Ministers’ Brief

Issue 9, September 2021

16th edition of Caribbean Week of Agriculture launched

Celebrating a coconut ‘farm to fork’ alliance in Barbados

Natural positive selection for coconut planting material ongoing in St Vincent and the Grenadines

Building capacity in Climate-Smart Agriculture
The 16th edition of Caribbean Week of Agriculture launched on 15th September 2021. The CWA will be held from 4th – 8th October 2021 under the theme “Transforming our food systems.” It is the first regional agriculture launched by the CARICOM Secretariat and partner organisations - the Caribbean Agricultural Development (COTED) will also be convened.

Agriculture Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) will also be convened. During the week, the main partners, as well as other regional and international agencies, will host webinars on various topics geared towards finding solutions to the challenges affecting regional agriculture. A Special Meeting of the Directors, reiterated the need for Caribbean agriculture.

Mr Mustapha stated that “Notwithstanding the obvious challenges posed by the pandemic, the time the event will be held virtually. The message is clear, not even a pandemic will stop us from doing what is necessary for the advancement of regional agriculture.” He warned that “we cannot deal with these big challenges in a piecemeal way,” pointing out that the issues were inter-connected and inter-dependent and had to be addressed in a cohesive and strategic way.

The feature address was delivered by the Minister of Agriculture for Guyana, Zulfikar Mustapha. Speaking on behalf of the Agriculture Alliance for the Coconut Industry Development Expansion and Enhanced Support for the Caribbean project, coconut farmer A.T Nicholls also producing other crops such as sweet potato and cassava for the local market. Farmer Nicholls has dedicated 225 coconut palms of the 5-year variety to this initiative. This variety has a thicker flesh when compared to the 3-year variety. A.T Nicholls has been working in agriculture for decades. He started with cash crops including sugar cane and moved into planting coconut trees in 2006, which has become part of his retirement plan. Presently, with his small staff, he processes coconut water and cane juice while also producing molasses with coconut flesh. This venture may assist in reviving the sugarcane industry while stimulating growth in the coconut industry. According to Mr. Nicholls, while the Barbadian community by promoting and making the very best rum but also on supporting the development of value chains in the Caribbean by the CARICOM Secretariat and partner organisations - the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute.

Dr Julio Antonio Berdegue, FAO Assistant Director-General, in bringing remarks noted that the importance and the crucial role and place, indicative of the commitment, determination, and solve problems of praedial larceny and allow us to adapt and mitigate climate change technology, training, incentives and funding will be extracted and infused into one of the company's newest product offerings - Plantation Cut & Dry.

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In St Vincent and the Grenadines, CARDI is working with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour (MAFFRTIL) to increase the supply of coconut planting material. According to the MAFFRTIL’s Agri Export Strategy Initiative, St Vincent is targeting to replant approximately 150 acres of coconut per year.

Under the European Union/CARIFORUM supported “Alliances for the Coconut Industry Development Expansion and Enhanced Support for the Caribbean” project, the Institute is sourcing local planting material through natural positive selection. Here, CARDI is identifying, geo-referencing and characterizing superior mother plants on farmers’ plots. According to CARDI Representative in St Vincent and the Grenadines, Gregory Linton, “among criteria being used to evaluate the palms are their physical attributes, productive capacity, size of fruits, thickness of the kernels and water content.”

CARDI and MAFFRTIL are collaborating to strengthen the coconut nurseries at the Dumbarton Agricultural Station and later the Wallilabou Agricultural Station. Currently, 20 private farmers are involved in the programme but this is expected to increase as the project progresses.

By the end of 2021, the project is aiming to add 5,000 seed nuts to production, of which 70% will be the Atlantic Tall variety. Emphasis is being placed on the Atlantic Tall as many farmers on the island are opting for dwarf varieties in their operations. This initiative will also assist in conserving the variety. Complementing this initiative is the lead farmer approach. Under the project, lead farmers were selected in different agricultural regions to demonstrate good agricultural practices as it relates to coconut nursery establishment and management. Through the participatory approach, secondary ring farmers will gain knowledge and practical skills to improve their on-farm operations. Presently, 17 lead farmers have been selected in 3 agricultural regions, located in the green and yellow zones. Through the project, CARDI is working with local stakeholders to improve the coconut value chain as the market demand for fresh and end products are on the rise.

The latest report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) explicitly warns that the “planet is experiencing nearly unprecedented rising temperatures and carbon concentration levels and human activity is the “unequivocal” driver.”

In the Caribbean, agriculture will be among the most impacted by the climate crisis. The projected higher temperatures, increased heatwaves and floods will lead to higher crop failures and a decrease in production and productivity. To adapt and mitigate against these negative fallouts, the sector must be climate proofed. CARDI Jamaica, under the aegis of the Pilot Programme for Climate Resilience (PPCR), hosted a webinar series that introduced participants to Climate-Smart Agriculture and the components of the Climate-Smart Agriculture – Compliance Model (CSAC Model). Leading regional climate scientist and webinar facilitator, Steve Maximay advised that the CSAC Model provides a checklist guide to determine how closely the project or process under review satisfies five areas of compliance. These areas are resource conservation, energy use, safety, biodiversity and greenhouse gas reduction.

The objective of the webinar series was to equip decision-makers, policy makers and implementers and agriculturalists with a better understanding of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA). The areas targeted were soil and water management, irrigation management, integrated pest management (IPM), risk management, livestock management and cropping systems for important commodities. Participants were exposed to Climate-Smart practices that can be adopted to sustainably improve production, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience in the above mentioned areas.

More than 1200 participants attended the sessions with 43% of those in attendance representing farmers and farmers’ groups. Lyndonna Mark, a representative of the Climate Smart Agriculture and Rural Enterprise Programme (SAEP), Grenada, was thankful for the knowledge gleaned during these sessions. She is enthusiastic to introduce the CSA technologies in her network to increase food production. The full presentations can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdlXU1AK_1AgXjHHz0ENUQg.
From the field

Guyana

An 8 part video series on Cassava production in Trinidad and Tobago can now be viewed on the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (MALF) YouTube channel. These videos were prepared by CARDI and MALF.

Trinidad and Tobago

Peter Wills, a private coconut nursery operator from St David’s, is the beneficiary of a 700 plant coconut nursery under the regional coconut project. From here he has already supplied approximately 300 seedlings to another coconut farmer.

Grenada

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Barbados

Farmer Nicholls will be supplying coconuts to WIRD for the manufacture of one of their newest premium drinks. This relationship was facilitated under the regional coconut project.

Guyana

Officer-in-Charge, CARDI Guyana, Jhaman Kundun (r) and CEO of the Caribbean Agricultural Commercial Services Hub (CACSH) Maurice Wilson (l) met with Acting President of Guyana, Brigadier the Honourable Mark Phillips (c) to discuss the commercial potential of Agriculture.

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