the initiative is consistent with the Ministry’s focus on import substitution, rural development, and job creation.

“Thirty-six acres might seem small. But what you intend to do is employ best practices and you are going to be moving cassava production to the level (where) farmers can make (a livelihood) out of growing cassava,” Mr. Clarke said.

Red Stripe’s Chairman, Richard Byles, noted that the company is using its global experience in beer manufacturing to deepen its commitment and investment in Jamaica. “We hope this is the beginning of a project that will lead to many jobs for Jamaicans and to the saving of millions of dollars (foreign exchange),” he said.

Chief Executive Officer of the AIC, Everton Spencer, said the agreement exemplified the government’s focus on private/public sector partnerships in advancing national development.
“Therefore, Agro-Investment Corporation is, indeed, elated to be partnering with Red Stripe in this venture that can change the face of the cassava industry and, by extension, the agricultural sector,” he added.

Cassava output up. Barbados Advocate, 6 January 2014

Full Article

CASSAVA production has increased locally, to the extent that there has been an inability in some instances to get them out of the ground.

Barbados Representative of the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute’s (CARDI), Dr. Cyril Roberts, told The Barbados Advocate, “Because of the programme nationally, cassava production is up and we have a challenge on our hands that there is so much cassava, even the persons who use it to make flour can’t keep up.”

He noted that some producers of flour and the Barbados Agricultural Development and Management Company will take a substantial amount of the root crop.

“The beautiful thing about cassava is you have to pull it at the right time if you want to eat it fresh, but if it stays in the ground beyond that time, it can’t be boiled properly, but it can be still harvested and make flour, make pone, chip it up and feed it to animals. As long as you don’t have flood to rotten it,” he explained.

Dr. Roberts noted that a few years ago the field at the Graeme Hall Field Station was raided by crop thieves, who undermined research being conducted by CARDI and affected the Farmers’ Association who lost the precious tubers during the theft.

This year, he noted that while praedial larceny is an issue, the organisation’s work is not as severely affected.

“We still lost 30 to 50 per cent of our crop. In all honesty, the impact of praedial larceny to my programme was not as great because when persons came to steal the tubers they left the sticks behind, so we gathered the sticks and try to find persons who want to plant it or plant it back ourselves. Because the object of the work this year was to get planting material for the farmers.”

He explained that this could only be done within a two to four-week period if the sticks are kept in a cool place. “We were able to get less than half of the sticks of the stolen tubers that were left behind, into the hands of persons who could use them,” Dr. Roberts pointed out. (JH)
The Ministry of Agriculture is collaborating with the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute CARDI, to provide technical assistance to other countries in the region.

CARDI Representative in St. Vincent and the Grenadines Dr. Gregory Robin says the construction of the Tissue Culture Laboratory here, under the CARDI/CFC project, is beginning to bear fruit.

The Laboratory was constructed for the purpose of micro-propagating, multiplying and distributing new, improved, high yielding root and tuber crop plant materials (sweet potato, cassava, dasheen, yam) to the OECS and the wider Region.

Dr. Robin says plantlets of sweet potato, cassava and dasheen have been successfully distributed to other OECS countries, as well as to Barbados and Jamaica. However some countries have had difficulty in weaning and hardening cassava plantlets.

Due to the high failure rates experienced both in Grenada and St. Lucia when receiving, weaning and hardening cassava plantlets, CARDI sought technical assistance from the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines through the skills of Rohan Mc Donald, biotechnologist at the laboratory in SVG.

To transfer the success in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Mr. Mc Donald will visit Grenada and St. Lucia to train their local Ministry of Agriculture and CARDI staff in all aspects of weaning and hardening root and tuber crops tissue culture plantlets.

Training commenced in Grenada this week and will end in St. Lucia on December 31, 2013.

A release from the Ministry of Agriculture says CARDI, through projects funded by the CARICOM/Japan Fund and the IICA-CARDI Technical Cooperation Agreement, has provided the SVG laboratory with funding (US$ 18,551.00) for micro-propagating sweet potato, cassava and dasheen plantlets.

The laboratory receives technical support in disease diagnostics from the CARDI laboratory in Barbados.

The Ministry of Agriculture, through the Honourable Saboto Caesar, has pledged support to CARDI in this endeavour.
Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration CARDI with IICA are Looking at Ways to Improve the Value of Sweet Potato. NBC SVG, 28 November, 2013

Full Article

The Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration CARDI with IICA are continuing to look at ways to improve the value of sweet potato grown here.

According to a release from the Ministry of Agriculture a series of taste tests will be held here from today at various locations to determine the acceptability of new varieties of Sweet Potato among consumers for the making of potato chips as well as a staple in the diet.

The tests will be done in at least 10 locations including government ministries, schools, farming communities and supermarkets.

Country Representative of CARDI, Dr. Gregory Robin, said the purpose of the tests is to identify the varieties most suited for processing and by extension, increase the production of the variety and or varieties as a viable crop.

The general public is being asked to lend their assistance in the process by participating in the taste tests that are carried out in their general locations.

The project that is now being implemented is dubbed “Multiplying and Evaluating Roots and Tubers, in Cassava, Sweet Potato and Yam varieties suitable for value addition”.

Rice

Indian scientists develop new, shorter-duration Basmati rice news by Domain-b.com, 06 January 2014
http://www.domain-b.com/economy/agriculture/20140106_basmati_rice.html

Full Article

The Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) has launched an early maturing Basmati rice variety with seed-to-seed maturity of only 110-123 days against the 140-145 days the Pusa-1121 and Pusa Basmati-1 (an older improved basmati) take.

The new variety, Pusa Punjab Basmati 1509, has a lower plant height of 80cm as against 120cm for Pusa-1121. It has already been planted in around 5,000 hectares in the 2013 kharif season.

"I expect it to reach one million hectares (mh) in the coming season, replacing a large part of the 1.4 mh now covered under Pusa-1121," says Ashok K Singh, project leader (rice) at IARI and the main breeder of Pusa-1509. Singh was also involved in developing Pusa-1121.

Pusa Punjab Basmati 1509 possesses extra-long slender grains (8.19 mm) with very occasional grain chalkiness, very good kernel length after cooking (18.2 mm), desirable ASV (7.0), intermediate
amylose content (21.24 per cent) and strong aroma. Considering the advantages such as semi-dwarf stature, non-lodging and non-shattering habit, reduced duration, yield, the new variety has certain advantages.

Thirty days less time means farmers needn't transplant the seedlings in the peak mid-June summer. "They can do it in mid-July with the onset of the monsoon rains, saving 5-6 irrigations," he pointed out.

Alternatively, they could raise an additional crop - say, a 60-day moong or green gram - between harvesting of wheat in mid-April and transplanting Pusa-1509 in mid-July, he added.

The shorter size also offers scope for greater fertiliser application and, since there is no lodging or grain-shattering, allows use of combines for harvesting. "Lower height enables more fertiliser application. You can apply 2-3 bags of urea in Pusa-1509 for the entire season.

"Pusa-1121 cannot tolerate more than one bag. The plant will simply lodge and the grains, too, may shatter or drop from the panicles," Singh explained.

The new variety comes a decade after the release of Pusa-1121, a rice variety that accounts for roughly three-fourths of India's $4 billion-plus annual basmati exports.

Fruits and Vegetables

Buy British fruit and veg to help economy, minister says. BBC News, 7 January 2014
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-25633611

Full Article

Shoppers should buy more British fruit and vegetables to boost the economy, the environment secretary has said.

Owen Paterson said 24% of food eaten in the UK is imported despite "top-class" production on home soil.

He told the Oxford Farming Conference that farmers and manufacturers must "take action" to encourage consumers.

But it has emerged that 43% of meat served in Mr Paterson's own departmental canteen is imported.

In his speech, Mr Paterson said the public sector should be supporting the UK's world class farmers and their top quality products.

He praised the Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust for buying 92% of its food from the UK, saying it had saved a significant amount of money by sourcing locally.

Figures supplied by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) show
approximately 57% of the fresh meat served by the department's catering provider is British, with the remainder being sourced from the EU.

The Department said gammon and bacon had always been bought from the EU while beef, lamb, chicken and pork joints are all sourced from the UK - as are its eggs and milk.

Defra's catering providers say they are "fully committed to supporting British farmers and growers" and champion "the use of great British produce and seasonal British ingredients".

'Huge opportunity'

Mr Paterson said there was a "huge opportunity" for farmers, manufacturers and the government to promote UK produce.

"By buying seasonal fruit and veg we can improve the nation's health, help the environment and boost the economy," he said.

He added: "As British farmers and food producers you know that we grow some of the best food in the world here - so why is 24% of the food eaten in the UK imported when it could be produced here?"

"We have a top-class fruit and veg sector which produces everything from green beans to strawberries, yet we imported £8bn of fruit and veg in 2012.

"We can't grow mangoes or pineapples, but we can encourage UK consumers and food businesses to buy Scottish raspberries or Kent apples."

Mr Paterson also said changes to livestock movement rules will save farmers and taxpayers £70m over 10 years, while reduced bureaucracy will help farmers and improve prevention and control of diseases such as bovine TB.

These changes, which follow recommendations from the Task Force on Farming Regulation, will take effect from 2016.

Gene mutation could extend tomato production. FreshFruitPortal.com, 2 January, 2014
http://www.freshfruitportal.com/2014/01/02/gene-mutation-could-extend-tomato-production/?country=trinidad%20and%20tobago

Full Article

Researchers based in New York state have made a genetic discovery that could extend the production potential of early tomato varieties.

While plants used for canned fruit and juices benefit from a mechanically harvestable bush shape, they also stop growth earlier. This means that the plant produces fewer fruit than classic or home garden varieties.

To extend yield potential, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory has uncovered a genetic mechanism for hybrid vigor that could encourage these plants to flower for longer and as a result, produce more fruit.
CSHL associate professor Zach Lippman and Israeli colleagues found that a mutation in florigen, the hormone behind flowering, can dramatically increase yields in bush-shaped tomato plants.

Alongside researcher Ke Jiang, Lippmann has found that plants with this mutation produce half as much florigen, postpoing the moment when flowering ends and allowing for more fruit.

“This is because bushy tomato varieties are highly sensitive to the amount, or dosage, of the florigen hormone, which alters plant architecture – that is, how many flowers can form before growth ends. These discoveries lead to an exciting prediction: that it may be possible to tweak florigen levels to increase yields even further,” Lippmann said.

The study appears online on PLoS Genetics. The research is supported by the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship and the NSF Plant Genome Research Program.

Brazilian watermelon shows tolerance to mosaic virus. FreshFruitPortal.com, 13 December, 2013

http://www.freshfruitportal.com/2013/12/13/brazilian-watermelon-shows-tolerance-to-mosaic-virus/?country=trinidad%20and%20tobago

Full Article

A new watermelon from Agristar do Brasil has shown strong tolerance to key diseases that affect the fruit, while also producing a sweet and crunchy intense red flesh.

Agristar expert in cucurbits and product development, Eduardo Cleto, told RuralBR the Explorer watermelon showed reduced losses from the watermelon mosaic virus and zucchini yellow mosaic virus.

“Compared to other materials that are now being sold in the market, it actually provides a condition of decreased losses from virus attacks,” Cleto was quoted as saying.

“The Explorer is on average 10% to 20% more productive.”

While the fruit had improved productivity, Cleto said it was still important to control the aphids and thrips that transmitted disease.

“Farmers need to control these vectors. If the virus reaches the area, it is necessary to eliminate the plants that have symptoms, and avoid staggered plantings,” the expert told RuralBR.

The productivity results come from plantations where the Explorer has been introduced in the states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul and Goiás, as well as parts of the northeast.

Cleto added the variety had good post-harvest characteristics during transport.
Mexico ranks among the top exporters in the world for papaya, sending most of its external volume to the United States. Recently, however, Mexican producers have begun to suffer significant losses due to two viruses that affect the plant – papaya ringspot and papaya mosaic virus.

In conversation with www.freshfruitportal.com, Laura Silva of Mexico’s Cinvestav research center spoke about the importance of new technologies to protect producers from damages.

Currently, Mexican producers rely on crews to visually identify viruses in the plants. Silva explained that to properly treat infected plants, growers will need technological assistance.

“Producers need to be certain that the diagnosis is valid using other means. In this case, it means using a laboratory and a visual medium with scientific support,” she said.

“Knowing they have an infected plant lets them make the decision in the field to get rid of the plant or keep it in production.”

The technology developed by Silva and her team consists in a cartridge that can simultaneously detect both viruses, in addition to detecting a plant gene that maintains controlled cultivation.

“The use of specific indicators is intended to detect the two viruses in a uniform and simultaneous manner. This cartridge also has other indicators like an endogenous gene that works as a form of technical control,” she said.

To carry out the tests, producers only need to provide leaf tissue from the plant in question and show it at the laboratory.

To allow producers to do tests directly in the field, Silva said another cartridge is in development that does not require laboratory assistance.

Silva and her team also hope to improve the technology to be able to detect other viruses that affect papayas.

She is currently waiting on the patent to begin marketing the cartridge technology.
Climate Change

New CARICOM chairman to place emphasis on climate change. CCCC, 9 January 2014

Full Article

Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves said Monday he would use his six month term as chairman of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) grouping to deal with the deleterious effects climate change is having on the socio-economic future of the 15-member bloc.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia and Dominica are now emerging from the effects of a weather system that left a trail of death and destruction over the Christmas holidays.

Caribbean countries have also had to deal with the annual hurricane season and in many cases, like in Haiti, unseasonal rains that cause widespread devastation.

“The big issue…is global warming, climate change. We are having systems affecting us outside of the normal rainy season and the normal hurricane season,” he said making reference to the floods in April last year and the Christmas Eve rains that resulted in the deaths of nine people and hundreds of millions of dollars in damages here.

“There are lots of monies which countries talk about for adaptation and mitigation to climate change. But I haven’t seen the money yet and we have to use our diplomacy as a region and we have to be aggressive with our climate change center in Belize.

“In my term as chairman of CARICOM this is one of the issues which you will recall I said earlier on…I want dealt with during my term in a continued serious and structured way, (and it) has to deal with the deleterious effect of climate change and to get the requisite responses from the international community in relation to this matter”.

Gonsalves told a news conference that the region does not contribute “anything to these man made weather systems, these problems with putting so much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

“We are …on the front line,” he said, adding that “this is an issue which is big”.

Gonsalves said that efforts were now underway to stage an international donors’ conference to help the three affected islands recover and rebuild their battered infrastructures.

He said he had already received a letter from Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer, who is also chairman of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), outlining plans for an international donors’ conference.

“There is a letter which Baldwin sent to me which I have reviewed and make one or two slight alterations and suggestions, but we have to prepare for a donors’ conference well, maybe in March may be in February…but we have to prepare for it well so that we can get the donors to make pledges,” he said, recalling a similar conference had taken place to help Grenada after it was battered by a recent hurricane.
“I know some of the donors came through and others did not, but at least we need to do that to lift the profile,” Gonsalves said.

The St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister told reporters that an insurance scheme organized through the World Bank, to which all the Caribbean countries contribute, does not go far enough.

“To the extent that the monies you get from the Catastrophic Relief Insurance System is fairly minimal, but of course every little bit helps,” he said.

Gonsalves said he had already written to the leaders of several countries and was now waiting to see “what kind of grant assistance we can get because we really need grants preferentially.

“The World Bank will give soft loan monies, the CDB (Caribbean Development Bank) will give soft loan monies, the European Union will give grants, Venezuela will give grants, (and) Taiwan will give grants”.

Caribbean urged to brace for impact of climate change. CCCC, 8 January 2014


Full Article

A two-week regional training workshop on climate change has started here with a warning that the Caribbean could suffer billions of dollars in losses over the next few years as a result of climate change.

“As a region, we have to assist each other in every conceivable way imaginable,” said Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change Minister Robert Pickersgill at the start of the workshop that is being organised by the Belize-based Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCC) in partnership with several regional governments and the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI).

It is being held under the theme “The use of sector-specific biophysical models in impact and vulnerability assessment in the Caribbean”.

Pickersgill said that Caribbean countries needed to work together to boost technical expertise and infrastructure in order to address the effects of the challenge.

He said global climate change was one of the most important challenges to sustainable development in the Caribbean.

Citing a recent report from the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), he noted that while the contribution of Caribbean countries to greenhouse gas emissions is insignificant, the projected impacts of global climate change on the Caribbean region are expected to be devastating.

Pickersgill said that according to experts, by the year 2050, the loss to the mainstay tourism industry in the Caribbean as a result of climate change-related impacts could be in the region of US$900 million.

In addition, climate change could cumulatively cost the region up to US$2 billion by 2053, with the fishing industry projected to lose some US$140 million as at 2015.

He said the weather activity in sections of the Eastern Caribbean over the Christmas holiday season was a prime example of this kind of devastation.
The low level trough resulted in floods and landslides in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia and Dominica. At least 15 people were killed and four others missing. The governments said they would need “hundreds of millions of dollars” to rebuild the battered infrastructures.

“For a country the size of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, this loss is significant and could result in their having to revise their GDP (gross domestic product) projections. (Therefore), while one cannot place a monetary value on the loss of lives, the consequences in terms of dollar value to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) is also important,” Pickersgill said.

“It only takes one event to remind us of the need to become climate resilient in a region projected to be at the forefront of climate change impacts in the future,” Pickersgill said, adding that he hoped the regional training workshop would, in some meaningful way, advance the Caribbean’s technical capabilities to meet the future projections head-on and be successful.

He said the workshop has particular relevance to Jamaica as one of the SIDS that is most vulnerable to climate change.

The two-week programme forms part of the European Union (EU)-funded Global Climate Change Alliance Caribbean Support Project, which is geared towards the creation and financing of policies that can reduce the effects of climate change as well as improved climate monitoring within the region.

The Global Climate Change Alliance project is to be implemented over 42 months and will benefit Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

CCCCC Programme Manager, Joseph McGann, said the project would include several activities including: enhancing national and regional institutional capacity in areas such as climate monitoring; data retrieval and the application of space-based tools for disaster risk reduction; development of climate scenarios and conducting climate impact studies using Ensemble modeling techniques; vulnerability assessments that can assist with the identification of local/national adaptation; and mitigation interventions.

Food Security

World food prices stay high, but steady. FAO, 9 January, 2014

Full Article

2013 third highest year on record for FAO Food Price Index.

The FAO Food Price Index averaged 206.7 points in December, nearly unchanged from the previous month, with a sharp increase in dairy prices and high meat values balancing out a steep decline in sugar quotations and lower cereal and oil prices.

For 2013 as a whole, the index averaged 209.9 points - down 1.6 percent from 2012, and well below 2011’s peak of 230.1, but still the third highest annual value on record (see sidebar).
Large supplies pushed down international prices of cereals (with the exception of rice), oils and sugar. However, dairy values peaked in 2013, and meat also hit a record.

"Last month, the FAO Food Price Index remained elevated as strong demand for certain high-protein foods continued to drive up prices overall, countering falling prices of major food crops after last year's abundant harvests," said FAO economist Abdolreza Abbassian.

FAO's FPI is a trade-weighted index that measures prices of five major food commodities on international markets: cereals, dairy products, meat, sugar, and vegetable oils.

**Good harvests nudge cereal and sugar prices down**

The FAO Cereal Price Index averaged 191.5 points in December, down 2.8 points from November, and the lowest monthly value since August 2010. Large global supplies, following record harvests in 2013, continued to exert downward pressure on international prices of wheat and maize in particular. By contrast, rice prices were up slightly in December.

For all of 2013, the Cereal Price Index averaged 219.2 points, down as much as 17 points, or 7.2 percent, from 2012.

FAO's Sugar Price Index averaged 234.9 points in December, a sharp slide of 15.8 points from November. This was the third consecutive monthly decline, with the sugarcane harvest in Brazil - the world's largest sugar producer and exporter - exceeding expectations. Adding to the downward pressure on international prices were reports of record production in Thailand, the world's second biggest sugar exporter, as well as good harvests in China.

Overall, in 2013, sugar prices were 18 percent lower than in 2012.

**Dairy and meat hit record high**

Dairy prices, on the other hand, were up for both December and for 2013 as a whole.

The FAO Dairy Price Index averaged 264.6 points in December, a rise of 13.2 points over November. Demand for milk powder, especially from China, remains strong, and processors in the southern hemisphere are focusing on this product rather than on butter and cheese.

During 2013, the dairy index averaged 243 points - its highest annual value since its inception.

The FAO Meat Price Index averaged 188.1 points in December, just slightly above its November level. Prices for bovine and pig meat moved higher: demand from China and Japan have resulted in beef prices showing consistent growth since last June. Prices for poultry were stable, while those for sheep meat moved lower. Still, in 2013, the index remained historically high, well above pre-2011 levels.

**Drop in vegetable oil prices**

FAO's Vegetable Oil Price Index averaged 196 points in December, a decrease of 2.5 points from November.

For 2013 as a whole, the index averaged 193 points - well below 2012's average of 224 points - with palm oil falling to a 4-year low.
Agriculture Development

Farmers urged to report attacks. Barbados Advocate, 8 January 2014

Full Article

Chief Executive Officer of the Barbados Agricultural Society (BAS), James Paul is calling on farmers whose livestock are attacked by stray animals, to report the incidents to the appropriate authorities so that they can get a handle on the situation.

“I would like to think that by now the animal control office should be there coming out here, looking to see what’s happening and try to understand where the dogs are originating from, because we are not that big an island, so we should be able to map the occurrences and to see what areas are suffering from it and somehow track down these dogs,” he told the media yesterday morning during a visit to the Golden Ridge Farm in St. George.

Paul’s comments came in the wake of an incident on at that farm earlier this week, which left at least 140 turkeys dead and several others nursing injuries following an attack by a pack of dogs; and he is calling on the relevant authorities to go beyond the call of duty to ensure that no more of these attacks hurt the livelihoods of farmers.

“Ms. Norton has lost money as a result of these attacks and that is very clear, and that of course is a disincentive to many farmers out there who might give up; because of the size of their operations and they suffer a loss like this they might give up. What I want to do is appeal to farmers, don’t give up, but at the same time I am appealing to those persons who are responsible for tracking down these wild animals, let us get out there [and] find out where these attacks are occurring,” he said.

Moreover, he said that dog owners also have a responsibility to ensure that they report any cases of their dogs getting out of control. Paul contended that we can no longer have a situation where such animals are allowed to roam and destroy people’s property in the way in which they have been.

“These are tough economic times, we appreciate that, but we cannot have a situation where other Barbadians are making it difficult for persons to make a living. They [farmers] don’t depend on the State for this, they do it of their own volition and I think that we should be giving them encouragement rather than placing them in a situation where at the same time they cannot make a living from it,” he said. (JRT)

Government provides $7.5M to assist Agro Park Farmers in St. Thomas by Garfield L. Angus, Jamaica Information Service, 7 January, 2014
http://jis.gov.jm/government-provides-7-5m-assist-agro-park-farmers-st-thomas/

Full Article

Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon. Roger Clarke, says the Government has pumped $7.5 million into a recovery effort to help farmers at the Plantain Garden River Agro Park, in St. Thomas, who have incurred losses in a recent onion crop.
“We decided that we are going to get them back on their feet, and we injected $7.5 million to see what we could do to help them. The credit union has been working with them, they have been preparing land, and they have been planting pumpkin,” the Minister stated on Monday, January 6, at a press briefing at the Ministry, in St. Andrew.

“In the area that they planted the onion, we decided that we would not go into onion in that area for the succeeding crop. We will put something else in, like pumpkin and pepper. They have pepper in the ground, they have Irish potato in the ground, and they are doing some work. We have not abandoned them,” he added.

The Minister was responding to media reports, which highlighted the failure of the onion crop, and the hardship faced by the farmers.

Mr. Clarke stressed that the St. Thomas Cooperative Union has also been providing weekly grocery support to the farmers, which to date has amounted to some $650,000. A loan scheme was facilitated by the Agro Investment Corporation (AIC), and the financial institution to provide working capital for the farmers.

“The credit union, during the Christmas period, and up to now, has helped...because they know that the crop had failed,” the Minister said.

Mr. Clarke pointed out that the failure of the onion crop was due in part, to a faulty irrigation system.

The resuscitation plan for the area included: establishment of 40 acres of onions (delayed until Spring planting season); production of 50 acres of pumpkin, with potential revenue of $20 million; 25 acres of hot pepper (15 acres of Scotch Bonnet, and 10 acres West Indian Red), with potential revenue of $14.4 and $18 million, respectively; along with other short term crops, to enable cash flow for the affected farmers.

Other support provided for the recovery plan involved an onion specialist, a marketing consultant, and an infrastructure engineering consultant, along with farmers field school, focusing on technology.

Irrigation work is also taking place on 60 additional acres of land, a new diesel pump has been procured to replace one that is inadequate, a tractor programme has been instituted for the farmers, and AIC is in discussion with the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) to obtain fund for expansion of the irrigation system.

Meanwhile, the Minister noted that the other agro parks, while they have had their own challenges, as would occur in business ventures, are working well. “None of the benefits that we gave these farmers (at Plantain Garden) were afforded to farmers in the other agro parks,” Mr. Clarke added.
Economics professor advocates charging fees for antibiotics used in food production. Flood of antibiotics into the environment creating public health crisis, says Aidan Hollis by Heath McCoy. UToday, University of Calgary, 7 January 2014

Full Article

Citing an overreliance on antibiotics in the agriculture and aquaculture industries and the resultant proliferation of resistant organisms that threaten public health, economics professor Aidan Hollis has suggested one solution might be to apply fees to the non-human use of antibiotics.

In a newly released paper published in the New England Journal of Medicine, Hollis and co-author Ziana Ahmed state that in the United States, 80 per cent of the antibiotics in the country are consumed in agriculture and aquaculture for the purpose of increasing food production.

The flood of antibiotics released into the environment – sprayed on fruit trees, fed to livestock, poultry and salmon, and used elsewhere – has led bacteria to evolve, Hollis writes, resulting in an increase in resistant pathogens immune to available antimicrobial treatments.

If the problem is left unchecked, this will create a health crisis on a global scale, Hollis says. In the paper, he suggests that user-fees, comparable to stumpage fees and royalties paid by logging and oil companies, could help address the issue.

“Modern medicine relies on antibiotics to kill off bacterial infections,” explains Hollis. “This is incredibly important. Without effective antibiotics, any surgery – even minor ones – will become extremely risky. Cancer therapies, similarly, are dependent on the availability of effective antimicrobials. Ordinary infections will kill otherwise healthy people.”

Bacteria that can effectively resist antibiotics will thrive, Hollis adds, reproducing rapidly and spreading in various ways.

“It’s not just the food we eat,” he says. “Bacteria is spread in the environment; it might wind up on a doorknob. You walk away with the bacteria on you and you share it with the next person you come into contact with. If you become infected with resistant bacteria, antibiotics won’t provide any relief.”

Using antibiotics to increase productivity a low-value proposition

While the vast majority of antibiotic use has gone towards increasing productivity in agriculture, Hollis asserts that most of these applications are of “low value.”

“It’s about increasing the efficiency of food so you can reduce the amount of grain you feed the cattle,” says Hollis. “It’s about giving antibiotics to baby chicks because it reduces the likelihood that they’re going to get sick when you cram them together in unsanitary conditions.

“These methods are obviously profitable to the farmers, but that doesn’t mean it’s generating a huge benefit. In fact, the profitability is usually quite marginal.

“The real value of antibiotics is saving people from dying. Everything else is trivial.”
User-fees could curtail overuse of antibiotics

While banning the use is antibiotics in food production is challenging, establishing a user fee makes good sense, according to Hollis.

Such a practice would deter the low-value use of antibiotics, with higher costs encouraging farmers to improve their animal management methods and to adopt better substitutes for the drugs, such as vaccinations.

Hollis also suggests that an international treaty could ideally be imposed. “Resistant bacteria do not respect national borders,” he says. He adds that such a treaty might have a fair chance of attaining international compliance, as governments tend to be motivated by revenue collection.

Hollis notes that in the U.S., a move has been made to control the non-human use of antibiotics, with the FDA recently seeking voluntary limits on the use of antibiotics for animal growth promotion on farms.

He asks: “Is the Canadian government going to take any action to control the use of antibiotics for food production purposes? Health Canada is trying to monitor the use of antibiotics, but has virtually no control over use.”


National Budgets – Agriculture

ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Agricultural minister sets 2014 targets. The Vincentian, 27 December 2013
http://thevincentian.com/agricultural-minister-sets-targets-p4509-1.htm

**Full Article**

Minister of Agriculture Saboto Caesar, in delivering Season’s Greetings to the nation, has taken the opportunity to review the performance of the agriculture sector in 2013 and to set ambitious targets for the New Year.

In a statement, entitled "Lifting Agriculture Higher in 2014”, Minister Caesar outlined the successes of the sector this year, revealed planned budgetary spending for 2014, set the targets envisioned for accomplishment over the next 12 months, and also emphasized the importance of collaboration with relevant stakeholders in order to fulfil the vision.

Among the successes highlighted, the Minister mentioned the increase in the production and export of non-banana produce, especially on the regional market. A welcome addition in this regard, according to the Minister, was the export of cattle to Grenada. Over 200 head were thus exported during the year, and the Minister said that "new markets are being finalised in at least two other OECS territories” in 2014. He also pointed to exports of fish to North America, "one of the largest single shipments” in his words, and the export of vacuum-packed root crops.
During the year, the Minister said, advances were made in the battle against Black Sigatoka, exportation of locally produced tissue culture commenced while the country was honoured by the United Nations’ Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) for its efforts to reduce hunger and undernourishment.

As regards budgetary allocations for 2014, Caesar’s statement mentioned that there will be a 24% increase over 2013, with $42.1 million set aside for spending. Major funding will come from the European Union’s BAM (Banana Accompanying Measures) programme in the sum of $32 million, a $6 million Revolving Fund from the Petrocaribe Fund and $3.6 million from the BNTF (Basic Needs Trust Fund).

Targets set by the Minister for 2014 include a 20% increase in the production of vegetables, root and tree crops on some 40 selected farms, an expected 10% increase in local honey production, and a revival in banana exports, 2000 metric tonnes being projected for export to the extra-regional market and 1100 metric tonnes in the region.

In conclusion, while pledging full collaboration with all stakeholders in the sector, the Minister called on them to "lift their game".

Below is an excerpt from THE TARGETED RESULTS section

The major targeted results of the Ministry are those set out in eight pages in the Estimates under the rubric ”2014 Result Indicators”. Among these are the following for agriculture:

- Continue the implementation of the cocoa project in collaboration with Amajaro and the farmers of St. Vincent and the Grenadines
- Complete the operationalisation of the Agricultural Training Institute by March 2014.

- Establish and operate the Cocoa, Condiments and Spices Unit.
- Better facilitate the implementation of the Agricultural Modernisation and Development Programme.
- Establish and operate at least one Greenhouse Park by December 2014.
- Strengthen a viable commercial broiler industry in collaboration with the private sector.
- Implementation of an altered marketing initiative for non-banana produce with WINFRESH.
- Enhance quality and production in the Animal Health and Production Division particularly in respect of poultry, pigs, small ruminants, and cattle.
- Produce thousands of vitro plantlets in specified quantities through the Bio-Technology Unit for Bananas, Orchids, Dasheens, Pineapples, Cassavas, Sweet Potatoes, Yams and Tannias.

From the Extension and Advisory Services do the following:

- Increase production and productivity of vegetable, root crop and tree crops on 40 selected farms by 20 percent in 2014;
- Provide technical and support services to 2000 farmers in 2014;
- Increase production of honey by 10 percent by December 2014.
- Through the Banana Services Unit do the following:
- Export a minimum of 2,000 metric tonnes of bananas through a core group of farmers and 1,100 metric tonnes to the regional markets for 2014;
- Establish a Core Farmer Programme with 40 Fairtrade Global Gap Certified Farmers and 200 acres to export bananas to the UK by December 2014;
- Provide Fruit Quality Assurance for the Core Group of Farmers attaining 90 percent Within Specifications (PUWS) and 85 percent Consistency to the UK;
- Improve the management of Black Sigatoka to attain Cronshaw levels below 2.5;
- Maintain an average of 9 healthy leaves on each banana plant;
- Provide a minimum application of six aerial cycles complemented by weekly ground crew spraying in 2014; and
- Enhance Soil and Water Conservation with specific published targets for contour drains, runoff drains, grass barriers, bench terraces, and the construction of green houses.
- Upgrade research and development with specific published targets for the Crop Research Unit, Plant Protection Unit Agri-Product Development Unit, and Bio Technology Unit.

Information & Communication

Opinion: why smartphones and apps matter in the produce industry by Greenscans co-founder and BerryBroad Juanita Gaglio, FreshFruitPortal.com 18 December, 2013


Full Article

At the Produce Marketing Association’s (PMA) Fresh Summit this year, the message that I took back was the relevance of “analytics”, whereas last year it was about connecting to the shopper through social media. It got me thinking, “have we even got that right?” At a recent seminar that I attended on “Harnessing Big Data”, I learned that it is not enough to open a Twitter or Facebook account, and that there is a science behind all social media channels. Produce companies have just established their social media presence with Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest accounts, and already there are new emerging platforms.

Furthermore, these platforms appeal to different segments of the population. Millennials comprise the largest U.S segment; approximately 80 million Americans call themselves Millennials. This group is responsible for introducing the farm-to-table movement and the fight against trans-fats in foods. Next we have the Baby Boomers and at the other end of the spectrum, Hipsters – young adults ranging from 20 to 30 years of age who value independent thinking and counterculture.

The latest app worth looking at is Snapchat, used by one in five iPhone users. Taco Bell took notice and was the first major brand to use this, while other brands are using it to ask consumers to send a “snap” of themselves eating their products, and in turn the company rewards the recipient with a snapchat coupon. Are there any produce companies out there doing this? The rewards will go to those companies who can stay ahead of the curve and understand how to use these channels to harness information to make their sales and marketing decisions.

Social media and big data is like hot thick lava cascading quickly down a mountainside. How did we arrive at this social media quagmire? It all began with the advent of the smartphone, which allows users to have access to information through an app. However, the fact that the inception of the app culture is as recent as two years ago illustrates the power of this technology – it has changed the traditional model dramatically. The tables have turned and consumers are now dictating what they want and their consumption experiences, whether positive or negative, are being broadcast for all to read. Companies are challenged trying to grapple with all this information.

Another observation that I made at the “Big Data” seminar is that the produce industry is not alone. Attendees represented every industry from Oil & Gas to IT to Health Care, and each had the same
question: “How much should we allocate on social media and how do we measure ROI (return on investment)?” This is a conundrum that is only going to grow exponentially. Why? This is due to the proliferation of smartphones and apps, and the data supports this.

According to Comscore, 114 million Americans used smartphones in July 2012, while Flurry reports that the technology is used by 78% of the population aged 15-64. According to Smart Insights, Apple’s app store has reached 25 billion downloads, tracking at 1 billion downloads a month. To put this figure into perspective this figure is nine times greater than McDonald’s sells burgers.

Companies have started dedicating resources to “social listening” via their Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and Google+ feeds. Recent statistics listed with Digital Market Ramblings list users for the top social media apps: Facebook accounts for 1.11 billion users, Pinterest has 48.7 million users, Twitter has 500 million total users and Google+ has 342 million users. These are only four out of the top 200 listed. If these numbers aren’t enough to make you sit up and take notice, I don’t know what will get your attention. Companies across all industries are using every form of these social media channels to measure consumer response and feedback about their products.

The encroachment of social media has given rise to “Big Data”. Once captured, how is it measured? This leads us to the “Dark Hole” of Big Data, which I have learned has no standard for measurement. It is defined as a collection of data sets too difficult to process with traditional data base management tools, for example social media channels. It is large, complex, and amorphous with velocity and variety. We know we need to be using these channels but what value is derived from them. Another frequently asked question is how is ROI determined using social media? The answer, from Susan Etlinger’s “The Social Media ROI Cookbook”, is that 75% of companies lack a holistic measurement strategy.

Interestingly enough, what I did learn is that it is up to each company to set up a social media metrics scorecard listing the core metrics that are specific to their organization. Each metric will be assigned a score between 1-5, with one being the lowest and five the highest.

When Etlinger was speaking at the Big Data event, I particularly liked her closing comments: “Shift your POV (point of view), Big Data is here to stay.”

Asking for analytics before examining each piece of social media is putting the cart before the horse. First take a look at how you are delivering information to consumers. In sales and marketing the buzz word is “engagement”. It is the content that will drive you to the correct way to measure and analyze. For example, if you are looking for analytics from an app, you first want to determine at how many downloads you will begin to collect and what information you are providing the consumer to motivate them to click and respond.

Content is being given much more attention as it frames the qualitative response. With 500 million twitter followers, isn’t it worth investing time and resources in content, management and analytics? Consumers are downloading not only Twitter but all other forms of social media and are using them at record speed. It is an exciting time to be in marketing.

We have many non-traditional tools to work with that are challenging yet rewarding. Have you begun to develop strategy for the Google Glass experience? This is right around the corner. Consumers will be wearing them as they shop the produce department looking for that virtual experience. Get ready to shift gears quickly as we try to stay ahead of the curve.
Upcoming Events

2014 International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). FAO
Description
The 2014 International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) aims to raise the profile of family farming and smallholder farming by focusing world attention on its significant role in eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment, and achieving sustainable development, in particular in rural areas.
The goal of the 2014 IYFF is to reposition family farming at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies in the national agendas by identifying gaps and opportunities to promote a shift towards a more equal and balanced development. The 2014 IYFF will promote broad discussion and cooperation at the national, regional and global levels to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by smallholders and help identify efficient ways to support family farmers

January 2014
International Plant & Animal Genome XXII Conference
Date: 11-15 January 2014
Location: San Diego, CA, USA
Description: The International Plant & Animal Genome XXII Conference is designed to provide a forum on recent developments and future plans for plant & animal genome projects. Consisting of technical presentations, poster sessions, exhibits and workshops, the conference is an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas, and applications on this internationally important project.
Website: http://www.intlpag.org/2014/

February 2014
Global Forum for Innovations in Agriculture (GFIA)
Date: 3-5 February 2014
Location: Abu Dhabi
Description: Will showcase global innovations in the field of sustainable agriculture. The theme is ‘driving innovation for an agricultural revolution.” The conference will highlight sustainable agriculture initiatives that have been developed and deployed globally, and also demonstrate the various investment opportunities that are now available in this sector.
Website: http://www.innovationsinagriculture.com/

May 2014
Building Resilience for Food and Nutrition Security. IFPRI 2020 Conference
Date: 15-17 May 2014
Location: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Website: http://www.2020resilience.ifpri.info/

July 2014
XII World Congress of Computers in Agriculture and Natural Resources
Date: 27-30 July, 2014
Location: San Pedro, San José, Costa Rica
Description
This congress provides a forum for agriculture related professionals to exchange information on applications and developments in the use of Information Technologies. It covers a wide array of topics.
These include new applications of well established and understood technologies to innovative and entrepreneurial applications of emerging technologies, in addition to issues related to policy and knowledge dissemination. Contributions from various countries will allow a broadened perspective for all attending. This congress is sponsored by International Network for Information Technology in Agriculture and the University of Costa Rica (UCR).

Abstracts submission deadline: 15 February, 2014
Website: http://wcca2014.ucr.ac.cr/

Conference on Ecological and Ecosystem Restoration 2014
CEER is a Collaborative Effort of the leaders of the National Conference on Ecosystem Restoration (NCER) and the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER).
Date: 28 July - 1 August, 2014
Location: New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
Call for Abstracts: deadline Friday January 10, 2014
http://www.conference.ifas.ufl.edu/CEER2014/call.html
All individuals working in ecological and ecosystem restoration are invited to submit abstracts describing their efforts, science, projects and results. Oral and poster presentations will be selected from abstract submissions, and abstracts from all presentations will be published online in the conference book of abstracts. Poster presentations will be divided into two sessions and formal poster sessions will be held for each grouping to allow maximum time for discussion with individual authors. Abstracts must be submitted ONLINE via the web site.
Website: http://www.conference.ifas.ufl.edu/CEER2014/