Chesney assures of CARDI’s support of agriculture in the Caribbean, as CARDI Units across the Region host Open Days. Bajan Reporter, 2 January 2014

As the year 2013 came to an end, CARDI Units in Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada and St Lucia hosted Open Days with the objective to showcase activities aimed at making the Region more food and nutrition secure. Open Days have become institutionalised in CARDI’s calendar, with the first series being hosted in 2008.

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.

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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
Yam


Full Article

Researchers at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) have successfully grown seed yams in the air using aeroponics technology, raising hopes and more options for the propagation of virus- and disease-free planting materials.

In preliminary trials, Dr Norbert Maroya, Project Manager for the Yam Improvement for Incomes and Food Security in West Africa (YIIFSWA) project at IITA, together with a team of scientists successfully propagated yam by directly planting vine cuttings in Aeroponics System (AS) boxes to produce mini-tubers in the air.

Aeroponics System is the process of growing plants in an air or mist environment without the use of soil or an aggregate medium. The technology is widely used by commercial potato seed producers in eastern Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania etc.), and southern Africa (Mozambique, Malawi etc.) but successfully growing yam on aeroponics is a novelty for rapidly multiplying the much needed clean seed yam tubers in large quantities.

“With this approach we are optimistic that farmers will begin to have clean seed yams for better harvest,” Dr Maroya said on Friday.

Preliminary results showed that vine rooting in Aeroponics System had at least 95% success rate compared to vine rooting in carbonized rice husk with a maximum rate of 70%. Rooting time was much shorter in aeroponics.

Aeroponics is coming at an opportune time for African farmers. Traditionally, seed yam production is expensive and inefficient. Farmers save about 25 to 30% of their harvest for planting the same area in the following season, meaning less money in their pockets.

Moreover, these saved seeds are often infested with pathogens that significantly reduce farmers’ yield year after year.

However with an established Aeroponics System for seed yam propagation at the premises of an interested private investor, seed company or humanitarian nongovernmental organization; yam producers can have access to clean seed yams. The soilless yam propagation system will increase the productivity of seed and ware yam and effectively reduce diseases and pests incidence and severity (no soilborne or vector-transmitted pests and diseases during the vegetative phase).

Dr Robert Asiedu, IITA Director for Western Africa described the results as “impressive.”

“Yam is an important crop in Africa and addressing the seeds’ constraint will go a long way in improving the livelihoods of farmers who depend on the crop for their livelihood,” he added.
In conducting the aeroponics trial, a special structure was built in an existing screen house with Dixon shelf frames using perforated styrofoam box, as support for plant vines, while the developing roots of the plants in the air were enclosed in conditions of total darkness to simulate the situation of soil to the roots. For the plant and tuber to develop, an automated power house system was established for atomizing periodically nutrient enriched water solution in the form of mist to feed the plants.

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**Pests - monkey**

**Damage to crops.** The Barbados Advocate, 14, January, 2014.


**Full Article**

As wild dogs cause problems for livestock farmers in this country, a leading agricultural executive says that those animals are not the only ones wreaking havoc on the agricultural sector.

According to the Chief Executive Officer of the Barbados Agricultural Society (BAS), James Paul, the country’s monkey population is making it exceptionally difficult for large scale crop farmers to reap the sweets of their labour, and he said a number of farmers have been complaining about the primates damaging their crops. To that end, the agricultural industry executive said there is an urgent need to get the population of monkeys in this country under control.

Paul’s comments came as he noted that not only are large scale farmers under attack from the creatures, but persons growing crops in their backyards as well.

“We are encouraging persons to grow more of what they eat and to start kitchen gardens, but the monkeys are reaping the crops long before they can and this is not occurring in traditional agricultural areas, this is happening in residential neighbourhoods where you would not expect to see monkeys as rampant as they are,” he said in an interview with The Barbados Advocate.

The CEO added, “They make it hard for farmers because they would take a bite out of everything they find and just throw it aside.”

Paul suggested that with more development taking place across the country the monkeys have lost many of their habitats and as such are residing closer to residential communities. The BAS head is therefore adamant that something has to be done about the pest as soon as possible, contending that if the population is allowed to continue to grow unchecked, it has the potential to put the agricultural sector in jeopardy. Paul noted that the sector is already subject to the vagaries of the weather and praedial larceny, and the monkey raids on fields just put another burden on the farming community. (JRT)
Plant Science and Production

Agriculture Ministry looking at Bio-Stimulant to boost productivity by Douglas McIntosh, Jamaica Information Service 15 January, 2014

Full Article

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is exploring the possibility of introducing the bio-stimulant Vitazyme to the local agriculture industry as part of efforts to boost production and productivity.

Vitazyme is an all-natural growth formulation, which, when applied to fruits, vegetables, small grains, and other crops, improves their yield and quality.

It is manufactured by United States-based firm, Vital Earth Resources, and has reportedly yielded significant success in the countries where it has been introduced. These include: Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The formulation includes enzymes, vitamins and other growth stimulants, and is said to be a safe, non-toxic solution for today’s agriculture.

“This technology has been used by our neighbours in Cuba in their sugar industry, and tomato and sweet potato production, resulting in significant increase in productivity,” informed Agriculture Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke.

He was addressing a stakeholder sensitization seminar on the stimulant on Tuesday, January 14, at the Bodles Research Station in Old Harbour, St. Catherine.

“We can also take the example of the sugar cane industry, which has vast potential for increased production and productivity and, based on the Cuban experience, we in Jamaica can also explore the possibilities for Vitazyme in that regard,” he added.

Mr. Clarke invited all sector stakeholders to “explore this bio-friendly technology which may lead to increased productivity.”

The bio-stimulant is one option being examined by the Ministry, as it continues to explore all tangible possibilities to boost the sector and safeguard food security, while reducing the country’s food import bill, which is at almost US$1billion per annum.

Minister Clarke noted that as part of the focus, the Ministry has embarked on initiatives such as the Agro Parks programme, which seeks to increase production of key crops to boost exports and reduce imports; and the Food and Nutrition Security Policy, which provides the framework for the government to increase local food production, improve access to food by the most vulnerable, and “bolster the resilience of our food production systems.”

“We want to ensure that Jamaicans have access to good food of high nutritional value on a sustained and affordable basis. As a country, we need to increase our capacity to produce adequate and wholesome food to ensure the health and well-being of our people,” he underscored.

Over 30 sector stakeholders attended the seminar, which was held under the theme: ‘Improving Crop Production, Increasing Productivity’.
New discovery could stimulate plant growth and increase crop yields. Durham Centre for Crop Improvement Technology, University of Durham, 13 January 2014
https://www.dur.ac.uk/dccit/news/?itemno=19773

Full Article

Plants naturally slow their growth or even stop growing altogether in response to adverse conditions, such as water shortage or high salt content in soil, in order to save energy.

They do this by making proteins that repress the growth of the plant. This process is reversed when plants produce a hormone – called Gibberellin – which breaks down the proteins that repress growth.

Growth repression can be problematic for farmers as crops that suffer from restricted growth produce smaller yields

The research team, led by the Durham Centre for Crop Improvement Technology, and including experts at the University of Nottingham, Rothamsted Research and the University of Warwick, have discovered that plants have the natural ability to regulate their growth independently of Gibberellin, particularly during times of environmental stress.

They found that plants produce a modifier protein, called SUMO that interacts with the growth repressing proteins.

The researchers believe that by modifying the interaction between the modifier protein and the repressor proteins they can remove the brakes from plant growth, leading to higher yields, even when plants are experiencing stress.

The interaction between the proteins can be modified in a number of ways, including by conventional plant breeding methods and by biotechnology techniques.

The research was carried out on Thale Cress, a model for plant research that occurs naturally throughout most of Europe and Central Asia, but the scientists say the mechanism they have found also exists in crops such as barley, corn, rice and wheat.

The research was funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and is published in the journal Developmental Cell. It is the subject of pending patent applications and commercial rights are available from Plant Bioscience Limited, Durham’s commercialisation partner for this technology.

Corresponding author Dr Ari Sadanandom, Associate Director of the Durham Centre for Crop Technology, in Durham University’s School of Biological and Biomedical Sciences, said the finding could be an important aid in crop production.

Dr Sadanandom said: “What we have found is a molecular mechanism in plants which stabilises the levels of specific proteins that restrict growth in changing environmental conditions.

“This mechanism works independently of the Gibberellin hormone, meaning we can use this new understanding for a novel approach to encourage the plant to grow, even when under stress.

“If you are a farmer in the field then you don’t want your wheat to stop growing whenever it is faced
with adverse conditions.

“If we can encourage the crops to keep growing, even when faced by adverse conditions, it could give us greater yields and lead to sustainable intensification of food production that we must achieve to meet the demands on the planet’s finite resources.”

Organics

http://www.ofrf.org/blogs/good-news-organics-latest-federal-spending-bill#sthash.cuN5G0xN.RC00scHk.dpuf

Full Article

In a hopeful sign Monday that Washington is returning to the peoples’ business, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees released a compromise fiscal year 2014 budget which both chambers will vote on this week. The spending bill sets funding levels for specific government programs using the budget ceiling of $1.1 trillion agreed to by the House and Senate Budget Committees back in December.

The extremely good news is that the spending bill includes favorable funding levels for key organic programs. Major victories include a $1 million increase to the National Organic Program’s budget (for a total of $8 million), $4 million for this year’s Organic Transitions competitive grants program and $2,250,000 for the National Agricultural Statistics Service to complete its Organic Production Survey. The spending bill also includes important report language directing USDA to improve its organic crop insurance coverage and FDA to factor economic viability into implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act.

The House is scheduled to vote on the budget bill Wednesday and with passage deemed likely, the Senate could take up the measure later this week. It is very clear that the leadership of both parties in both chambers, as well as clear majorities in both parties, do not want another fiscal meltdown like the kind that resulted in last fall’s government shutdown. Fingers crossed, that common objective will pull the spending bill across the finish line where President Obama is waiting to sign it.

What progress, if any, Congress is making on a new Farm Bill remains mostly a secret as House and Senate Agriculture Committee leaders continue to operate behind tightly closed doors http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/farm-bill-fits-and-starts/. While the funding victories in the spending bill are impressive, other key organic programs – especially the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program and the Organic Research and Extension Initiative - cannot be funded until reauthorized in a new Farm Bill. There’s always more work to be done in Washington, but the impending budget deal offers hope that your hard work is paying off!
A One-Stop Shop for Organics, with Lots in Store posted by Mark Lipson. United States Department of Agriculture 18 December, 2013

Full Article

As an organic farmer, I know how frustrating it can be to search the internet for information that might help my operation. It might be there somewhere but finding it takes precious time, especially if I don’t know exactly what I’m looking for. Now, USDA has solved part of that problem with a centralized web resource center on USDA.gov for all the programs, services, and data we have that support organic agriculture. Not only is this web resource center a “one-stop shop” for information about organics at USDA, but there is lots in store!

Organic operations (and those considering transitioning to organic) can:

- learn about improved organic crop and livestock insurance,
- view local and national organic commodity price reports and other economic data, and
- identify additional export markets for their products.

They can access credit and cost-sharing assistance through traditional farm loans, more flexible microloans, and conservation programs that reimburse farmers for implementing environmentally-friendly practices (hurry, applications close for the Conservation Stewardship Program on January 17th!).

Additionally, USDA supports many organizations that provide organic research and education. For example, land-grant universities use USDA funds to help farmers and ranchers across rural America manage pests, support their animal’s health, and provide other production and conservation assistance.

Through its Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), USDA enforces national standards for organic products and facilitates trade throughout the world. With over 17,000 certified organic businesses in the United States alone, the organic industry supports jobs and communities on a global scale. In fact, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) estimated that the organic food industry generated more than 500,000 American jobs in 2010 alone. OTA research calculates that for every $1 billion in retail sales of organic products, 21,000 more jobs are created.

Earlier this year, Secretary Vilsack issued Guidance on Organic Agriculture, Marketing and Industry instructing all USDA agencies to incorporate the needs of the organic sector into their programs and services, and asked AMS to lead this effort. This resource center for all things organic at USDA.gov is one way we are meeting those needs.

Organic agriculture is a strong contributor to USDA’s goals for rural economic development, and we are committed to supporting continued growth of the organic sector by removing obstacles for organic farmers and businesses. Learn about the benefits of organic certification and help determine if organic is an option for your farm or business by visiting our Organic Literacy Initiative.

As the organic sector continues to grow, so does USDA’s commitment to meeting the needs of organic operators. The new organic web resource center at USDA.gov reflects that commitment and the growing menu of services we provide.
Minister Ramsammy visits Hope Canal Project – says ministry, contractors working to make project operational as early as possible, GINA, 9 January, 2014

Full Article

No new deadline has been set for the East Demerara Water Conservancy (EDWC) Northern Relief Channel at Hope/Dochfour, Minister of Agriculture Dr. Leslie Ramsammy stated, but the Agriculture Ministry, the contractors and the engineers are working to make the project operational as early as possible.

The Agriculture Minister made the remarks today during a visit to the project, to get a first-hand look at the progress. He was accompanied by the Chief Executive Officer, National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA), Lionel Wordsworth.

One of the four components of the project; the Hope Bridge has been completed and Minister Ramsammy explained that it was considered essentially finished before the December 31 deadline. “After so many visits, where we were looking at structures going up, we are now standing on a bridge with vehicles which we ourselves drove, over this bridge…in terms of the contract that we have for the completion of this bridge, it is essentially completed. There are some landscaping work and so to be done, for this bridge, but that is outside of the contract for this bridge,” he said.

The channel which will be the last aspect to be completed is 95 percent done, and cannot be fully realised until the project is ready to be operational. Minister Ramsammy explained that the reason why the incompletion is that “we cannot open this channel to the sea or to the conservancy. We have to await the readiness of the whole project before we can complete the channel.”

There is also the shaping of the dam, “but as I have said all of 2013, the dams will be shaped and reshaped over a period of time, and it is possible that a year, two year from now, we will still be doing some reshaping of the dam, but that does not affect the function of the channel,” he said.

The head regulator is sufficiently completed in terms of the superstructure. Minister Ramsammy noted that outside of the superstructure, the elements of the project that need to be completed will be done over the next several weeks.

The component of the project that posed the greatest challenge has been the sluice towards the sea side, but the ministry has worked with the contractor towards moving this aspect.

“I believe that going back into November (of 2013) there was a sense of hopelessness among many people to the extent where some people seriously considered terminating that contract, but within the Ministry of Agriculture and particularly within the NDIA, the engineers and the consultants believed
that the termination of that contract would in fact have prolonged the completion date and we needed
to work with the contractor.

I want to commend the contractors for the work they been doing with the ministry, and with the NDIA
team, they have worked in accordance with a work plan,” Minister Ramsammy said.

The ministry and the contractor have agreed to have the outstanding work divided into several
tranches, some of which are to be completed by February. The first few tranches would realise the
completion of the super structure for the sluice, he said.

Work is on pace right now to complete six tranches by mid February and that would bring it to a stage
where the super structure for the four projects would be essentially completed, paving the way for the
project’s operationalisation, he explained.

“I saw that we have a deadline of April, but that’s a deadline that Kaieteur News made up. I am saying
the work we are doing is trying to get to a stage where this project is completed and we could begin
the hard work of operationalisation,” he said.

He explained that April is not a new deadline. The Minister pointed out that the deadline was
December 31. “Now we are beginning to do the kind of work that would mean that the work we did
not complete by the December 31 deadline gets done as quickly as possible, and I would like to see the
operationalisation of this by the end of April so that when we get to the May-June rainfall this channel
would be working the way we envision that it would impact rainy seasons in Guyana,” he said.

“Next week we are going to get together again and we will begin planning. So far, all our plans have
been on the construction of this channel and its related associated structures, now we are seeing the
light at the end of the tunnel, and we are seriously now looking at the functioning, the
operationalisation of the channel,” he said.

The EDWC Northern Relief Channel at Hope/Doufour was undertaken with Government of Guyana
resources. Minister Ramsammy was adamant the project will be completed within the budgetary
allocations of just over $3B.

“This project, it was done by Guyanese contractors, Guyanese engineers and Guyanese workers, and
for me reaching this stage is more a sense of pride. I do understand that there will be concerns about
the fact that we went beyond the construction deadline, and that is something we should always be
concerned about, but we should also not forget that a project that many said was beyond the capacity
of Guyanese contractors, workers and engineers has been essentially completed and successfully so,”
the Minister said.
Agricultural Development

New Public Policy for Agriculture in Progress. GIS Dominica, 17 January, 2014

Full Article

The Ministry of Agriculture hosted a one-day national consultation on Tuesday in order to draft a new public policy towards agriculture for the period 2014 to 2018.

Discussions were held under the theme ‘Creating a Platform for Food and Nutrition Security, Competitiveness and Sustainability.’

Consultations were held in collaboration with the National Authorising Officer (NAO) And the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA).

Several agriculture officials and other stakeholders, especially farmers formed part of the team who met at the Garraway hotel to put plans together.

Permanent Secretary in The Ministry of Agriculture, Eisenhower Douglas is hoping that the new policy will be complete by April 2014 and subsequently approved by cabinet for implementation. “This consultation is a means to an end but the end of course would be to put the policy together and to get the policy approved by Cabinet.”

In his discourse regarding the background and purpose of the consultation, Douglas emphasized the importance of the contribution of stakeholders in order to ensure that the policy is relevant.

P.S. Douglas also pointed out that at the heart of the Ministry of Agriculture and hence the consultation is the work of the farmer and his ability to boost production.

“Notwithstanding the role that we play in the Ministry of Agriculture but at the end of the day it’s the farmers who need to be engaged in production.”

One of the main objectives of the consultation was to bring forward the approach of the Ministry of Agriculture in the formulation of a National Agriculture Policy and to solicit feedback from stakeholders.

Another objective is to reach a consensus on the core elements of an Agriculture Policy for Dominica. This initiative forms part of Government’s Growth and Social Protection Strategy aimed primarily at poverty reduction.

Economist, Lucilla Lewis, in her remarks regarding ‘agriculture policy in the context of national development’ noted that although there has been an average decline in agriculture over the past ten to twelve years, agriculture has remained one of the main contributors to GDP in Dominica.

During the course of the day participants worked in groups to review the existing agriculture policy framework with a view to reconfiguring agriculture in Dominica.

This policy is expected to be in place by the new fiscal year, July 1 2014.
Farm machinery and sustainable agriculture must evolve together. FAO, 17 January, 2014

Full Article

New book turns critical eye on the mechanization of the world’s fields

Farm machines have revolutionized agriculture and reduced drudgery for millions of farm families and workers, but the machinery of tomorrow will have to do more than that – it will also have to contribute to agriculture that is environmentally sustainable.

A new FAO book *Mechanization for rural development, a review of patterns and progress from around the world*, explores the inexorable rise of the use of machinery in farmers’ fields, drawing lessons for policymakers and economists from some of the big winners and also the regions lagging behind.

For example, Bangladesh went from using human muscle and ox power in the early 1970s to being one of the most mechanized agricultural economies in South Asia, with 300 000 low-power 2-wheel tractors, a million diesel powered irrigation pumps and widespread mechanized crop threshing.

On the other hand, Africa, which has comparatively the most abundant land resources, has less than 10 percent of mechanization services provided by engine power. About 25 percent of farm power is provided by draught animals and over 60 percent by people’s muscles, mostly from women, the elderly and children. *Mechanization for rural development* draws lessons from these trends, with in-depth studies of mechanization in countries and regions in Africa, Asia, the Near East, South America and Eastern Europe, as well as chapters on themes such as development needs, manufacturing and information exchange.

“The book delves into many aspects of farm mechanization, not only how machines will contribute to an environmentally sustainable future, but also what policies will put machines at the service of family farms so that they too can profit,” said Ren Wang, Assistant Director-General of FAO’s Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department.

Future of agriculture

The book also looks to the future, arguing that the design of agricultural machinery must evolve in parallel with the roll out of Sustainable Crop Production Intensification (SCPI). That means fewer chemicals, more efficient use of water, and more efficient use of machines.

Farm machinery needs to be intelligent, lean, precise and efficient in order to minimize the impact on the soil and the landscape. Two of the farming activities that have the greatest impact on the environment are soil tillage, because it can severely damage soil ecology, and pesticide application.

Conservation agriculture is an approach that reduces or eliminates soil tillage and pesticide use. To control weeds, conserve soil moisture and avoid soil disturbance, a mulch layer of crop residue is retained on the unploughed field.

Special machinery is needed to plant seeds and apply fertilizer through the mulch at the correct depth without disturbing the crop residues. An added advantage to this type of mechanization is that, without the need for high-draught tillage, lower powered and therefore cheaper tractors can be used. These
lighter machines have the added advantage of not compacting and therefore damaging the soil like a heavy tractor would.

The use of agrochemicals for the management of insect pests, disease and weeds can have a significant impact on the environment. Besides reducing pesticide use overall through integrated pest management including biological control, when chemicals are necessary they can be used with greater precision since it is estimated that about 50 percent of all pesticides applied do not reach their intended target. Many technological innovations exist to improve this situation, for example, low drift nozzles and spray shields.

In irrigation, technologies such as micro sprinklers or drip irrigation that save water and consume less power are the environmentally friendly way of the future, according to the book.

*Defeating poverty*

*Mechanization for Rural Development* argues that government policies should encourage the agricultural machinery sector to develop markets for agricultural mechanization, especially for conservation agriculture, and to establish the required infrastructures.

“Such support, especially to the smallholder sector, can have a dramatic impact in moving farm families out of poverty into a more profitable, commercially oriented agriculture,” said the book’s lead editor Josef Kienzle.

“The global agricultural machinery industry should provide more support to smallholder farmers with equipment designs and models that better suit the needs of smallholder farmers and service providers,” he said. “Without this change in the machinery sector, the needs of developing countries for food security, poverty alleviation, economic growth and environmental protection cannot be achieved.”

**House committee proposes strengthening praedial larceny law**, by Alecia Smith-Edwards, Jamaica Information Service, 16 January, 2014


**Full Article**

Persons found in possession of agricultural produce, for which they have no receipt or invoice, may face hefty fines if recommendations put forward by the Economy and Production Committee of Parliament for the strengthening the praedial larceny law are adopted.

At a meeting at Gordon House on January 14, committee member, Daryl Vaz, noted that currently, the end user is not charged or fined if they are found with goods without an invoice.

He argued, however, that if they are now liable to be fined or charged that “will force them to insist that…the farmer who they are buying from legitimizes themselves by issuing them a receipt to protect them”.

“The commencement of this legitimization starts with the farmer but encompasses the end user, who is not currently (included) and therefore, it will force me to tell (the farmer) that he will have to give me a receipt for the (goods) just in case they (inspectors) come to my establishment,” he said.
Committee member and Opposition Spokesperson on Agriculture and Fisheries, J.C. Hutchinson, said that while he agrees that the end user should now be charged, the farmer, on the other hand should not. Farmers are currently charged up to $250,000 if they fail to produce a receipt for their goods.

“Instead of pressuring the farmer, turn it around and pressure the end user where the end user can be charged up to $1 million and when that user sees that he has to get a receipt from the farmer, he is then going to make sure he gets the receipt.

“What happens now is the farmer is the one that is charged, the end user isn’t charged anything at all….So we move it from the farmer and the inspector goes there and if the end user cannot produce a receipt, then he is charged $1 million,” he said.

The committee further recommended that the fine for farmers be reduced to $100,000.

In his concluding remarks, Chairman of the committee, Karl Samuda, said a report will be prepared calling on Parliament to recommend that action be taken to amend the existing legislation relating to praedial larceny “to give it more teeth.”

He further noted that proposals will be made to strengthen the collaboration between the agencies of Government, most importantly, the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), the Trade Board, and to provide financial resources in order to make it possible for the Ministry of Agriculture to assist in apprehending and bringing to book, those people who are engaged in praedial larceny.

Agriculture push needed. The Barbados Advocate, 14, January, 2014


Full Article

The Barbados Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (BANGO) wants to see Barbadians focus more on agriculture during 2014 and the years ahead.

That is the word from the Secretary General of the NGO umbrella body, Roosevelt King, who said that food and nutrition security and alternative/ renewable energy have been identified by BANGO as key areas for Barbados going forward. Speaking to The Barbados Advocate recently, King said that it is vital that Barbados cuts down on its high food import bill and one way to achieve this is to encourage Barbadians to grow more of what they eat.

“We need to stand on our own feet to some degree, but that is not being done now, we are depending too much on imports and for things that can be made right here. So achieving food and nutrition security must be a thrust for Barbados this year. If we achieve this we would also be guaranteed good health for our citizens, which would also be a good thing, as it would cut down on our rising health bill and the incidence of non communicable diseases, which is a thorn in our side,” he said.

King added, “Once we can get things like backyard gardening going, where people can grow some of their own vegetables and supplement what they have to purchase at the supermarket – a lot of which is brought in from overseas – we should see some improvement.”

With that in mind, the Secretary General said that BANGO wants to see the local agricultural sector expand and as such, has been consulting with the Ministry of Agriculture on the National Food and
Nutrition Security Policy and Action Plan. He said that they are pleased that steps are being taken in this direction and would like to see the Ministry bring the plan to fruition soon.

“Basically we think it is a very good plan and we hope to see it implemented as soon as possible, because this is really the belly of the nation we are talking about. Agriculture is the key to Barbados overcoming many of the challenges currently facing it and it is vital that steps are taken to give it a sound, secure footing on which to stand,” he said.

Meanwhile, referring to the recent renewable energy push, King said that he hopes the day will come when householders and businesses in this country are able to generate their own energy, to the point where they no longer have the expense of an electricity bill, thereby reducing the country’s fuel import bill considerably. (JRT)

**OECS Agriculture Task Force to assist Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and The Grenadines.**
Government of Antigua and Barbuda press release, January 13, 2014

**Full Article**

In response to the damage sustained by the agricultural and rural sectors as a result of the December 24 weather system that affected the Windward Islands, an OECS ad hoc agriculture task force has agreed to embark on a support mission to Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on January 9 and 10 and January 13 and 14 respectively.

The task force, established at a November 2013 meeting of OECS Ministers of Agriculture held to address issues of governance for agriculture development and food and nutrition security in the OECS, took the decision to mount the Windward Islands support mission at its third meeting held on January 7, 2014.

The agriculture support mission, led by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), includes professionals from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Caribbean Agriculture Research and Development institute (CARDI) and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Secretariat.

The following are the main tasks of the mission:

- The preparation of emergency response and livelihood rehabilitation projects for immediate funding consideration;
- The preparation of development project ideas for building resilience within the agricultural and rural sectors for funding consideration in the short run; and
- To assist with implementation of the funded projects

The OECS agriculture task force will work with national agriculture sector officials to review the preliminary damage assessments undertaken by the respective Ministries of Agriculture, and will generate additional information required for emergency and development project preparation and for development of the respective project documents for funding consideration. Upon completion of the preliminary assessment of damage to Dominica’s agricultural and rural sectors, the task force will schedule a visit to that country.
Chesney assures of CARDI’s support of agriculture in the Caribbean, as CARDI Units across the Region host Open Days. Bajan Reporter, 2 January 2014

Full Article

As the year 2013 came to an end, CARDI Units in Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada and St Lucia hosted Open Days with the objective to showcase activities aimed at making the Region more food and nutrition secure. Open Days have become institutionalised in CARDI’s calendar, with the first series being hosted in 2008.

Executive Director, Dr. Arlington Chesney (holding Mic) in his Message said that ‘the major objective of the Open Days is to showcase the Institute’s activities to our stakeholders, strategic partners and clients to enable them the opportunity to comment on what they had seen and for them to also determine if what they had seen was consistent with their perception of the needs and requirements of the agricultural sector and also to chart the way for CARDI’s research for development activities in the next years.’ He also made the unequivocal statement that ‘CARDI will work more closely with its stakeholders to ensure that its research for development makes a major impact on agriculture, being a major economic driver in the sustainability of the Region’s economy’.

The CARDI Open Day 2013 in Dominica was held on December 6th 2013 at the Castle Bruce Farmer Service Training Centre, under the theme ‘Improving Lives through Agriculture Research’. The Institute’s recent contribution to improving production and productivity of yam, cassava, sweet potato and farine in the catchment area received much commendation from the farmers during an open discussion.

Attendees included farmers and small agro processors who benefited directly from CARDI’s work, innovative extension officers and agriculture students from the tertiary institutions. Throughout the year, CARDI’s Dominica Unit engages in constant dialogue with relevant stakeholders with regards on pertinent aspects of its work program.

Two days earlier in Barbados, on December 4th, 2013 at Graeme Hall in Christ Church, close to one hundred persons attended the Open Day. Visitors were able to purchase cassava tubers; livestock farmers were provided with complimentary Mulberry plants; and hot pepper seedlings were also distributed. Visitors expressed their enthralment for the intricacies of hot pepper seed production; and the size and yield of cassava tubers from the introduced varieties.

In attendance were Mr. James Paul, CEO of the Barbados Agricultural Society; Mr. Ian Gibbs, Entomologist at Barbados’ Ministry of Agriculture; and students of the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, among others.

Dr Chesney assured all attendees that “CARDI works for you, the individual entrepreneurs, the Ministries related to agriculture, Member States singly and collectively, and all others in the agricultural sector.”

Open Days are scheduled for early 2014 in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago.
Information & Communication

Data standards; making CGIAR data available and accessible. CGIAR Consortium News, 3 January 2014

Full Article

Sharing research data and making it widely available is commonly recognized as a way to support a sustainable increase in food security in both developed and developing countries. In fact, the 2012 commitments of the G8 leaders included an agreement to “share relevant agricultural data … and … to develop options for the establishment of a global platform to make reliable agricultural and related information available to African farmers, researchers and policymakers, taking into account existing agricultural data systems.”

Now that CGIAR is officially “Open Access” and is focusing its attention on implementation, what does ‘open data’ mean for CGIAR?

The concept of ‘open’ isn’t in itself new to CGIAR; it has long been our basic philosophy to make our research results publicly available. But publicly available doesn’t necessarily mean publicly accessible, and it is now critical for CGIAR to not only to commit to making data available, but to pay more attention to the way in which that data (and related information) is released.

The Open Knowledge Foundation defines Open Data as: “…data that can be freely used, reused and redistributed by anyone – subject only, at most, to the requirement to attribute and share alike.” Living by such Open Data principles will be vital if we are to achieve CGIAR’s long-term data management objectives. There are already many examples of Open Data initiatives across CGIAR, such as those showcased earlier this year at the G-8 Conference on Open Data for Agriculture, and, with the adoption of the CGIAR Open Access and Data Management Policy, the CGIAR Consortium now has the institutional mechanisms necessary to tackle the issue from a system-wide perspective.

In order to enhance the visibility, accessibility and impact of research and development activities broad consensus is required on how to ensure data is stored and described appropriately so that it is discoverable and interoperable with CGIAR and partner data repositories. Interoperability requires good metadata, appropriate data protocols and the use of standard formats to allow content not only to be discovered, but also shared and incorporated across different technology platforms. Agreement on data standards is urgently required.

[Perhaps highlight this text linked to photo] “Our basic philosophy remains very much the same” says Frank Rijsberman, CEO of the CGIAR Consortium. “We receive funding from taxpayers, and make our results publicly available to use. This has always been part of the ideology of CGIAR, which hasn’t changed. What has changed is the way we need to do it. Easy access as well as Open Access is required to ensure the most effective use of research results.”

CGIAR Data Summit

In November 2013, the CGIAR Consortium hosted a Data Standards Summit for CGIAR Consortium Members and some of our key partners. The aim was to work collaboratively on how to develop a
practical roadmap for the adoption of Open Data Management Standards. The report from the meeting is now available.

The group discussed the Draft CGIAR Open Access and Data Management Implementation Guidelines, with a focus on consolidating current practices across CGIAR and its partners, data management, data standards; and talked about how to agree on metadata standards and vocabulary that can be applied to all data domains (broadly categorized as germplasm data, spatial data and socioeconomic and environmental data).

Scaling up current good practices

Within CGIAR there are a number of good practices currently in progress with the potential for scaling up across the system. A white paper developed by scientists from across the CGIAR Consortium puts forward several recommendations on how data generated by the centers can not only be made widely available but also used to maximize the CGIAR’s impact on development. Examples from the white paper include:

**AgTrials.** An information portal developed by the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) providing access to a database on the performance of agricultural technologies at sites across the developing world. It builds on decades of evaluation trials, mostly of varieties, but includes any agricultural technology for developing world farmers. This project will standardize data and information to the benefit of climate change analyses, future multi-environment trials and research and development in international agriculture.

**Intergenebank Potato Database.** The Intergenebank Potato Database (IPD), a database to cross reference potato collections and share passport and evaluation data, since early 1995.

**Longitudinal Village Level Studies.** The longitudinal Village Level Studies (VDSA), of ICRISAT have for over three decades provided profound insights into the social and economic changes in the village and household economies in the semi arid tropics of Asia and Africa. Over 150 research papers and more than 40 doctoral dissertations have been based on empirical analysis of VLS data in the semi arid tropics of India and West Africa. A recent search in Google scholar shows that this body of work has generated over 10,000 citations.

For more examples download the white paper “Shifting the goalposts – from high impact journals to high impact data.”

In addition, initiatives such as AGROVOC (a controlled vocabulary covering areas such as food, nutrition, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, environment etc) and OpenAGRIS (a world-wide bibliographic data repository in the agricultural domain) are already opening up and enhancing access to open data and agricultural research information by means semantic standards related to Linked Open Data.

Fruitful discussions took place during the Summit, with presentations from Oak Ridge National Lab and the Virtual Lab for Plant Breeding (VLPB). These initiatives already enable collaborative research, development, and provide systems to facilitate informed decisions. Lessons learned can assist CGIAR to structure the processes required to synthesize, analyze, and visualize vast amounts of information.
Concentrating on the commonalities

Whilst CGIAR research works across different data domains, discussions at the Data Standards Summit confirmed that common challenges remain. Data collection, curation, sharing, appropriate resources, governance, communication and the need to better support scientists were all recurring themes, regardless of the data domain. It is on these areas participants agreed to concentrate.

Next Steps

The following next steps were defined in order to build upon existing efforts within and beyond CGIAR as we move into implementation phase of the CGIAR Open Access and Data Management Policy:

- Finalize the CGIAR Open Access and Data Management Implementation Guidelines;
- Establish a Data Standards Taskforce to identify/ manage standards over time;
- Establish an Open Access and Data Management Governing Council;
- Finalize where to store, share and access data – use of Dataverse, existing genomic, spatial and other data repositories to set up the destinations for our data pipeline;
- Actively engage with/contribute to AGROVOC and build additional CGIAR language into the system; and
- Identify other opportunities for greater engagement beyond CGIAR, including CIARD, IATI, etc.

Open Access and Open Data offer new opportunities to promote CGIAR science and scientists. These opportunities will need to be better communicated, explained, and even evangelized across a broad range of stakeholders. Researchers and scientists will need to be better supported, and creating tools, processes and a culture that supports open access will be essential. We should no longer be talking about costs as a barrier to implementing open data standards, but rather highlighting the potential losses associated with a failure to implement this important policy!

For more information
CGIAR is committed to Open Access
“Shifting the goalposts – from high impact journals to high impact data” (white paper)
CIARD: information and tools available (checklists, good practices and pathways)

Innovation

Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA)
http://cta.int/en/component/cck/?view=item&id=809

Description of grant
CTA is calling for proposals on innovations in use or have potential in smallholder agricultural production systems in ACP countries and which if known and widely promoted can benefit other farming communities. From among the applicants, an international jury, comprising a multi-disciplinary team of experts drawn from agricultural research, academia, extension and farmers’ organizations will select a shortlist (40-50) which will then be voted on by farmers. The final top 20 will be selected by an international panel of experts. Successful applicants (CTA top 20) will be given a grant of 5,000 Euros to elaborate their ‘innovation’ as a guidebook (for which they will receive support from the jury members);
and invited to a cross-learning workshop where they will also work with an editor and an artist to finalize
the guidebook which explains the innovation and the design of a brochure and a poster which can be
disseminated to the public at large (for use, inter alia, by extension agents).

All materials will be made available in English and French, and will be widely distributed in ACP
countries. A media campaign will be organized to draw to the attention of the public and policy makers of
the possibilities that these innovations carry to significantly improve smallholders’ lives.

A maximum of € 100 000 is available for this grant.

Who should apply?
Applicant can be organizations such as research institutes, extension agencies, farmers’ organizations and
NGOs, or individuals working with such organizations. The innovations need to be well-articulated using
the format provided, and proof that this innovation has been adopted by farmers or has the potential to
benefit famers in ACP countries is necessary.

Proposal specifications
Download the full documentation needed for proposal submission here

Agricultural Research - Cacao

Finally, a way to authenticate premium chocolate. American Chemical Society ACS News Service
http://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/pressroom/presspacs/2014/acs-presspac-january-15-2014/finaly-a-
way-to-authenticate-premium-chocolate.html

Full Article

“Accurate Determination of Genetic Identity for a Single Cacao Bean, Using Molecular Markers with
a Nanofluidic System, Ensures Cocoa Authentication” Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry

For some people, nothing can top a morsel of luxuriously rich, premium chocolate. But until now,
other than depending on their taste buds, chocolate connoisseurs had no way of knowing whether they
were getting what they paid for. In ACS’ Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry, scientists are
reporting, for the first time, a method to authenticate the varietal purity and origin of cacao beans, the
source of chocolate’s main ingredient, cocoa.

Dapeng Zhang and colleagues note that lower-quality cacao beans often get mixed in with premium
varieties on their way to becoming chocolate bars, truffles, sauces and liqueurs. But the stakes for
policing the chocolate industry are high. It’s a multi-billion dollar global enterprise, and in some
places, it’s as much art as business. There’s also a conservation angle to knowing whether products are
truly what confectioners claim them to be. The ability to authenticate premium and rare varieties
would encourage growers to maintain cacao biodiversity rather than depend on the most abundant and
easiest to grow trees. Researchers have found ways to verify through genetic testing the authenticity of
many other crops, including cereals, fruits, olives, tea and coffee, but those methods aren’t suitable for
cacao beans. Zhang’s team wanted to address this challenge.
Applying the most recent developments in cacao genomics, they were able to identify a small set of DNA markers called SNPs (pronounced “snips”) that make up unique fingerprints of different cacao species. The technique works on single cacao beans and can be scaled up to handle large samples quickly. “To our knowledge, this is the first authentication study in cacao using molecular markers,” the researchers state.

The authors acknowledge funding from the Agricultural Research Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and a financial gift from the Lindt and Sprüngli chocolate company through the World Cocoa Foundation.

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/

Seventh International Training Course In Vitro and Cryopreservation for Conservation of Plant Genetic Resources: Current Methods and Techniques
Date: 17 - 28 Feb. 2014,
Location: New Delhi, India
Description: The International Training Course is being organized by the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) - Bioversity International Centre of Excellence. NBPGR is one of the leading institutes under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi, India for plant genetic resources (PGR) management. The course will be conducted at NBPGR, IARI Campus, New Delhi, India. The participants will improve their skills in tissue culture, cryopreservation and in vitro conservation of crops relevant for their countries. They will also gain knowledge on the molecular techniques and protocols for conservation of plant seeds and tissues. The applicants must have a prior experience in the teaching areas of the course. Female scientists are particularly encouraged to apply.


Course documents

- Application form

May 2014

Building Resilience for Food and Nutrition Security. IFPRI 2020 Conference
Date: 15-17 May 2014
Location: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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

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/