Agriculture Ministry seeks to reduce food import bill by Glenis A. Rose. Jamaica Information Service, 3 April 2013

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is seeking to reduce the food importation bill from US$1 billion to US$700 million in the short to medium term. “We have targeted some 8,000 acres of government lands that we intend to put into the hands of farmers and we are committed to putting in the basic infrastructure to help to get those lands into production,” said Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon. Roger Clarke.

For more information see page 14

AGRICULTURE IN THE NEWS is a monthly newsletter which provides a compilation of selected news articles on issues affecting agriculture in the Caribbean region. Articles from Newspapers, Online News Service Agencies, Newsletters and Press Releases are featured.

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Our Vision

To be the centre of excellence in the Caribbean for the provision and application of research and development in agriculture and rural enhancement.

Our Mission

To contribute to the sustainable economic well being of Caribbean people by the generation and transfer of appropriate technology through research and development within the agricultural value chain.

www.cardi.org
Cereals and Grain Legumes

Corn stays lower by Business Recorder, 3 April, 2013
http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/1170142/

Full Article

Corn prices fell early on Tuesday for a third straight session, touching a nine-month low, as funds kept liquidating positions after the US government reported last week that stockpiles were much larger than expected. Soyabeans slid, led by corn, while wheat clung to modest gains, recovering some ground lost in the slump that followed Thursday's stocks report by the US Department of Agriculture.

At the Chicago Board of Trade as of 12:30 pm CDT (1730 GMT), May corn was down 6-3/4 cents at $6.35-1/2 per bushel and May soyabeans down 2-3/4 cents at $13.88 a bushel. May wheat was up 3-1/4 cents at $6.67-1/4 a bushel. Corn sagged after an early relief rally fizzled.

"Traders are cautious and uncertain whether the fund liquidation that has been pressing the market lower is complete," said Shawn McCambridge, grains analyst with Jefferies Bache in Chicago. "We've nailed this market so hard but could not generate much follow-through buying," McCambridge added.

The market was still digesting USDA's stocks figures. The government on Thursday reported US corn stocks as of March 1 at 5.4 billion bushels, well above the average analyst estimate for about 5 billion. Stocks of soyabeans and wheat also came in above expectations, and the USDA said farmers would plant the most acres to corn since 1936. CBOT corn prices have fallen nearly $1 a bushel, or 13 percent, since the USDA reports were released. The drop in CBOT corn prices during Thursday and Monday totalled 12.6 percent, the biggest two-day decline in data dating back to 1959, an exchange spokesman said.

Funds have been aggressive sellers, selling an estimated 75,000 corn contracts during those two sessions. Yet open interest in CBOT corn showed little change since before USDA's report. Open interest rose by more 16,000 contracts, or 1.2 percent, during Thursday's sell-off and fell by roughly the same amount on Monday. "That tells me there are some longs hanging in the market," said Ken Smithmier, analyst with the Hightower Report in Chicago. When the sell-off in corn will end is anybody's guess, but signs should emerge from a rise in demand in the cash market, said Don Roose, president of US Commodities in West Des Moines, Iowa.

CBOT soyabeans turned lower with the new-crop November contract leading the way down. New-crop soyabeans have gained value relative to corn, a factor that could motivate US farmers to switch some corn acres over to soyabeans when planting begins in the coming weeks. (Copyright Reuters, 2013)
GRAINS-Wheat up for second day on demand hopes; corn, soy lower by Julie Ingwersen. CNBC, 4 April, 2013
http://www.cnbc.com/id/100613854

Full Article

Chicago Board of Trade wheat rose more than 2 percent Wednesday on concern about poor U.S. crop weather and expectations of strong global demand for U.S. supplies after prices fell to a nine-month low earlier this week. Corn was choppy and trying to stabilize after three straight losing sessions following last week's U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report, which surprised investors with estimates of big U.S. corn and wheat stockpiles. Soybeans fell on worries that feed demand in China might be slowing with a new avian flu strain emerging, and as traders unwound long soy/short corn spread positions. At the CBOT as of 12:45 p.m. CDT (1745 GMT), May wheat was up 18-1/2 cents at $6.89-1/4 per bushel. May corn was down 1-3/4 cents at $6.38-3/4 a bushel and May soybeans were down 15-1/2 cents at $13.78-1/2 a bushel. Wheat rose in part on concerns about dry conditions in the southern U.S. Plains.

Welcome rains are forecast for the region this week but may miss the southwestern portion of the belt. Expectations that the sharp drop in CBOT wheat prices this week could trigger export demand added support. Also, China's state-owned agricultural trading company, COFCO, has complained about the baking performance of some Canadian spring wheat shipments and suggested it may import more U.S. wheat instead.

"U.S. wheat is supposedly the cheapest in the world, even cheaper than Australian. A combination of those things, with the funds being short, has made wheat the upside leader," said Jim Gerlach, president of A/C Trading in Fowler, Indiana. Cold weather in Europe lifted European wheat futures. A wave of cold weather across France in recent weeks could hit grain crop yields by 5 to 6 percent if it lasts beyond mid-April, a scientist at the French National Institute for Agricultural Research said.

CORN TURNS LOWER IN CHOPPY TRADE CBOT corn turned lower on choppy trade as the market struggled to find its footing after plunging roughly $1 per bushel, or 13 percent, since USDA's blockbuster quarterly stocks report last week. The government pegged U.S. corn stocks as of March 1 at 5.4 billion bushels, well above the average analyst estimate of about 5 billion. Stocks of soybeans and wheat also came in above expectations, and the USDA said farmers would plant the most acres to corn since 1936. Commodity funds sold an estimated 81,000 corn contracts in the three sessions after the report's release, and open interest in CBOT corn fell by more than 40,000 contracts this week.

By Wednesday, fund liquidation appeared to have slowed but continued to hang over the market. "With wheat being 10 to 20 cents higher, I am shocked that corn is not higher. It tells you there is still massive length in that market that has to get cleaned up," said Mark Schultz, analyst at Northstar Commodity in Minneapolis. Bearish moves in corn options pressured values. Traders said Rand Financial bought at least 3,500 December $4 corn puts. CBOT December corn, which represents the 2013 U.S. harvest, was trading at $5.35-1/2 a bushel, but some analysts have said the contract could drop to around $4 if favorable summer weather results in a record-large crop.

Also, private analytics firm Informa Economics raised its estimates of 2012/13 corn production in Argentina and Brazil and 2013/14 production in China. Informa estimated Brazil's 2012/13 corn crop, which is currently being harvested, at 71.95 million tonnes, up from 71.6 million previously, and Argentina's corn harvest at 25.3 million tonnes, up from 25.0 million previously. The firm raised its forecast for China's 2013/14 corn production to 213 million tonnes, from 205 million previously, citing an increase in expected plantings.
SOYBEANS SAG ON WORRIES ABOUT BIRD FLU Soybeans fell on seasonal pressure from the expanding soy harvest in Brazil and Argentina, as well as concerns about feed demand in China, the world's top soy buyer. Chinese state media on Wednesday announced two more cases of a new strain of bird flu, including one death, bringing to nine the number of confirmed human infections from the previously unknown flu type. Most-active September soymeal futures on China's Dalian exchange fell 2 percent amid worries that the flu could lower demand for poultry feed.

"There is a lot of uncertainty with this avian flu, this new strain in China, (and) fears that, due to poor livestock margins in China, they might not use as many soybeans as the USDA is stating," Gerlach said. Soybeans have also gained relative to corn since last week's USDA stocks report, a factor that prompted some traders to take profits by exiting long soy/short corn spreads.

In triplicate, genes make maize tolerant to toxic soil by Krishna Ramanujan. Cornell Chronicle, 18 March 2013
http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2013/03/triplicate-genes-make-maize-tolerant-toxic-soil

Full Article

Rendering some of the world’s toxic soils moot, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research and Cornell researchers are learning to grow stress-tolerant crops on formerly non-farmable land.

In this effort, when plant scientists searched the maize genome for clues as to why some plants can tolerate toxic aluminum in soil, they found three copies of the same gene known to affect aluminum tolerance, according to new USDA/Cornell-led research.

Aluminum toxicity comes close to rivaling drought as a food-security threat in critical tropical food-producing regions.

Acidic soils dissolve aluminum from clays in the soil, making it toxic to plant roots in half the world’s arable lands. The MATE1 gene, which was found in triplicate in aluminum-tolerant maize, turns on in the presence of aluminum ions and expresses a protein that transports citric acid from root tips into the soil, which binds to and locks up aluminum, thereby preventing it from harming roots.

“We found three functional copies that were identical,” said senior author Leon Kochian, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Agriculture Research Service (USDA-ARS) Plant, Soil and Nutrition Laboratory at Cornell. “This is one of the first examples of copy number variation contributing to an agronomically important trait.”

He added that the extra gene copies had a cumulative effect of coding for more protein that transports aluminum-binding citric acid into the soil.

The study, “Aluminum tolerance in maize is associated with higher MATE1 gene copy number,” appeared online March 11 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.
The finding points to the importance of looking for multiple copies of a gene for higher expression of certain traits. “This could be a key factor for other traits of agricultural importance,” said Kochian. The research came out of a long collaboration on aluminum tolerance with Embrapa Maize and Sorghum in Brazil, which provided the aluminum-tolerant maize germplasm where the 3-copy allele was discovered. Lead author Lyza Maron, a senior research associate at the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research at Cornell, also collaborated with researchers at the University of Florida, Gainesville, the University of Missouri, Arizona Genomics Institute and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory to verify the finding. By sequencing the genomic regions that harbor the MATE1 gene in aluminum-tolerant and aluminum-sensitive plants, she found a similar MATE1 allele (version of a gene) in both types of plants. But when she examined copy number variation, she found the aluminum-tolerant plant had three copies, while the intolerant plant had only one copy of the MATE1 allele.

“[Copy number variation] is well documented in the human genome,” Kochian said, “and maize does a lot of this, so there are probably many examples” of gene copy numbers affecting traits, he concluded. A Generation Challenge Program Grant funded this research.

Hot Peppers

Hot new chili pepper takes off in Mexico by FreshFruitPortal.com, 3 April, 2013

Full Article

With high yields, a long shelf life and tolerance to a range of pests, a new habanero chili pepper developed in Mexico has spread like wildfire.

Mexico’s National Institute of Forestry, Agriculture and Livestock (INIFAP) developed the “Jaguar” chili pepper using a germplasm from the productive areas of Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Campeche and Veracruz.

In a release, researchers from the institute said the variety now covered half of the habanero acreage nationwide. They said hybrids needed to be sought in an increasingly competitive market to ensure better quality and fewer production risks.

INIFAP claims the Jaguar’s yields are high and it is resistant to extreme environments, has longer shelf life and is tolerant to bacterial spot, root rot, viral diseases and leafminer.

The variety can reach up to 15 metric tons (MT) per hectare in areas with a good season, while yields of 30MT per hectare can be achieved with the help of drip irrigation and fertigation. This figure goes even higher to 36MT in protected horticulture conditions.

Compared to other commercial and native varieties, the Jaguar thrives well in clay soils where habanero production is normally more difficult.
Livestock

**Strong biosecurity measures required in response to influenza A(H7N9) virus.** FAO Media Centre, 5 April 2013


**FAO supports China and neighbouring countries in disease detection and animal health management**

**Full Article**

Responding to the occurrence of the A(H7N9) influenza virus in China requires strong biosecurity measures, FAO said today. Unlike other influenza strains, including highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1, this new virus is hard to detect in poultry because the novel virus causes little to no signs of disease in animals.

"Unlike H5N1, where chickens were dying off on a large scale, with this virus we don't have a red flag that immediately signals an infection. This means farmers may not be aware that virus is circulating in their flock. Biosecurity and hygiene measures will help people protect themselves from virus circulating in seemingly healthy birds or other animals," said Juan Lubroth, FAO Chief Veterinary Officer.

FAO commends China's quick notification of human cases and subsequent release of detailed information to the public on the nature of the virus and other precautionary measures. With this information, FAO and the international scientific community have been analyzing the virus sequence in hopes of better understanding its behavior and its potential impact humans and animals.

"With the virus harder to detect, good biosecurity measures become even more essential to reducing the risk of virus transmission to humans and animals. Good biosecurity and hygiene measures implemented by farmers, livestock producers, transporters, market workers and consumers represent the first and most effective way to protect the food chain," Lubroth said.

While this new virus is being evaluated, FAO continues to recommend the following standard precautions:

- Keep all birds and livestock separate from people's living areas. Close contact with infected animals can put people at risk. Since A(H7N9) causes little to no signs of disease in birds, separate living areas for animals and people is key.
- Keep wild birds away from poultry and other animals, keep different types of bird and species of animal apart. Screens, fencing or nets can be used to separate species and help prevent transmission.
- Report sick or dead animals to the local veterinary (or public health) authorities. If this is not possible, tell your neighbours or community leaders. It is important that all signs of illness or sudden and unexplained deaths in poultry, farmed birds, wild birds or other animals are reported to the authorities so that they can deal with them safely and help stop the virus spreading.
- Wash your hands often to kill and remove the virus. You should always do so after handling birds or other animals, cooking or preparing animal products, and before eating.
- Eat well-cooked meat products.
- Do not eat sick or dead animals and do not give or sell them to others. Such animals should also not be fed to other animals.
Seek immediate advice from your doctor if you show signs of fever after being in contact with poultry, farmed birds, wild birds or other animals.

If the human threat is confirmed as animal in origin, culling would be appropriate as long as it is performed in a humane way with appropriate compensation made.

FAO is monitoring the situation closely through its wide network of country and regional offices and key partners, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

The FAO and OIE reference centre, the Harbin Veterinary Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, is leading laboratory analysis in response to the situation. The scientific community and FAO are currently working to optimize diagnostic approaches in order to better detect this new strain of influenza virus.

Climate Change

A new tool to measure and reduce emissions from agriculture by Stephen Russell, 26 March, 2013. World Resources Institute


Full Article

Agriculture is a major actor in spurring global climate change. The sector is already responsible for at least 10-12 percent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and agricultural emissions are expected to increase by more than 50 percent by 2030.

Mitigating agricultural emissions, then, could go a long way toward mitigating global climate change. The Greenhouse Gas Protocol is currently developing an Agricultural Guidance to help companies measure and reduce their agricultural emissions. We’ve just released a second draft of the Guidance for open comment period, which will run until May 31, 2013.

Key Challenges to Measuring Agricultural Emissions

Reporting agricultural emissions in GHG inventories is a decidedly complex endeavor, which can hinder reduction efforts. For example, agricultural emissions are strongly affected by weather and are therefore often calculated with a large amount of uncertainty. This ambiguity makes it challenging to set and track progress toward reduction targets. The carbon stored in biomass and soils can often be emitted into the atmosphere, making it imperative that companies do not over- or under-count the impact of farming practices on stored carbon. And companies vary widely in how they control different parts of agricultural supply chains—such as commodity production, processing, and retail—so it’s difficult to maintain consistency in how inventories are reported.

To help address these challenges, the new draft of the Agricultural Guidance provides guidelines on the following areas:

How changes in carbon stores should be reported in inventories, both in the context of farming activities—such as soil tilling and crop residue management—and land use change—such as the conversion of forests for agricultural production;
Setting inventory boundaries in relation to agricultural production contracts, leases, and other business relationships to determine whether specific operations should be reflected in inventories;

The types of tools available to calculate or assist in calculating agricultural emissions; and

The types of information that should be reported in inventories to ensure the utility and transparency of inventories.

The new draft incorporates input from stakeholder consultations held between April 2012 and February 2013—including three review workshops in the United States and Brazil—as well as feedback from more than 80 organizations in more than 10 countries. The project has received funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development and Unilever, while the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ford Foundation are supporting an intensive review process in Brazil.

Provide Your Feedback on the Draft Guidance

Comments from a variety of stakeholders help us ensure that our guidance is strong, effective, and widely applicable. To provide your feedback, please download the draft guidance and use the feedback form available on our website. Please send all feedback by email to WRI at opencomment@wri.org by Friday, May 31, 2013.

Concurrent with the open comment period, WRI is road testing the draft in select companies in the livestock and crop sectors. If you would like to road test the draft, please contact us at opencomment@wri.org.

WRI will release a new draft of the Guidance around October 2013 that incorporates feedback from both the open comment period and road testing. A summary of the feedback and an explanation of how issues and comments are addressed will be published on the GHG Protocol website.

Agricultural Development

Gov’t investment in Guysuco critical to industry survival. Ministry of Agriculture, Guyana, 5 April, 2013.  

Full Article

The $1B Government has earmarked for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (Guysuco) will not just benefit the sugar company, but also the thousands of people who depend on the sugar industry. Minister of Agriculture Dr. Leslie Ramsammy drew attention to this fact, whilst addressing the allocation to the sugar company and the agriculture sector in the 2013 National Budget during a programme on the National Communications Network (NCN) programme ‘Budget 2013 at a Glance.’ The programme is being specially aired to inform the public of what is contained in the budget by engaging the various Ministers in discussion and the implications of the 2013 allocations to the respective ministries.

For Minister Ramsammy, this discussion revolved around the allocation of Government’s 2013 subsidy to Guysuco, the projection for the rice industry, and the almost doubling of support to agriculture diversification.

Gov’t intervention critical to sugar industry’s survival

This year the Government through the Ministry will provide a massive $1B support to Guysuco to support the reorienting and reengineering of the company to ensure it remains competitive and viable.

Minister Ramsammy explained that this year’s and subsequent interjections into the sugar company are critical for its survival. “Guysuco needs our support… in this new world unless we invest in Guysuco, Guysuco cannot survive. By helping Guysuco, we help make it relevant and remain relevant in this new world,” he said.

Government’s continued support to the sugar company also takes into consideration, that importantly, the company provides employment for about 18,000 people and indirectly benefit another 120,000, the Minister said. This indirect benefit can be felt in the company’s provision of drainage and irrigation, not only for sugar, but for all other crops in all the areas in which Guysuco operate. Its drainage and irrigation system also benefit many residential areas, the Minister said.

During the discussion, Minister Ramsammy also pointed out that Government has over the last five years invested more into Guysuco than the European Union. He emphasised that the $39.1B provided to Guysuco in the last five years came from Central Government.

The Agriculture Minister made this emphasis to address misinformation being spread by some political parties, particularly from the Alliance for Change (AFC) that, “the Government received European Union money and is not passing it over to Guysuco. The truth is that the Central Government from the Consolidated Fund has transferred more money to Guysuco than we actually received from the European Union,” he said.
In 2012 alone Government provided $4B in subsidy to GuySuCo to assist the sugar company’s cash flow. For 2013, in addition to the injection of $1B, the company will also benefit from the Ministry’s procurement of equipment costing $500M. The equipment will be shared with GuySuCo and will go towards assisting with the land conversion for mechanisation, Minister Ramsammy explained.

Government remains committed to the sugar industry and will continue to invest in its viability.

**Rice will exceed 2013 projected projection**

Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh in his March 25, Budget 2013 presentation reported that rice production for 2013 is targeted at 450,000 tonnes.

Minister Ramsammy however, is optimistic that at the close of 2013, the rice production figure will far exceed this total.

“We (the Ministry of Agriculture) set a target of 412,000 tonnes for 2012 for rice. Last year we produced over 422,000 tonnes, but we wanted to be a little conservative in our target setting. Minister Ashni Singh saw the success that we have had and has targeted for us to produce 450,000 tonnes.”

Minister Ramsammy reminded that the projection of 450,000 tonnes which was made decades ago in the National Assembly was labelled a pipe dream.

“It was a dream but it was not a pipe dream because we have achieved 400,000 two years in a row… if you go out there and speak to any farmer, they will tell you that they are getting 50-60 bags of rice from one acre; this is a country that used to get 18 and 15…So I expect this first crop will exceed 220,000 tonnes, and I expect that we will far exceed the target we set of 422,000 and when Minister Ashni reports to the nation next year, he will be able to report that the rice farmers of Guyana met the expectation of 450,000 tonnes of rice,” he said.

Meanwhile, the Ministry is aiming to modernise the rice and sugar industries, and to increase value-added. Minister Ramsammy explained that in 2013 more focus will be placed on selling more packaged sugar and rice, and more processed rather than cargo rice.

Government will also continue to seek markets for the rice produced. With the death of the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, there may be concerns about the Venezuela market, but Minister Ramsammy assured that the farmers have nothing to fear as this market remains assured. “The Venezuelans are concluding the agreement with Guyana to continue the rice export from Guyana so nobody should be fearful of this market,” he said.

**More rice varieties, seed paddy**

The Ministry through the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) has over the years introduced over 12 high-yield rice varieties that have assisted the annual increase in rice production. He explained that further rice production has been constrained by the fact that there is not enough seed paddy of the new varieties to be distributed to the rice farmers across the country.

He urged the committed production of enough seed paddy from these varieties for farmers to utilise with special focus on the GRDB 10, 11, 12- varieties introduced in the last few years. This, he noted, would prevent the usage of lesser quality paddy.
To this end, he said that focus in 2013 will be on the seed paddy facilities such as the one at Number 56, Corentyne which will become operational and will produce about 20,000 bags of seed paddy mostly of the variety 10, 11 and 12.

“The country needs about 200,000 bags of seed paddy for farmers and we (GRDB) produce, through our seed mills, some 40,000 bags, so about 150,000-160,000 bags are coming from the farmers themselves. Often it is whatever they are growing and not the best variety,” Minister Ramsammy explained.

He said that the ministry increasing its capacity to produce seeds for the farmers will translate into the same amount of land producing more rice, “because we are giving them higher yielding varieties,” he said.

New varieties; upland and salt resistant

This year, in terms of other new rice varieties, the focus will be on creating upland rice varieties using germplasm from Brazil to increase rice production in the hinterland region, Minister Ramsammy said. Some of the varieties that have been introduced to the coast cannot be cultivated in the hinterland.

Focus will also be placed on developing a new strain which is also salt resistant, he said, an intervention that will be useful for coastal farmers, who now are cultivating north of the seawall, particularly in places like Regions 5 and 6, where salt water comes over the seawalls and make cultivation difficult.

Agriculture Diversification

Budget 2013 has seen a significant $1.9B being budgeted to promote the agriculture diversification drive of the government; a drive, which promotes farmers’ increasing production in non-traditional crops to take advantage of the niche export market available for these produce.

To support this drive in 2013, $500M has been budgeted for a fertiliser facility that will see the ministry procuring the fertiliser and pesticides used during cultivation and the farmers purchasing the said supplies from the facility.

“We want farmers to get engaged in shade farming, drip technology and hydro-phonics and these require certain supplies. This $500M will help us to buy those supplies in bulk so that the farmers can buy from us at cost,” he said. This will prevent farmers having to import or depend on private persons importing and charging high prices. “We are going to procure those things with a revolving fund and farmers will get it from us at cost without the high mark-up,” Minister Ramsammy explained.

Part of the budget towards agriculture diversification will support an aggressive search for markets for the agro-produce and for the New Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) to create a special unit to work the agro-processors to improve their packaging and labelling skills. Packaging is still a weakness for agro-processed products, he said.

The allocation to this area also caters for addressing issues such as sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards.
Drainage and Irrigation

There is no agriculture without drainage and irrigation and with this in mind government has allocated $6.5B to this area in 2013. Minister Ramsammy explained that this year the focus is on addressing improving irrigation capacity by putting in better pumps.

The budgeted allocation also addresses some of the canals that link deep river areas to the cultivation areas.

The drainage and irrigation 2013 allocation caters for works on the Cunha Canal and the completion of the Hope Canal Project. Last year the Ministry procured 18 new pumps, eight of which have been assigned to fixed areas like Pine Ground, Mahaicony, Region Five.

Minister Ramsammy explained that the 2013 budget accommodates the building of eight pumping stations where the pumps will be located.

Improving the capacity of the conservancies so the dependency on river water is reduced, will also be an area of focus in 2013, Minister Ramsammy said.

IICA East Caribbean Rep. thankful for partnership with Region’s Ministries of Education. NIA (Nevis Island Administration) Press Release, Charlestown, 4 April, 2013

Full Article

NIA CHARLESTOWN NEVIS (April 04, 2013) -- Representative of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) Offices in the East Caribbean States (ECS) Mrs. Una May Gordon thanked the Ministries of Education in the Region for allowing her organisation into the schools, a new move by IICA to provide technical cooperation.

Her comment came while she handed over a greenhouse to Premier of Nevis and Minister of Education Hon. Vance Amory on March 28, 2013, at the Charlestown Secondary School compound.

“We want to take the opportunity to thank the students and the teachers in the schools for acceding to our requests to work with the schools and the Ministries of Education across the region, to allow us into the schools to provide technical cooperation which is actually new to IICA working with the schools in this way.

“Usually we are out in the open fields, so we want to thank the Ministries of Education and the principals and teachers of the schools that allow us to go into the schools and provide this kind of technical cooperation," she said.

According to Mrs. Gordon, shade house technology was a new technology but was a refreshing change to the agricultural landscape of St. Kitts and Nevis. She recalled her experience with her earlier attempts to introduce the technology in the Federation.
“I remember coming to St. Kitts and Nevis a couple years ago and mooting the idea of putting down greenhouses which were introducing the technology which we were doing in other countries across the region and I would like to say that someone said to us ‘nah that would not work in St. Kitts and Nevis’.

“We are very happy today that that scenario has changed and has changed drastically for the benefit of the agriculture landscape,” she said.

The IICA’s Caribbean Representative also stated that she was pleased to see the advancements made in the agro processing sector in St, Kitts and Nevis, since as an agro business specialist in another capacity she was able to assist the agro processors and the entrepreneurship programme that she was mooting at the time across the region.

Mrs. Gordon stated that the agro processing sector was critical to the success of shade house technology because they were intricately linked.

“I am also very happy to see the advancement in the agro processing sector because if the shade house technology is to be successful, we must link it to the agro processing sector and to have both of them intricately linked so that we can remove the wastage that we sometimes have as gluts in the sector,” she said.

Notwithstanding, the IICA ECS Representative impressed on the Minister of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture that they should gave effective data collection and data mining parallel to the erection of the green houses.

She explained that the important information collected would effectively capture the benefits of the introduction if the green houses to Nevis in economic terms and would also provide investment information to farmers which would assist them to make the right investment decisions.

Mrs. Gordon also stressed the need for capacity building at all levels since greenhouse technology differed from open field agronomy.

“The Department of Agriculture would be well informed to ensure that the extension officers should be helped to get some training in green house agronomy that would help them to service the budding sector that you have here,” she said.

Regarding the island’s population, Mrs. Gordon said they too should be sensitised about the island’s changing agricultural landscape, with the introduction of the green houses.

“The population must also be sensitised that the landscape of agriculture. The profile of agriculture in the country is changing and placing the green house in the school is not by accident. It is by design because if we can conduct agriculture in a learning environment, half of our work is finished.

“We don’t need to spend time to re-engage youth in agriculture which is a challenge for us these days. So let us ensure that the students of the school and the principals and teachers students understand that this is smart agriculture and not hard work agriculture,” she said.
Agriculture in the year 2025 by Eric Sfiligoj. CropLife, 1 April, 2013

Full Article

There are plenty of changes ahead for agriculture over the next dozen years, says one expert. If you watch a lot of movies and television shows (as I do), you will find quite a bit of prognosticating on what the future will look like. At worst, this can seem old-fashioned (such as Back to the Future Part II thinking that multiple fax machines would be in every home by 2015). At best (as in the case of Star Trek), it can be thought-provoking.

And this trend is alive and well at CropLife®, too. In the April 2013 issue, you will find a story by ZedX’s Joe Russo detailing what life might be like for an agronomist in the year 2063.

While this seems a bit too far afield for my liking (I’ll be pushing 100 in that year), another future discussion I heard recently took a look at what life might be like for agriculture and the world in the year 2025 — just down the line, so the speak, in my expected timeline. This presentation was given by Rich Kottmeyer, global leader of agriculture and food production for Accenture at the 2013 Ag Issues Forum, sponsored by Bayer CropScience in late February.

By this year, said Kottmeyer, the global population will be pushing 8 billion — 1 billion higher than today’s mark. And because of improvements in food production (which will lower food costs), approximately half will be classified as living in the middle class.

And this will have a profound impact on agriculture. “The talk in growing food will shift from security to quality,” said Kottmeyer. “These new middle class consumers will be looking for things like convenience, quality and availability in their food, which will cause growers to move from producing commodity products to value-added ones.”

Furthermore, by 2025, Kottmeyer predicts that the world’s largest economies will both be in Asia, with China at No. 1 and India at No. 2. “The success of the U.S. farmer in 2025 will be tied to feeding consumers in these two countries,” he said. “The U.S. will be the world’s third largest economy, but still have more than 4% of the global population, which isn’t a bad place to be.”

Perhaps most encouraging about this rank order of country economies is how it will further the cause of biotech crop acceptance around the entire globe. “It is really simple why this happened,” said Kottmeyer. “China needed increased yields to feed its growing and more affluent population while India needed food availability to reduce food prices for its consumers. So as went these countries, so went Southeast Asia and the countries there that produce food for China and India. This, along with data that showed biotech crops were a way to conserve soil, water and energy ultimately convinced Japan and Europe that using biotech crops made sense, too.”

In one dozen years, the world will be in 2025 and it will be interesting to look back at Kottmeyer’s speech to see how many of his predications came to pass. Some may seem old-fashioned, but I’m betting the majority of them will prove insightful.
Trade

Agriculture Ministry seeks to reduce food import bill by Glenis A. Rose. Jamaica Information Service, 3 April 2013

Full Article

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is seeking to reduce the food importation bill from US$1 billion to US$700 million in the short to medium term.

“We have targeted some 8,000 acres of government lands that we intend to put into the hands of farmers and we are committed to putting in the basic infrastructure to help to get those lands into production,” said Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon. Roger Clarke.

“We will be working on irrigation systems, we will be helping with extension services and whatever else that can be done … we are going to do it,” the Minister emphasized.

Addressing hundreds of farmers and residents from western Jamaica at the annual Montpelier Agricultural and Industrial Show in St. James on April 2, Mr. Clarke said that thousands of acres of idle lands are available for production, and the Government is determined to reduce the import bill, while putting money into the pockets of farmers.

“The Ministry of Agriculture is targeting, between the short and medium term, to reduce that importation bill by at least US$300 million and I think we can do it,” the Minister said.

Citing statistics from the Ministry, Mr. Clarke said the importation of foods has been showing a steady decline, as the farmers have increased production in many areas.

“In terms of ginger, which we can be proud of, we imported 101,000 pounds in 2011. Last year 53,000 pounds came in, but we exported one million pounds,” the Minister said.

“When it comes to pork, we never had one imported leg of ham in this country last year … every pound of ham that was eaten last year was produced by our Jamaican farmers,” he added.

The Minister emphasized that the task at hand is for the country to continue to produce more of what is consumed.

“We are going to produce as we have never produced before, because that is the only way we are going to survive,” he stressed.

Mr. Clarke said what he saw at the show was evidence that agriculture is alive and well, and paid tribute to the small farmers.

“They are the ones who are feeding us now and who will continue to feed us way into the future,” he added.
Meanwhile, President of the St. James Association of Branch Societies of the Jamaica Agricultural Society (JAS), Councillor Glendon Harris, commended farmers in the parish for producing the most ginger in the island last year.

Mr. Harris, who is also the Mayor of Montego Bay, pointed out that the farmers had achieved this feat for the first time.

Information and Communications

Empowering policy through information: updated Food Security Portal provides improved accessibility by Sara Gustafson. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 1 April 2013
http://www.ifpri.org/blog/empowering-policy-through-information

Full Article

Effective policymaking relies on sound knowledge. Knowing what works and what doesn’t, who the target population is and what they need, and what the situation is really like “on the ground” is crucial to ensuring that policies and programs have the desired impacts. But all too often, critical information is out of date, difficult to locate and access, or even nonexistent.

Since its inception in 2010, the Food Security Portal has aimed to fill these gaps in knowledge about food prices and food security by bringing the most up-to-date data, news, and research together in one place. Now IFPRI is proud to release an updated Food Security Portal designed to make the site’s global, regional, and country-level food security resources even more easily accessible and shareable.

The redesigned Portal features a new homepage layout that puts the latest global commodity price data right at users’ fingertips. The new Price Watch feature provides an instant overview of the volatility status of five major commodity prices from the Excessive Food Price Variability Early Warning System, as well as monthly and weekly global commodity prices and daily futures prices. The feature also links to the major international early warning systems, FEWS NET and FAO GIEWS, providing fast access to food security alerts and emergency information. From the homepage, users can also directly access the Food Security Media Analysis System and the full collection of the Portal’s datasets from the Data API.

Improvements to the Commodities section mean that users can instantly view a wider range of data, comparing global commodity prices dating back a full year. Data on the individual commodities pages has also been expanded to allow users to search a six-month range of country-level price data. And thanks to improved navigation on the Data API, users can now easily switch from one dataset to another.

The updated Portal is also expanding its reach through translation and social media features. Users can now view the Portal in multiple languages, receive automatic blog updates, and easily share content and follow the Portal’s Twitter and Facebook accounts.
By gathering the latest information and making it accessible from one central location, the Food Security Portal continues to play an important part in the global food security conversation. The information and resources provided by the Portal can help policymakers prepare for and respond to the changing global food system.

**Information system being strengthened to assist farmers** by Alecia Smith-Edwards, Jamaica Information Service, 31 March, 2013  

**Full Article**

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is assisting farmers to better market their crops by strengthening its information gathering system.

This is according portfolio Minister, Hon. Roger Clarke, who lamented that lack of proper marketing techniques have often hampered the productivity of the nation’s farmers.

“To tackle the problems with production, marketing has always been a serious problem. If the farmers know there are markets, they will produce for those markets, but when farmers produce and can’t sell, it is a terrible turn off and the only way we are going to make that happen is to have proper information,” he said.

Minister Clarke was addressing the Annual General Meeting of the Ewarton Watershed and Farmer’s Co-operative Society at the Ewarton Community Centre in St. Catherine on March 28.

He pointed out that through the Rural Agricultural Development Authority’s (RADA’s) extension officers, the Ministry is “working to see how we can upgrade the information gathering”.

“We want to know when you’re going to plant and what you’re planting so that we can plan the market for it and to go further sometimes to tell you don’t put in any now because we don’t have market for it. Because there are some things that we grow in Jamaica that can only suit our local consumption, and if we can’t eat it off, it doesn’t make sense to over-produce, because there is no market for it,” the Minister said.

He called on farmers to be honest when giving information so that extension officers can have an adequate picture of the quantity of crops being produced.

The Minister noted that for instance, farmers can call the extension officer in their parish to give information on how much Irish potato they are planting at any given time.  
The extension officer will then know “that so much Irish potato was put into the ground and then he can start to connect you with the people in the marketplace who are trading in Irish potatoes”.

In this vein, Minister informed that the Ministry currently has “a great programme going with Irish (potatoes), noting that persons who were previously importing Irish potatoes into the country, are now working with the local farmers to produce this crop.
“Some have even brought in the seeds, some helping with fertilizer and working with the farmers to produce because they are the ones who are going to benefit by selling it. And if there is a little shortage, those are the ones who are going to bring it in,” he said.

Mr Clarke said the Ministry is working to increase Irish potato production to 100 per cent, up from the 80 per cent produced last year. “We want to go further because Trinidad has some interest. We want to produce so that we can even export,” he said.

“We are on a path, our task is to produce. This is going to be a tough year as far as finances go, but the Ministry of Agriculture is going to be out there mobilizing and working with the farmers to make sure that we achieve this ‘eat what we grow; grow what we eat’ concept because that is the only way that we are going to survive,” the Minister said.

Upcoming Events

May 2013

3rd Global Cassava Partnership for the 21st Century (GCP21) Strategic Meeting
Date: May 2013
Location: Bellagio, Italy
Description: The 3rd GCP21 Strategic Meeting, which will take place in Bellagio, Italy, in May 2013, will be focused on a daunting question: Is it possible to eradicate cassava viruses in Africa? The select group of 32 scientists and developers from 24 institutions who attend that meeting will focus on the use of a range of technologies to efficiently control cassava viruses.

June 2013

Global Cassava Partnership for the 21st Century (GCP21) second meeting on cassava landraces
Date: June 2013
Location: Tanzania
Description: Global Cassava Partnership for the 21st Century (GCP21) second meeting on cassava landraces is scheduled in June 2013 at IITA offices in Tanzania. The meeting’s goal is to deliver products such as draft standard operating procedures to collect, evaluate, preserve and identify these landraces and a roadmap to start the work in East and Central Africa.

49th Annual Meeting Caribbean Food Crops Society (CFCS)
Date: 30 June to 6 July 2013
Location: Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
Description: The 49th Annual Meeting will be celebrated 30 June to 6 July in the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Trinidad. Joint meeting of the CFCS, Caribbean AgroEconomic Society (CAES) and the International
Contact: CFCS website  http://cfcs.eea.uprm.edu/

July 2013

International Conference on Tropical Roots and Tubers for Sustainable Livelihood under Changing Agro-climate
Date: 9-12 July 2013
Location: Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India
Website: http://isrc.in/internationalconference2013/