



Specialists in Food, Nutrition and Agriculture to combat health problems in the Region

SPECIALISTS in food and nutrition, health and agriculture from nearly 20 countries across the Caribbean region have pledged as a priority to reactivate or establish Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) Councils in order to influence major policy changes in their home countries. The decision was made at a one-week Regional Seminar entitled "Information and Communication Tools for Implementation of Food and Nutrition Security Plans in the Caribbean Region" held on the 14 – 18

March 2005 in Belize.

Prime Minister Hon Said Musa of Belize in opening the event expressed concerns about what he termed the development of an insatiable appetite for foreign foods and blamed new consumption patterns and trends for increases in incidences of obesity and other health problems in Belize and the Caribbean. In his call for a return to traditional root crops, fruits and vegetables that have been proven to be healthier than North American junk diets the Prime Minister



Belize Prime Minister, Said Musa, (3rd from left) and dignitaries at the Opening Ceremony

explained that governments are the ones forced to absorb rising health care costs associated with bad diet and nutrition.

The health bill for treating diabetes in only five Caribbean countries in the last decade has topped US\$1 billion dollars. This was revealed by Dr Fitzroy Henry, Director of the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI) in his presentation to the conference. He also made reference that governments have had to

Securing food and nutrition

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divert already scarce resources to deal with growing health problems, and pointed out that cervical cancer rates in the Caribbean Region are up to 500 times higher than the global average. In addition, there is an alarming increase in cases of obesity, hypertension and even cancer, which are linked to major dietary changes.

In recognition of the relevant data and information required for effective decision making regarding food and nutrition security in the Region, the Executive Director of the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) Dr Wendel Parham, informed the delegates of their role "...to influence the various decision-makers to develop appropriate food and nutrition related policies, programmes, projects and activities as a vital part of national planning for all levels of the socio-economic structure in particular vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly and the rural poor."

He further added, "commissions should be broad based and involve a wide cross section of society including the media, the Church, labour and NGO's."

Dr Parham also called for re-assessment and strengthening of FNS councils as informed by the findings at the Belize Seminar and suggested that regional and international organisations like Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI) and CARDI seek funding in areas pinpointed by working groups. He further opined that these agencies should monitor, evaluate and support national initiatives in FNS and execute regional programs in support of their national agendas.

In this regard, delegates pledged to seek support at the level of Cabinet with respect to the necessary legislation as the Region gradually works towards greater food and nutrition security, assist in the establishment of councils, and proposed to rethink the current model of Food and Nutrition Commissions to make them more effective and independent. Hence, it was suggested that coun-



Belize, Prime Minister, Said Musa addressing the regional conference.

cils should be headed by a director and backed by supporting staff while still retaining their multi-sectoral membership. This system as explained would

BACKGROUND INFO

Food security refers to a situation where food production and distribution systems ensure a sustained food supply in sufficient quantities and quality at the national level, and is accessible to all members of the population. Globally, there has been a paradigm shift in the concept of food security. To this effect there is now greater emphasis on productivity, availability, health and nutritional goals in defining food and nutrition security.

In the Caribbean region, as a result of the improvement in the socio-economic conditions over the past 25-30 years, the incidence of energy-protein mal-nutrition and infectious disease has declined and has been replaced by non-communicable, nutrition-related chronic diseases as the major causes of death.

To date, even though most Caribbean countries have developed food and nutrition plans aimed at meeting some food and nutrition goals in respective countries the implementation of these Food and Nutrition plans has been limited and the broader concept of food and nutrition security has not been well integrated into these plans.

The recent spate of disasters such as hurricanes, flooding and earthquakes has also drawn attention to the need to take into consideration the aspect of disaster preparedness and recovery when implementing plans for food and nutrition security.

empower the director to focus more on implementation and less on co-ordination of programmes.

Several participants have also pledged to organise national seminars to inform local policy and decision-makers of their findings and recommendations within weeks of returning to their respective countries.

The delegates also supported the following recommendations: all staff working in FNS to be equally proficient in the use of both conventional and modern information tools, an aggressive programme of study visits to regional and international institutions such as CARDI, CTA and CFNI, internships at these agencies to develop skills in e-conferencing and other modern ICT tools. One notable outcome was a suggestion that an FNS surveillance system be developed for effective planning and implementation of policies. Food commissions should network with other regional agencies co-ordinated by CFNI and all efforts should be made to get the media on board.

The Belize regional seminar was organised by CTA in collaboration with CARDI, CFNI, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Belize. It is the second CTA seminar on food and nutrition. The first was held in Maputo, Mozambique in November, 2004 to examine the role of information and communication tools in food and nutrition security in Africa. The problems highlighted with respect to food and nutrition security included chronic mal-nutrition, high levels of poverty, the spectre of HIV/AIDS, and low productive capacity which are different in emphases to those of the Caribbean region. The final one is set for Apia, Samoa in July 2005.



Tolerance of non-venemous snakes - useful allies in crop pest control.

As the premier institute for excellence in research and development in the CARICOM Community, CARDI along with its strategic partners strives to develop food crop production systems that protect the natural resource base and meet international standards for food safety. To widen the scope of eco-supportive farming methods offered to its clients, the Institute began developmental research in viable organic farming systems in 1999 with the hiring of Mrs Joan Petersen-Polo whose specialist area is certified organic agriculture.

Today, a major focal point of CARDI's work with this crop production methodology is at the Goldsborough Demonstration and Training Centre (GDTC) in Tobago, which has been managed by CARDI since 1999. The present GDTC manager is Mr Karl Murray, Agronomist and Officer-in-Charge of the CARDI Tobago Unit. At the GDTC, conventional and organic farming methodologies are being developed to enable farmers to implement practices that will lead to highly competitive and safe-food outputs. The Institute is thankful for the steadfast support of the Department of Agriculture of the Tobago House of Assembly in its developmental research in appropriate farming techniques.

CARDI is in the process of establishing a 4.2-hectare pilot commercial organic farm at a site at Cow Farm Road, Goldsborough which is being developed as a sub-project of the GDTC. Here, appropriate farm practices that comply

Thinking organic



Conserving a mutant form of the common weed species, *Piper tuberculatum*.

with organic farming standards will be demonstrated and research into optimising the use of locally available resources will be conducted. The farm will also serve as an information centre of certifiable methodologies in organic food production including on-farm processing and livestock production. Mrs Petersen-Polo believes that the presence of a successful certified commercial farm is critical to



Land clearing at research area of pilot organic farm in Tobago.



Tagging citrus plants for orchard systems.

improve the rate of adoption of organic farming techniques in Trinidad and Tobago. She says the "farmers are tired of talk – it's high time for action and tangible proof that the organic farming techniques are commercially productive".

It is envisioned that the entire commercial acreage at the Cow Farm Road site will be "certified organic" by August 2007. Certification acceptable to the certification programmes of the European Union (EEC 2092/91) and the United States of America (USDA National Organic Program, NOP) will be sought through Quality Assurance International, QAI, a reputable certification agency that is an accredited EU and USDA certifier.

Commercial production in the first three years will be dedicated to organic vegetable production utilising bio intensive and alley cropping systems occupying some 1.3 hectares. The crop selection is based on a complementary range of salad vegetables including lettuce, beetroot, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, slicing and cherry tomatoes, sweet peppers, string beans and cucumbers. The fifth year of establishment should see commercial production from the farm's orchard systems coming on stream with outputs of coffee and cocoa beans, avocados, citrus, mangoes and sugar apples.

It is anticipated that the successful implementation of this pilot farm in commercial organic crop production would serve as a catalyst to the overall programme for the long-term sustainability of the agricultural sectors in the region.

Executive Director of CARDI Dr Wendel Parham in February, held discussions with Chief Secretary of the Tobago House Assembly (THA) Mr Orville London in Tobago. In this regard, an overview of the CARDI's research activities was presented to the Chief Secretary. They included the Goldsborough Demonstration and Training Centre and Cow Farm Road projects, and the Blenheim Sheep Multiplication and Research Project

Topics also discussed at the meeting included projects to generate employment and to attract young people in the field of agriculture, the Institute's work programme as well as conventional and organic production systems, among others.

To this end, the Chief Secretary issued an invitation to CARDI to review a project proposal on organic farming with

R & D in Tobago

respect to its viability. While in Tobago, Dr Parham also met with Secretary of Agriculture Mr Hilton Sandy and Tobago House of Assembly staff as they relate to Research and Development priorities for Tobago, and to initiate arrangement for the National Co-ordinating Committee for Agricultural Research and Development (NCCARD).

NCCARD is designed to co-ordinate all agricultural research and development activities in the region, and seeks to ensure that agricultural research and development programmes/projects are formulated, executed and documented in accordance with established principles, methodologies and standard.

As a result, the Executive Director outlined CARDI's strategic plan in relation to national needs and the need to strengthen collaborative linkages and to co-ordinate agricultural Research and Development through the NCCARD or other suitable mechanisms.

Dr Parham was accompanied by Head of Trinidad and Tobago Unit Mr Norman Gibson and his staff who gave a brief outline of the Livestock projects to be undertaken by CARDI. For instance the Regional Dairy Project and the Sheep Genetic Improvement Project.

The meeting ended with a commitment by all parties to continue to work together for the development of the sector. Representatives at the meeting included technicians from the public and private sectors, and from the Farmer's Association.

CARDI, CARICOM & UWI explore Regional co-operation programmes with Israel!

Representatives of CARDI, CARICOM and the University of the West Indies (UWI) on 1 March, 2005 held discussions with senior government officials of Israel in Trinidad and Tobago.

At the meeting, the representatives discussed potential areas of collaboration and co-operation between the Government and people of Israel and the people of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Areas of interest included pressurised irrigation systems, intensive vegetable production systems in controlled environments, small ruminants, horticulture production systems, organic production, development of agro-enterprises, market strategies, and training.

One of the primary objectives of CARDI is to ensure that agriculture in the Region achieves its goal of increased productivity, diversification, international competitiveness and sustainability. As a result, research and development activities were under-



CARDI Executive Director, centre, with delegates

scored at the meeting as a significant input to improve and accelerate a vibrant and sustainable agriculture sector in the Region.

To this end, issues of significance such as shade-house technology, water management as well as plant biotechnology were also discussed. In addition, special attention was given to issues such as effective organisation, training and demonstration, and cutting-edge

modern technologies.

Representatives at the meeting, included the Executive Director of CARDI Dr Wendel Parham, Manager for Research and Development (R&D) Mr Bruce Lauckner, and Mr Herman Adams of the Planning and Development unit and Mr Selwyn E King, PR Manager for CARDI.

CARICOM and UWI were represented by the Adviser to the Regional Transformation Programme for Agriculture, Mr Sam Lawrence and Professor Dyer Narinesingh, the Dean of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture respectively.

The delegation of Israel included Deputy Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Arie Arazi, Director of Projects & Special Assignments, Mr Yehuda Rozenblum, Head of Projects Section for Latin America & the Caribbean Center for International Cooperation, Mr Moshe Bachar and Ambassador Shlomo Cohen.

Contact Information

CARDI Headquarters, P.O. Bag 212, UWI Campus, St Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago
TEL: 868 645 1205-7 ; FAX: 868 645 1208
EMAIL: publicrelations@cardi.org or publications@cardi.org
CARDI Website: <http://www.cardi.org>

Editorial Team

Editor: Selwyn E King
Design & Layout: Candice Dubarry
Photos: Keith Roach
Circulation: Trevor Christo & Keith Roach