Ministers’ Brief

According to the Caribbean Regional Climate Centre, some countries in the Caribbean are more likely to experience drought conditions this dry season as a weak to moderate El Niño becomes more likely. The outlook until the end of March 2019 generated by the Centre has issued drought warnings for Barbados, The Cayman Islands and Suriname. While Antigua, northern Bahamas, southeastern Belize, much of Cuba, Dominica, northern & eastern Dominican Republic, northern French Guiana, much of Guyana, eastern Jamaica, Martinique, northwestern Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands have been placed on drought watch.

With hotter and drier conditions on the cards, it is important farmers implement water conservation strategies on-farm to maintain production, as much of the Region’s agriculture is rain fed. Farmers must use water conservation strategies to carry them through the dry season. Some useful water smart strategies in crop production are drip irrigation, mulches, compost, cover crops, cultivating drought tolerant species and varieties and monitoring soil temperature and moisture so that watering can be optimised. For livestock, it is important that the animals have access to clean water and shade is provided in pastures. Forage conservation measures such as silage and hay will also guarantee animals have access to nutritious forage during the hot, dry days. Farmers can also implement rotational grazing on their pastures as it promotes regrowth and increases the fields’ water absorption and decreases water runoff.

Water –smart farming practices for the dry season

Drip irrigation is a smart water conservation strategy that reduces water loss from evaporation and run off.
Remembering Dr. Frances Chandler…. an eminent agricultural researcher

Dr. Chandler has authored more than 40 publications many of which have been published in regional and international journals. The management and staff of CARDI express our sincerest condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Frances. May she rest in peace.

Positive feedback from cassava and sweet potato bread making venture

CARDI partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and Epicurean Bakery in Antigua and Barbuda to train stakeholders in bread making, using sweet potato and cassava mash. Three practical sessions each targeting different stakeholders introduced the concept of using composite flour for bread making. It is estimated that cassava and sweet potato mash can replace as much as 40% of the wheat flour used in traditional bread mixes.

Adding value to local produce serves as a catalyst for local agricultural production and will inherently boost a country’s food and nutrition security status. Antigua like most of the Region is recording growing incidents of non-communicable diseases. Bread, a convenience food when made with composite flour presents consumers with a more nutritious healthier option.

The feedback from the taste tests was very positive. Project partners are targeting other bakeries on the island to host similar training in a move to scale up production. CARDI is supportive of this initiative and will continue to work with farmers to boost cassava and sweet potato production.

The training which took place over the period 29-31 January, 2019 targeted food and nutrition teachers, representatives of non-governmental organizations, prison officers and ministry of agriculture staff.

One of the key programmes of CARDI’s Strategic Plan is building capacities of stakeholders along the agriculture value chains. On February 7 the St Lucia office trained 20 farmers in the identification, selection and preparation of cassava stem cuttings. At a field session, farmers learnt the criteria for identifying and selecting quality planting material. Following this they received hands-on training on the preparation and treatment of cuttings for planting.

Cassava has been identified as an important crop to meet the food and nutrition needs of St Lucia. CARDI is working with stakeholders to strengthen the supply chain for cassava on the island – which will enable them to meet the growing demands for planting material.

CARDI also partnered with the University of Belize to provide practical training for agriculture research students. On February 7 students visited a bean varietal experimental plot at the Field Station in Central Farm where they learnt more about experimental designs and biometrics. The students will also get involved in data collection, analysis and reporting. Exposure such as this allows students to apply the technical knowledge and skills learnt in the classroom to a real world setting.

This exercise is part of an agreement between CARDI and the University of Belize which allow students to participate and learn from the Institute’s research activities.