Celebrating youth excellence in Agriculture

CARDI celebrates World Food Day

School garden project gets underway in Trinidad and Tobago

Barbuda receives an upgraded community garden
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Annually, the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) awards the top performing student across all degrees, over years 1 to 3 from the Faculty of Food and Agriculture, UWI, St Augustine Campus with the T.P Lecky Prize. From the 2022 graduating class, two male students Daree Myers and Justin Edwards tied for the top prize.

At the Faculty’s Prize Giving Ceremony held on 23rd October, 2022, Daree Myers received his prize from CARDI’s Executive Director, Ansari Hosein. Justin Edwards who was unable to attend the ceremony later received his prize at the CARDI office in Trinidad.

Both students began their tertiary journey in September 2019, but were only able to enjoy one full semester on campus before COVID-19 abruptly blew up their University experience. They switched to online learning and navigated that journey for the remainder of their undergraduate degree.

Practical learning through field and laboratory demonstration is an integral part of agricultural education, and both students were robbed of this for the most part as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. However, they were grateful for the 6 weeks On-Farm training the Faculty offered in 2022, which allowed them some vital practical field experience.

Daree Myers who hails from St Vincent and the Grenadines graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agribusiness and Entrepreneurship. He is currently enrolled in the MSc Food Security programme at UWI. This budding entrepreneur who has a keen interest in policymaking says that he hopes “To spark a change in the tastes and preferences of people. I want to make regionally grown foods attractive to the Caribbean palate, increasing opportunities for our farmers.” He continued by saying “Agriculture is far too important and more needs to be done to promote the value and importance of the sector to the Region.” He mused that it should be an essential part of the school curriculum at primary and secondary levels and youths must have easier access to land and financing.”

Like his colleague, Justin’s interest in agriculture took root at an early age and blossomed thanks to his Orisha faith which is grounded in ‘environmental consciousness.’ In the near future Justin wants to be a successful agripreneur – owning multiple businesses. To ensure he has the requisite knowledge and experience to hone the business aspects of Agriculture, Justin is currently pursuing an MSc in Management Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, UWI, St Augustine. One of his goals is to start an e-farm from where he can supply healthy and nutritious foods as well as agri based services to customers. Justin notes that technology is a game changer for agriculture and he is excited to demonstrate how it can improve production and efficiency.

Noting that students are shying away from pursuing studies in Agriculture, Daree’s advice to the youths are “The field needs your intelligence and your ideas. Realize that agriculture is more than what you see being practiced in the fields. Help us end the age-old notion that Agriculture is for the uneducated. Your brilliance, along with the skills you’ll obtain through formal education will not only allow you to make a living, but it will help you to make desperate incremental changes to our food system.”

Similar sentiments were echoed by Justin, who advised that “Agriculture is more than tilling land, it is becoming automated as there now use of drones, tractors and other technologies to increase agricultural goods and services. Agriculture is taking major leaps and this evolution will positively impact the Caribbean people and environment.”

In offering his congratulations CARDI’s Executive Director, Ansari Hosein said that the youth and young farmers are the future of the Region’s agriculture and agri-food sectors. The Institute’s OJT Programme is designed and structured to provide the practical skills and technical knowledge needed to develop them into future agriculture architects. He continued by saying they will be prepared to bring their fresh ideas and innovative approaches to the fore which will result in building a competitive sector ready to meet the changing needs of tomorrow.

Dr. Thomas Phillip (T.P.) Lecky, is a Jamaican Scientist, whose research work focused on cattle. In 1951 Lecky’s extensive research resulted in the first breed of indigenous Jamaican cattle, the Jamaican Hope, a symbol of hope for the poor. Later research work resulted in the development of the following breeds: Jamaican Red, Jamaican Brahman and Jamaican Black. As a young boy Lecky’s love for livestock and agriculture in particular was instilled by his father a farmer. He is the recipient of several awards including Order of the British Empire. Lecky is widely published and held many prominent positions in Jamaica.
The Caribbean is one of the most food dependent regions in the world. With an annual food import bill estimated at USD 5 billion and climbing, much of the data is pointing to the fact that the Region is operating below its potential to feed itself. The global economic downturn, low productivity, pests and diseases, heightened food prices, increased frequency and intensity of natural hazards, climate variability and extremes compounded by the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia/Ukraine conflict continue to undermine the achievement of food security targets in the Region.

Disrupted food supply chains have forced the transaction cost of goods up, leaving many without the means to access or afford healthy food. The fourth round of the CARICOM Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security and Livelihoods Impact survey revealed that 2.75 million people (39%) out of 7.1 million in the English-speaking Caribbean are in fact, food insecure. Choosing cheaper unhealthier meals, using savings to put food on the table and going without meals for extended periods of time are some of the negative coping strategies people have resorted to.

On the occasion of World Food Day 2022, the Institute remains committed to working together with all stakeholders ‘to leave no one behind’. We hold the view that every person must have access to nutritious, safe and affordable food, says Executive Director, Ansari Hosein.

To achieve this, CARDI will continue to leverage partnerships and pursue projects and other initiatives that will provide the science based solutions needed to transform and reposition Caribbean agriculture. For the new Strategic Period, beginning in 2023, emphasis will be placed on improving the productivity and utilization of local commodities, climate proofing and building resilience, harnessing digital technologies, increasing youth involvement, knowledge generation and information sharing.

This year several CARDI offices across the Region hosted activities to commemorate World Food Day.

In Tobago, the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development hosted a series of Open Days to celebrate World Food Day. The first event was hosted by CARDI at the Goldsborough Demonstration and Training Centre (GDTC) under the theme ‘Producing for the displacement of food importation’. Attendees also learnt about the new and improved method for trapping the South American Palm Weevil in coconuts and gained information on the construction and efficacy of using such traps.

In Antigua, CARDI collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs (MAFBA) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to host two schools at the CARDI Field Station in Betty’s Hope. Students from the Potters Primary and St. Andrew’s Primary Schools received a guided tour by CARDI Representative Paul Lucas of the fields, seed bank, weather station and shade house. They also saw the various water management strategies deployed on station to cope with the dry conditions. Many students were excited to see how sweet potato grows - many noted that while they consume it they weren’t aware of how the crop grows.

Across in Guyana CARDI participated in the World Food Day and Berbice Expo at the Albion Sports Complex, Region 6. Here visitors were able to gain a deeper insight into the Institute’s work in Guyana: to improve the sweet potato and cassava industries; develop the 5,000 acre commercial enterprise in Ebini and the various capacity building initiatives being undertaken to improve the capacity of farmers and processors.

In St Lucia, CARDI participated in the World Food Day exhibition hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture. Dubbed a ‘Sea Moss Fiesta’ the event highlighted a locally-grown product that can help improve Saint Lucia’s food security. Noting that food security is a global priority, CARDI Representative, Barry Innocent, said the Institute remains committed to assisting in the fight for food security because the health, stability, and well-being of a country is dependent on the food security that it has built. Mr Innocent also participated in a Panel Discussion on Food Security that was aired on the National Television Network.
In early October, through the Government of Mexico and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the first climate resilient school garden was installed and planted Barataria Community Council (Homework Centre). CARDI, Trinidad and Tobago collaborated with project implementers FAO, to design 3 climate resilient production systems, recommended the types of crops to be grown and provided training to the students.

The mini climate resilient commercial systems installed, included a deep flow technique recirculating closed hydroponic system, which allows for the production of 280 heads of lettuce per crop cycle or 2,240 heads of lettuce per year.

In addition, a climate smart drip grow bucket open hydroponic system, was also set up which allows for the production of fruiting type vegetables, and has the capacity to grow 125 plants, producing 1,500 – 2,500 lbs of produce over a 5 month period. The crops planted in the system included tomatoes, sweet pepper (green, yellow and purple), melongene, hot pepper and cauliflower.

An automated climate smart drip grow bed system, was also set up for the production of herbs including parsley, celery, chive, basil, kale and salad beans.

The drip bucket and grow bed systems are fed water and nutrients via a venturi injector system, connected to solenoid valves and controlled by an electronic timer which automatically turns on 5 to 6 times per day. The system also has a rain sensor which can shut off irrigation on rainy days.

These systems are automated and provide recycling and efficient use of water and fertilizers, require less labour for crop management, remove the need for chemical and manual weed control and allow for greater yield per square foot.

Over the next 8 weeks CARDI and FAO will continue to provide training for the students to ensure best practices are utilized. There will also be demonstrations on the maintenance of the systems for a successful crop cycle together with a manual on Climate Resilient practices. Produce from this system will be supplied to the school feeding programme and persons in the community to generate income.

Collaborators of this initiative include the FAO, the Barataria Home Work Centre (BHC), The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Thomson’s Garden Materials Ltd, 4H Leaders Council of Trinidad and Tobago, the School Feeding Programme and Pennacool.

The Be Foundation a community based organisation located in Barbuda is now the recipient of an upgraded community garden – equipped to produce a variety of high valued vegetables.

This project “Innovative Interventions to Strengthen Befoundation Community Garden in Barbuda” was financed by the Australian Government’s Direct Aid Program (DAP) and implemented by a number of locally based institutions including: the Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), CARDI, the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs and the Barbuda Council.

Through this project a drip irrigation system, fertilizer injector and biodegradable mulches were installed, the shade house was upgraded and a utility room constructed.

CARDI also conducted several training sessions for the group on soil and water management and good agricultural practices. The Institute further provided technical support for the construction of the shade house and the installation of the irrigation system.

Barbuda imports over 85% of their food from Antigua through the USA. This community based initiative produces food for the community with surplus going to vulnerable persons. It emphasizes the themes ‘sustainable production’ and ‘grow local, eat local’.

The project partners note that farmers and students from the neighbouring schools can visit the site to view the improved technologies and adopt them to improve their own production. The project also supports women inclusion. The team will also continue to lend their support and offer technical advice to the Foundation on areas such as good agricultural practices and pest and disease management.

The goal is to reduce Barbuda’s food import bill by supporting local.

The Direct Aid Program (DAP) is a flexible small grants program through which the Australian Government supports development projects that contribute to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction.

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SPOTLIGHT
From the field

Trinidad and Tobago

A CARDI team met with Ms. Rachel Hulsman, Regional Manager, Latin America and the Caribbean, Wageningen University and Research (WUR) to discuss potential areas for collaboration between both institutions. High on the agenda were capacity building opportunities.

Bahamas

CARDI Bahamas hosted a webinar on sweet potato production. The session was facilitated by CARDI’s Plant Health Specialist, Dr. Annika Minott. More than 200 persons attended the session.

Guyana

CARDI Guyana participated in an Agriculture Open Day. Their presentation focused on the development of the sweet potato industry.

Barbuda

CARDI Technician, Bradbury Browne training farmers on water conservation strategies.