The Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), continues to play a major research and development role in St. Lucia. The CARDI Unit in St. Lucia is located in the Mabouya Valley at La Resource in Dennery and has developed appropriate technological packages, trained Extension Officers of the Ministry of Agriculture and farmers, provided agricultural information and much needed planting material to farmers for increasing sustainable food crop production. Such initiatives have complemented the Ministry of Agriculture crop diversification programme.

The CARDI UNIT BRIEF is an attempt to sensitise CARDI’s stakeholders on a monthly basis over the next five months of some of the Units activities and their impact on the agricultural sector. This month Brief focuses on passion fruit and banana ripening.

**IMPROVING PASSION FRUIT PRODUCTION**

Passion fruit (*Passiflora edulis*) belongs to the family passifloraceae. Its strong and unique exotic flavour and aroma resembling a combination of guava and pineapple makes it one of the popular refreshing fruit drinks of the Caribbean. The juice is very nutritious with high quantities of Vitamin A, and fair quantities of thiamine, Riboflavin and Vitamin C. The juice is extracted from the pulp surrounding the seed, which is usually sweetened and diluted for drinking, canned, or used to make syrups and flavourings for mixing cocktails, rum punches and commercial fruit beverages.

Many yellow types of passion fruit exist. CARDI has introduced a high yielding Columbian cultivar which is yellow in colour and is recommended to farmers for production. It is now the most popular type cultivated on the island (Plates 1 and 2). Farmers have been trained in utilizing a more cost effective and sustainable improved production system.
This involves the establishment of an I-trellis system using locally available post and discarded telephone cable wire (Plates 3). A demonstration plot was established at the CARDI Demonstration and Training Centre (DTC) where Extension Officers and farmers observed the improved production system.

Validation trials were established on two farmers’ holdings in the Mabouya valley for comparing the farmers’ system of production and CARDI’s recommended improved system. The improved system yielded more than the farmers’ system by 25% and was also more cost effective with cost of production reduced by 16%. Seedling planting material has also been distributed to over 30 farmers island-wide (Plate 4). The Unit continues to make available to farmers planting material (Plate 5) upon request, at a highly subsidized price of EC$1.50/plant at the CARDI DTC at La Resource in the Mabouya Valley.

Because of the demand for ripe bananas from the supermarkets and the general public, CARDI designed a small scale ripening facility for the commercial production of ripe bananas. A banana ripening protocol was developed and a model ripening facility was established at its DTC to demonstrate the ripening procedures to entrepreneurs who may wish to explore such a venture (Plate 6).
Technical assistance was provided to Mr. Raphael St. Mark of Fond Assau, Babonneau in establishing a commercial small scale banana ripening facility. His output is approximately forty cartons (40 lb each) of ripe bananas per week and supplies mainly the super markets and some roadside vendors (Plates 7, 8 and 9). Mr. St. Mark is quite pleased with assistance he obtained from CARDI and has since expanded the capacity of his facility as he continues to generate much needed income from such a successful venture. CARDI in an effort to portray goodwill in the La Ressource, Dennery area where it operates embarked on a programme in providing two cartons of ripe bananas weekly to schools in and attempt to help improve the dietary and health of school children within the community. Green fruit was provided to CARDI gratis from the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College farm and neighbouring Fair Trade banana farmers which were ripened at the CARDI facility (Plate 10). This activity though a good gesture lasted for only one month as it could not be sustained due to the decline in banana production within the area.
**CARDI** is the leading Agricultural Research and Development organization in the Caribbean. It was established in 1975 to serve the agricultural and development needs of the member states of CARICOM. CARDI is governed by the Ministers of Agriculture of CARICOM Member States. This body approves the budget and provides the Board of Directors with general guidelines concerning policy and programmes. The Board of Directors is composed of representatives of Member States, Universities of the West Indies and Guyana, the Caribbean Development Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and CARICOM Secretariat.

**CARDI Mission**

To contribute to the sustainable development of Caribbean people by the generation, transfer and application of appropriate technologies through agricultural research for development.

Website: www.cardi.org