

# Ministers' Brief



Newly appointed Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Zulfikar Mustapha, met with a CARDI team virtually on 28 August, 2020. Among the areas discussed were CARDI operations in Guyana and future areas of collaboration. (Photo courtesy: Ministry of Agriculture, Guyana)

## CARDI team pays courtesy visit to Minister of Agriculture, Guyana

A CARDI team headed by Executive Director, Barton Clarke paid a virtual courtesy call to the newly appointed Minister of Agriculture, Guyana the Honourable Zulfikar Mustapha, on 28 August 2020. Accompanying the Executive Director, were the Chairman, CARDI Board of Directors, Ignatius Jean and CARDI Representative in Guyana, Jhaman Kundun.

In his opening remarks, Clarke congratulated the Minister on his appointment and pledged CARDI's ongoing support to the development of Guyana's agriculture sector. Clarke gave an update on CARDI's work in Guyana and provided the Minister with an overview of the Institute's governance structure, highlighting the critical role the President of Guyana currently has as the Head for Agriculture, Agricultural Diversification and Food Security in the Quasi-CARICOM arrangement.

In the wide ranging discussion, the CARDI team also reiterated the need for private sector engagement and Guyana's role in attracting cross border investments. Clarke noted that putting the large tracts of land in Guyana, Belize and Suriname to productive use can help meet the Region's target of reducing food imports by 25%, by 2025 (25 in 5 plan).

Minister Mustapha, thanked CARDI for the work and investments in Guyana's agriculture sector and noted there is more to get done. To this end, he said that he will be calling on the Institute to provide technical assistance and training and capacity development in several areas. The Minister remarked that Caribbean farmers are quite capable of feeding the Region, however there is need to provide them with the right marketing and policy support. He continued that the harmonization of intra-regional trading protocols and trade liberalization can assist the Region's small economies to

become more resilient and improve their bargaining power on the world stage. He vouched to support this at the policy level.

In Guyana, CARDI is currently implementing Phase II of the EU/CARIFORUM Regional Coconut Development Project. Over the next 5 years, CARDI and the International Trade Center (ITC) will be working in the areas such as production improvement, waste management and the establishment of a Coconut Industry Board. In addition, CARDI, through the Institute's subsidiary - The Caribbean Agricultural Commercial Services Hub Limited (CACSH), is developing a 5,000 acre commercial farm in the Upper Berbice River, Ebini. Featuring a range of high value crops such as coconuts, hot peppers, passion fruit and soursop, the project is expected to prompt the development of the community through improved employment, contract farming and technical as well as business advisory services.



Results showing seedlings grown in different ratios of Nutmoss potting media by CARDI Grenada

## Introducing Nutmoss a locally produced potting mix

Unused stockpiles of decomposing nutmeg shells have been given a new lease on life by the Grenada Cooperative Association (GCNA). Collected shells have been ground up, mixed with peat moss and packaged as a potting media for use by farmers, nursery operators and home gardeners. The GCNA has branded it as Nutmoss Potting Mix.

CARDI Grenada tested several concentrations of the mixes ranging from the pure 100% media, to those combined with peat moss at ratios of 75%, 50% and 25% respectively, as a potting media. In collaboration with the GCNA, the results were demonstrated on the use and effectiveness of the mix to agriculture retail stores, nursery operators and farmers, on 23 July, 2020 at the CARDI Field Station, Westerhall, St David.

Across the board the results were excellent! Not only were the seedlings healthy but, the root balls were also well developed and vigorous. According to Reginald Andall, CARDI Representative in Grenada and Agronomist “this potting mix is very easy and it fits very well in one’s vegetable seedling production. It has tremendous potential for the agriculture sector, not just in Grenada but around the Caribbean, as it can be easily exported.”

Agronomist Ronald O’Neale, explained that for every thousand pounds of nutmegs that is processed by the GCNA, 300 pounds of nutmeg shells are generated. The positive results of these mixes as an alternative potting media in nursery production presents an agripreneurial opportunity and the creation of a potential spin off industry. The GCNA hopes this mix can be commercialized in the near future, so reducing the dependence on imported potting media.

## Young women complete CARDI Internship

CARDI has explicitly stated its commitment to the development of young professionals in the Region. Through our internship programme, individuals are provided with the opportunity for personal and professional development. Such programmes also support the institutional strengthening thrust of the Institute and its partners.

From July 13-31, CARDI hosted two interns from the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), at its headquarters in Trinidad and Tobago. They were attached to the Resource Mobilization and Planning Unit. The ladies, Gamali Waldron and Narissa Moonan were both final year students pursuing their undergraduate degree in Agriculture and Entrepreneurship. As a fulfilment of the degree, the interns were required to complete training in the industry, to obtain the necessary work experience and exposure in the agriculture sector.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the internship period though short, was structured to expose both students to different aspects of CARDI’s work. They assisted in the development of several commodity profiles and contributed ideas to the Institute’s Big Data Working Group. The interns also got the opportunity to experience aspects of CARDI’s field work first hand. They visited and interacted with hot pepper farmers in Barrackpore, Piparo and Chaguanas. Through the use of CARDI’s technologies, their interaction was not only limited to staff at Headquarters but with Country Representatives in Belize, St. Lucia, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands - who were able to share their knowledge and experience with the interns.

Overall, the interns were able to increase their awareness about CARDI and the role of the Institute in advancing agricultural research to develop the sector. They termed the experience as valuable, knowledgeable and critical to the completion of their degree. CARDI appreciates the candid feedback provided by these young professionals on the operations of the organisation and as stated by the Executive Director, Barton Clarke, “welcomed this mutually beneficial relationship.”



Interns enjoy a day out in the field with the CARDI Trinidad and Tobago Unit



Students, principal and a WHYFARM representative harvesting sweet potato planted at the San Fernando TML Primary School. (Photo courtesy: WHYFARM)

## Supporting Youth in Agriculture

We Help You-th FARM (WHYFARM) is a non-profit organisation, originating in Trinidad and Tobago, established to “help counter the challenges relating to food insecurity in communities around the world, by providing young men and women with the knowledge and skills necessary to recognize opportunities in the agricultural sector.”

CARDI Trinidad and Tobago Unit was pleased to have helped WHYFARM establish a 96 square foot sweet potato plot at the San Fernando, TML Primary School. This was part of the “Plant your Plate” initiative of the South West Regional Health Authority’s Health and Dietetic Department, where the produce grown will go back to the hospitals to feed patients. This move supplements patients’ diets with healthier, wholesome foods while decreasing the hospital’s food bill.

CARDI donated the sweet potato cuttings from a mass-produced batch, which was originally sourced from the well-known sweet potato farmer and breeder, Mr Ramdeo Boondoo. In early March, the standard two pupils of the school learnt about the production of this local staple and actively participated in establishing the crop. The school plot was established with two unusual but tasty cultivars, White-UBW1 and Purple-UBP1.

CARDI also provided technical advice on improved production practices such as appropriate plant spacing, pre-plant treatment and harvest indicators. The use of pesticides, was limited due to the exposure of the plot to children. These recommendations, along with the support of WHYFARM and teachers, aided the students with the knowledge to conduct best practices and have the healthiest harvest possible. In July, although crop care was affected by the COVID 19 restrictions which saw schools closed for an extended period, 152 pounds of sweet potato were harvested from the plot.

CARDI is proud to be part of this venture as we continue to support youth activities in agriculture.