CARDI’s Executive Director, Barton Clarke (l) is calling for local food production to be placed on an emergency footing as the Region navigates the COVID-19 pandemic

Securing regional food and nutrition security during the COVID-19 pandemic

A special Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) — Agriculture meeting was convened by the CARICOM Secretariat on March 19 to discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and nutrition security in the Region.

With the prospect of a disruption in extra-regional food supplies, Regional production will need to be ramped up. According to Executive Director, Barton Clarke, “this is war and regional food production should be placed on an emergency footing”.

To aid the regional effort, CARDI will serve as a hub of information to inform planning and decision making, particularly as it relates to infrastructure, germplasm supplies and production capacity for commodities of importance. The Institute will also serve as a data source for trade and market prices for critical commodities, input supplies and mapping of the key private sector supply chain actors.

As a supplier of planting material for various commodities CARDI has already ramped up production to meet the increase in demand.

The regional response framework to COVID-19 envisions Member States drawing up national food security plans, engaging the private sector to ensure their supply chains are in place and interacting with farmer and producer organisations to see how best to boost local production of food in the event that the COVID-19 pandemic continues. Institutional coordination and an effective communications strategy were also among the pillars proposed.

During this time CARDI will continue to Chair of the Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Cluster as well as continue to provide technical and advisory support to national committees and systems.
Building capacity in roots and tubers production

In Grenada, CARDI in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands hosted a one day training for farmers, 4-H groups and agriculture officers on root crop production. Through practical sessions, participants were exposed to best practices, smarter technologies and new techniques for growing cassava, yam, sweet potato, tannia, eddoes, dasheen, ginger and turmeric.

The Government of Grenada has prioritized root crops for increased production in 2020. Root crops have also been identified as priority commodities by CARICOM and CARDI for food and nutrition security.

Speaking at the start of the training Chief Extension Officer, Randolph Shears said that the plan is to capitalize on Grenada’s ideal growing conditions to improve production and productivity. CARDI Representative, Reginald Andall was confident that once farmers utilise the new knowledge gained and adopt the best practices Grenada can realise its goal of becoming self-sufficient in root crop production.

CARDI has had a long track record of research on roots and tubers in the Region. The Institute has a collection of more than 30 varieties of cassava and 70 varieties of sweet potato conserved in germplasm banks spread across the region. Over the last few years, researchers have been demonstrating the use of the rapid propagation techniques for cassava and sweet potato which have facilitated an increase in the supply of planting material to farmers. The Institute has also successfully pioneered the adoption of integrated pest management strategies to combat pests and diseases such as sweet potato weevil, the cassava hornworms and cassava bacterial blight.

CARDI shows off broad spectrum of research programme at Agrofest 2020

BARBADOS’ premier agricultural exhibition, Agrofest, was held from 28 February – 01 March 2020 at Queen’s Park in Bridgetown. The exhibition which is hosted by the Barbados Agricultural Society (BAS) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security is designed to sensitize the public on the importance of the agricultural sector.

CARDI Barbados participated and gave an insight into the Institute’s work in Barbados and around the Region.

On display were samples of the Institute’s work on the focal areas of hot peppers, roots and tubers and small ruminants. CARDI Barbados has the largest germplasm collection of sweet potato on the island – from which planting material is provided to farmers on an ongoing basis. Under the Institute’s hot pepper programme, a seed collection of over 100 accessions is maintained in Barbados. From here, breeder seeds for varieties such as Scotch Bonnet are produced and sent to Antigua and Barbuda for commercial multiplication. In the area of small ruminant production, CARDI showed off the results of our research work to develop alternative rations using local materials such as cassava peels and mulberry and provided information on high yielding, nutritious forage species.

CARDI Representative, Ansari Hosein also used the platform to provide an overview of Phase II of the Regional Coconut Project, funded by the European Union and CARIFORUM and jointly implemented by CARDI and the International Trade Centre (ITC). Launched in Barbados last year, work will continue to focus on improving the supply of quality planting material and addressing pests and disease issues on the island. Attention will also be focused on value added product development and increasing the supply of coconut water as demand currently outstrips supplies.

CARDI launches school garden project in the Bahamas

On 26th February, CARDI Bahamas joined with the Over The Hill (OTH) Committee and the Ministry of Education to launch a school garden project in the OTH Community.

Together with the Faculty of Food and Agriculture of the University of the West Indies, (St Augustine), Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute (BAMSI) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources, CARDI will oversee the establishment, demonstration and training in innovative climate smart, land less and soil less crop production systems in 13 schools. Over 5,000 children between the ages of 4-16, their parents and members in the community are set to directly benefit from this project.

Hands on training will be complemented by capacity building initiatives and supplemented by user friendly information products such as factsheets and manuals.

Students and members from the OTC will be exposed to the basic principles involved in the construction of these systems, which can be advanced into business ventures for increased social and economic empowerment. Some of the systems being introduced are PVC hydroponics, grow boxes, trellising and micro tunnels.

The project is designed to; expose students to new technologies in the production of safe and nutritious fresh food; introduce them to agriculture career paths and ensure healthy eating habits take root in the early years. Additionally, it will positively contribute to the development of the students’ social skills and mental well-being.

The OTH Community project is supported by the Prime Minister’s Office, Dr. The Honourable Hubert Minnis whose vision is to rejuvenate and restore pride in the disadvantaged communities.

To facilitate this activity CARDI signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of the Bahamas in January 2020.