Ministers’ Brief

Issue 1, January 2021

- Export guidelines for St Lucian breadfruit
- Restarting dasheen export to Europe
- Intercropping in coconuts
- Strengthening cassava value chain
St Lucian breadfruit is a highly valued commodity on the international market. However, St Lucian exporters and farmers have long been encountering problems where their shipments of fresh produce were being refused at ports of entry, due to spoilage and over-ripening.

Export St Lucia, under the Taste of St Lucia branding, is aiming to improve the quality of breadfruit destined for international markets. To this end, the agency enlisted the help of CARDI to develop guidelines that can be uniformly used by current and prospective exporters to improve the quality of the exported produce. Export St Lucia is cognizant of the untapped commercial potential of this superfood and is seeking to increase the market share of the St Lucian breadfruit.

A survey was one of the first activities conducted amongst exporters to assess their knowledge of breadfruit and post-harvest practices. The results showed clear knowledge gaps existed, which may have accounted for the high losses exporters suffered.

CARDI, together with Export St Lucia, produced a full-length instructional video in English and Creole detailing the best practices for harvesting and post-harvest handling and treatment and packaging of breadfruit. The goal is to prolong the shelf life of breadfruit, ensuring it arrives at its destination in its freshest state. The guidelines address maturity indices, the timing of harvesting, the importance of reducing the field heat of fruits and a step by step walkthrough of the post-harvest treatment and packaging procedures.

Apart from the video, the guidelines were presented to farmers and exporters at a virtual webinar last November. The full-length video can be viewed @ https://bit.ly/3o6mm1H

The guidelines produced will be used by Export St Lucia for the marketing and promotion of breadfruit.
St Vincent farmers restart dasheen export to Europe

Dasheen is a widely grown crop across St Vincent and the Grenadines, important to the local diet and valued as a commodity with high export potential. Production for 2017, 2018 and 2019 was 11.9, 12.6 and 11.5 million pounds respectively. In 2017, 6.27 million pounds were exported, which valued ECS $4.8 million (Ministry of Agriculture Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation Industry and Labour (MAFFRTIL)).

In early 2020, a shipment of dasheen originating from St Vincent and the Grenadines was impounded by European authorities for exceeding the recommended Maximum Residue Level (MRL) of the chemical Metalaxyl. Metalaxyl based chemicals such as Ridomil Gold® are approved for post-harvest treatments of root crops, including dasheen, to preserve them against fungal rots during shipping and storage in the destination country.

To restart export, authorities requested that dasheen be treated based on recommended guidelines and samples tested by an accredited pesticide residue testing laboratory. The Eastern Caribbean Trading Agriculture and Development Organisation (ECTAD) sought technical assistance from CARDI and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation Industry and Labour (MAFFRTIL) to rectify this situation, which directly impacted the livelihoods of hundreds of farmers.

In September, CARDI Scientist Gregory Linton and officials from MAFFRTIL demonstrated the recommended treatment procedures and necessary precautions to packhouse workers, assisted with the identification of an accredited lab to do pesticide residue testing and also trialled the use of a new, locally-produced lime sulphur base organic treatment.

Following these interventions, the first shipment of dasheen arrived in the United Kingdom in November and pesticide residue tests, performed by Concept Life Sciences Analytical & Development Lab, showed that no metalaxyl residues were detected.

Both treatments were effective in preserving the dasheen for the long trip across the Atlantic and in storage in distribution centres.

This resulted in 800 boxes of dasheen being exported to France and the United Kingdom in December—generating a guaranteed source of income for 300 farmers and farm families.
Commercial intercropping of coconuts in Guyana

CARDI Guyana has overseen the construction of two climate-smart shade houses. Located on private holdings in Dalgin and Mahaica, these shade houses will be dedicated to demonstrating alternative intercropping options for coconut farmers, as a means of both diversifying their operations and multiplying their income stream.

CARDI, in collaboration with the National Agricultural and Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), will also develop a manual on good agricultural practices for intercropping coconuts. From the data collected from these operations, recommendations for the optimum combination of crops to achieve profitability will be presented. Emphasis is being placed on high valued intercrops.

CARDI, NAREI and MoA have been providing technical support to the farmers. The agencies have already assisted with the installation of irrigation systems and worked on a soil program, which included the use of ameliorants such as charcoal/biochar and manure.

These shade houses will be used as demonstration sites, where secondary ring farmers in the communities can learn best practices and gain new knowledge on commercial intercropping of coconuts with cash crops. The plan is to scale-up the adoption of climate-smart shade houses by coconut farmers across Guyana's diverse agro-ecological zones.

The spacing between coconut plants is effective corridors for intercropping complementary crops - providing an opportunity for farmers to increase their incomes manifold.

This activity is being funded under Phase II of the European Union (EU)/CARIFORUM, Alliances for Coconut Industry Development, Expansion and Enhanced Support for the Caribbean project, jointly implemented by CARDI and International Trade Center (ITC).
To develop and enhance the cassava industry in Dominica, CARDI implemented a project with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), through funding provided by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), entitled, “Cassava Industry Development- Market Assessment and Technology Validation and Dissemination Project.” Outputs of the project include enhancing the knowledge capacity of stakeholders as well as introducing them to effective cassava production techniques.

As part of this, 40 farmers and 19 extension officers were trained using the Farmer Field School (FFS) methodology to enhance their knowledge and practical skills. The capacity of extension officers to better advise farmers on cassava production was significantly improved. On the production side, small scale cassava producers gained a better understanding of good agricultural practices involved in cassava production and insights into emerging technologies and opportunities along the value chain.

To complement these hands-on training sessions CARDI with the support of FAO will be preparing a series of information products in varying formats for stakeholders. A series of short videos will communicate, educate and share information on best practices and improved techniques for production, harvesting, post-harvest handling and value addition.

Technology packs in simple, easy to follow formats will also be produced for farmers. A series of factsheets and a manual are also being developed to provide more evidence-based information to stakeholders. The objective is to provide the most up to date, knowledge, best practices, new technologies and emerging opportunities to stakeholders along the value chain.

CARDI continues to play a major role in the development and continuation of sustainable production of the cassava industry.
CARDI and FAO collaborated on a recipe book using tropical flours.

Establishing beans in South Belize to identify and select climate tolerant varieties.

Sweet potato drought tolerance study plot in partnership with UWI Mona. This is part of the Pilot Program for Climate Resilience project funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

Evaluating 15 cultivars of peanuts (from Belize) to identify those most productive under Bahamian conditions.

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