

IMPROVING CARIBBEAN FOOD & NUTRITION SECURITY AND THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY WITH THE “POOR MAN’S COW” AND THE HUMBLE SHEEP

Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo, July 21st, 2016 – Stop at any roadside market in the Caribbean and you’re likely to be able to buy fresh mutton and goat meat. Despite the fact that CARICOM producers have difficulty competing with the price of imported products, they have no trouble selling their meat at these markets. Most Caribbean residents know that fresh, local meat makes a much better meal.

However, if you stop at your neighborhood grocery store, you may have trouble finding local meat from small ruminants. There is a high demand for these products in the Caribbean, and Regional producers can only meet 25% of that demand. According to a CARDI report on “The Small Ruminant Industry in CARICOM countries” (2013), the Region imports 75% of small ruminant products from countries like New Zealand and Australia.

The high cost of production for local farmers contributes to a lower supply of small ruminants and hurts their ability to get their products into grocery stores. They face substantial competition from international suppliers who can sell at a lower price. Due to factors such as high feed costs, lack of access to information and research, lack of quality breeding stock and the lack of cooperatives in the industry, it is difficult for Caribbean farmers to lower their prices in order to both survive and compete.

Yet, the growth of the small ruminant industry has the potential to make positive and significant social and economic impact in the Caribbean. According to the 2013 CARDI report, growth of the industry could contribute to “employment generation, foreign exchange earnings and foreign exchange savings through import substitution, poverty alleviation and food and nutrition security.”

It is for these reasons that Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) and the Dominican Institute of Agricultural and Forestry Research (IDIAF) have joined together as part of the Intra-ACP Agricultural Policy Programme (APP) to present a comprehensive regional training workshop on Improved Breed Management and Techniques for Small Ruminants in the Dominican Republic from July 25th to 29th, 2016. The workshop is designed to practically help small ruminant farmers and institutional technicians build their knowledge and skills in the hopes of meeting more of the Regional demand for their products. As a result, Regional farmers will be able to put more money in their pockets and more affordable, local food on the plates of Caribbean residents. Institutional technicians will conduct similar training workshop in the country on their return with other farmer and farmer groups.

The IDIAF is the state institution responsible for the implementation of agricultural policy, research and validation in the Dominican Republic. They have long played an important role in the development of the agricultural sector in the country. The IDIAF mission is “to contribute to food security and the competitiveness of Dominican agri-businesses”. They aim to do this through the use of new technologies that are economically and environmentally sustainable, and by integrating and promoting interaction between institutions and the public agricultural sector, all with the purpose of helping to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life for Dominicans.

The IDIAF is well-suited to host the small ruminant workshop. It has a research center just outside of Santo Domingo that specializes in livestock, particularly, small ruminants, common to the Caribbean. The center is home to specialized researchers in the technological development of animal production, pasture, forage and more. They also have experimental facilities across the country, many of which will be visited during the workshop.

Access to accurate, timely and quality information for agricultural producers is a primary concern of the IDIAF. One of their priorities is to train agricultural technicians and leading producers in order to transfer IDIAF researched and

validated technologies. They also seek to improve the process adoption by users of those technologies so that they can compete in an increasingly globalized market. This is exactly what they will be aiming to achieve at the regional training workshop.

Participants of the workshop will visit several local sheep and goat farms, learn techniques in artificial insemination and embryo transfer and the use of specialised software for breed selection, good agricultural practices for the preparation of hay bales and silage. Visits to sheep and goats farms with high genetic production will provide an opportunity for learning about extraction and evaluation for goat insemination. And, visits to the IDIAF Experimental Stations will expose farmers to on-going research and validation projects that will benefit the small ruminant industry in the long-run.

The Improved Breed Management and Techniques for Small Ruminants workshop offers an excellent opportunity to advance CARICOM producers and producer groups in their drive to develop the small ruminant industry in the Region. It directly addresses the challenges to the industry noted by CARDI in their 2013 report.

By looking at new forage options and good agricultural practices for preparing fodder, high feed costs could be reduced. It also provides an opportunity to demonstrate to farmers the use of technologies for combatting the effects of climate change. Currently, feed costs make up 50% of the total cost of production for sheep and 25% for goat. If these costs can be reduced, farmers can become more competitive in their pricing compared to international import competition. Also, by providing access to new information and research, farmers will be able to improve their breeding stock which will result in higher quality animals, increased birth rates and bigger herds and flocks.

There is a clear and healthy demand for small ruminant products in the Caribbean. And, the social and economic benefits of growing the industry are obvious. Perhaps the goat will no longer be called the “poor man’s cow” when people begin to understand the value and social and economic benefits which they can bring to the Region.

For More Information on the workshop, please contact Richard Rampersaud, Technical Coordinator, C2 APP, CARDI, by email at rrampersaud@cardi.org.



The intra-ACP APP is funded under the 10th European Development Fund (EDF)