



For Immediate Release

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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12<sup>th</sup> May, 2022

### **CARDI recognizes the 1<sup>st</sup> International Day of Plant Health**

The International Day of Plant Health brings into focus the importance of plant health in addressing global hunger, as plant pests and diseases cause massive crop losses and leave millions without enough food. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that annually up to 40 percent of global crop production is lost to pests. Each year, plant diseases cost the global economy over \$220 billion, and invasive insects at least \$70 billion<sup>1</sup>.

Plants are the basis of life and for us working in agriculture, safeguarding their health is a direct response towards: achieving food and nutrition security, combating hunger, reducing food loss and wastage and protecting the livelihoods of farmers. It is an area of focus under the Institute's Value Chain programme.

In the Caribbean, plant health is under mounting pressure from the introduction of new and re-emerging pests and diseases as a result of increased movement of people, trade, development and climate change. The introduction and spread of plant pests and diseases are serious threats that have far-reaching economic, social and environmental consequences.

Over the years we have witnessed the devastating economic impacts of introduced pests and diseases such as the Coffee Berry Borer, Pink Hibiscus Mealy bug, Citrus Tristeza virus, Citrus Greening, Fruit Flies, Thrips, Red Palm Mite (Coconuts) and Lethal Yellowing (Coconuts) on regional agriculture. It is estimated that throughout the Caribbean the Pink (Hibiscus) Mealybug caused an average of US \$138 million in losses. In Jamaica, the presence of Lethal Yellowing completely destroyed a coconut farm with 11,838 Maypan trees in St. Ann, which translated to a loss of JM \$24, 859,800 (US dollars 207,165)<sup>2</sup> to the farmer.

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<sup>1</sup> Climate change fans spread of pests and threatens plants and crops, new FAO study.  
<https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1402920/icode/>

<sup>2</sup> Economic aspects of Coconut Lethal Yellowing in Jamaica.  
<https://www.tropicsafe.eu/economic-aspects-coconut-lethal-yellowing-jamaica/>

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has reported that the eradication programme for the Giant African Snail in the core area of Diego Martin costed the Government TT\$ 20 Million over the period 2008 – 2018<sup>3</sup>. Today, the snail can be found across the country.

Due to the presence of pests and diseases farmers have been unable to export their produce and thriving industries have gone into decline. Now the region braces for other pending threats such as the Fusarium wilt Tropical Race 4, tomato leafminer (*Tuta absoluta*), Citrus Canker and Ralstonia.

CARDI recognizes that plant health is key to the sustainable development of agriculture. As part of the Value Chain Programme, the Institute actively promotes an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach to managing pests and diseases. The idea is to move producers from the traditional reliance on chemicals, especially, broad spectrum synthetics. IPM balances the need to maintain pest numbers below levels that will cause economic damage with minimizing risks to the environment and health. Researchers have collaborated and continues to work with scientists from various Ministries, universities and research institutions, to test options and to develop IPM systems; emphasizing non chemical tactics and, if required, the use of more selective, less toxic pesticides.

Strategies include:

- Producing clean planting material – seeds (hot peppers, beans and grains) and vegetative planting material for cassava, sweet potato
- Promoting good agronomic practices and field sanitation
- Pheromone trapping (sweet potato weevil, cockle beetle and South American palm weevil in coconuts)
- Biological control – screening of natural enemies as well as introduced enemies
- Exclusion using low cost protective structures
- Use of pest tolerant varieties (hot pepper, sweet potato, banana) and new bio-rational pesticides

These strategies have been promoted in training workshops for trainers and farmers.

CARDI is an executive member of the Caribbean Plant Health Directors Forum (CPHD). The Institute also coordinates regional dialogue on areas of interest, gives technical support to national initiatives, conducts joint research and capacity building efforts and facilitates information sharing.

The Region's geographic location and free movement of people mean that we have to be vigilant regarding the introduction of new pests and diseases. Ideally, prevention is better, as eradicating and managing established pests and diseases are both expensive and time consuming.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (2022) Research Division: Managing the Giant African Snail in Trinidad. Available online [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z\\_8kgXjPJZI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_8kgXjPJZI)



On the occasion of the International Day for Plant Health the institute reaffirms our commitment to working with partners and donors to finding solutions that strengthen our plant health systems. CARDI strives to generate and disseminate information on scientific-based solutions for the prevention, monitoring, and management of pests and diseases, share information and equip farmers with the skills so they can produce healthier crops, increase their incomes and improve their livelihoods.

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### **About CARDI**

CARDI ([www.cardi.org](http://www.cardi.org)) was established in 1974 to serve the agricultural research and development needs of the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). CARDI is positioned to contribute to the sustainable development of the Caribbean by the co-generation, diffusion and application of knowledge, through agricultural research for development. The Institute's Headquarters is located at the University Campus, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

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