



**CARIBBEAN AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

April 1, 2008

Welcome and opening remarks

By

H. Arlington D Chesney

Executive Director, CARDI

Regional sweet potato workshop

Sunset Shores Hotel

St Vincent and the Grenadines

March 26-28, 2008

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Reuben Robertson, Chief Agricultural Officer (acting), Ms Pathleen Titus, CARDI Country Representatives of Diplomatic Agencies and Regional and Hemispheric Institutions, members of the Ministry of Agriculture, Ladies and Gentlemen, my colleagues from CARDI, Members of the Media. Good morning.

It is indeed a deep pleasure to welcome all of you this morning. When I was asked to take up the position of Executive Director of CARDI, I recognized that there was a challenge to make CARDI responsive in a total and timely fashion to the needs and requirements of the regional agricultural sector: a challenge to make CARDI useful to the Government, in general, and the rural community, in particular and thereby improving its image.

This workshop is one of many actions, both within and outside of the Institute, to address this challenge. It is to be noted that there are three pillars that underpin CARDI's actions. These are:-

- Bottom up, client led
- Working together; and
- Transparency and accountability

These pillars do not represent a new philosophy for the Institutes. They have been used for some time by IICA and more recently FAO has been pursuing at least the first two pillars.

In addition, in the implementation of these actions, there are two scenarios that are uppermost. Firstly, agriculture encompasses the entire product chain, from production of inputs to the sale of the final product. This requires CARDI professionals to understand the characteristics of activities and products at all sectors of the chain even though they conduct only on -farm research.

The second scenario is that CARDI in the immediate future will be harvesting the "low hanging fruits". That is concentrating on obtaining results that are visible and bring immediate and tangible benefits to the enterprise and/or industry. These results will contribute to the enhancement of the quality of rural life and the improvement of the contribution of agriculture to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

How does this workshop fit into the above paradigm?

In pursuit of the first pillar, "bottom up client led" there were national consultations to determine what were the priorities of member countries and to which of these priorities they would wish CARDI to work on. Analysis of the results of these consultations revealed that the achievement of competitiveness of four commodities was of major importance to a

significant majority of CARDI member countries. These commodities are hot peppers, small ruminants, cereals and grain legumes and sweet potato. Incidentally, the latter three commodities or substitutes were identified in the regional food basket that contributes to the high cost of living in the Region.

Therefore, the next step within the pillar, bottom up, client led is to determine very specifically what are the requirements and characteristics of the industries. This workshop is the activity for the sweet potato industry. In this regard, the workshop brings together persons from a number of institutions and ministries that are involved in Research and Development at the farm and value added components of the chain. There are also some farmers.

The choice of these participants is consistent with the key elements of the pillar, “working together” and the holistic definition of the agriculture sector. At the end of the workshop, we would

- I. Detail the Research and Development needed to satisfy these requirements in totality and that of CARDI, specifically
- II. Achieve the establishment of an industry cluster at the national and regional levels that would guide the Research and Development activities, in terms of its phasing and the minimization of overlap, thus maximizing the results of our individual and collective scarce results
- III. Identify priority projects for the seeking of finance

Finally, St Vincent and the Grenadines was chosen as the location for this workshop because it is one of the largest producers of potatoes in the Region. In addition, it is also one of the countries that CARDI has chosen for the development of Centres of Emphasis with the aim of them becoming Centres of Excellence. In this case, sweet potato.

Once again, I wish you a warm welcome and look forward to working with you during this workshop and many productive years thereafter for the betterment of the sweet potato industry, agriculture and the rural communities in the Region.

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