Tribute to Albert Fearon - a stellar CARDI livestock scientist

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CARDI and IICA ink new agreement

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Tribute to Albert Fearon - a stellar CARDI livestock scientist

It is with profound sadness we at the Caribbean Agricultural Research & Development Institute (CARDI), pay tribute, to a stellar livestock scientist, Albert Fearon. Albert was employed as an Animal Productionist at CARDI Jamaica at the time of his sudden passing on 14 June, 2023.

Since joining the Institute in 1992, Albert’s pioneering work in animal science changed small ruminant production in Jamaica and across the wider Caribbean. He is highly regarded throughout the Region for his knowledge, experience and competence in livestock production, particularly small ruminants and forage agronomy. His loss leaves an empty space in CARDI’s livestock programme which will not be easily filled.

Albert joined CARDI as a Scientist to lead the implementation of the Technology Transfer Research and Adaptation Project (TTRAP). It was under his guidance the Goat Farmers Association was formed with more than 100 groups spread across Jamaica. Since then he has played a leading role in the development and implementation of some major regional projects. Among these were the CIDA funded project, which led to the development of the Hounslo Research Station in St Elizabeth and the FAO funded Sheep and Goat Development Project which resulted in improvement of local stock and the certification of farmers and technicians in artificial insemination. Under the Common Fund for Commodities project implemented by CARDI in the mid-2000s, Albert proudly noted that more than 12,000 farmers across all parishes in Jamaica were trained in good husbandry practices with special emphasis placed on breed management and nutrition utilizing local forages. Similarly, under the New Zealand/CARICOM Small Ruminant Development project he was especially pleased with the training he coordinated for veterinarians across the Region in Embryo Transfer – excitedly noting that it was a game changer for the sector.

Fearon was based in Mandeville and managed the day to day operations of the Sam Motta Goat and Sheep Demonstration and Training Centre (SMGSDTC). His dedicated work at the station often resulted in animals under his care coping several prizes and awards. But perhaps most importantly was the training and capacity building opportunities he managed at the station for students and farmers from the surrounding communities. Albert was a consummate teacher and mentor, who willingly, and at every opportunity shared his experience and knowledge with thousands of students, farmers and technicians.

He credited his early experience with famed Animal Scientist T.P. Lecky for igniting his passion for animal science. After graduating from the Jamaica School of Agriculture, he majored in Animal and Poultry Science at Tuskegee University and later graduated with a Masters in Animal Science from Alabama A&M University.

Despite his many achievements, Albert was a gentleman and went about his life with profound humility. He was a CARDI stalwart and will be fondly remembered for his unwavering dedication and passion by all who knew and worked with him.

The management and staff extend heartfelt condolences to his family and friends.

May he rest in eternal peace!

Tribute to Gregory Linton – a dedicated CARDI Researcher

It is unfathomable, the depth of despair we at CARDI feel, on the shocking passing of our dear colleague Gregory Linton (fondly known as Greg).

Since 2017, Greg a Dominican national served as the CARDI Representative in St Vincent and the Grenadines. He graduated with a Master of Science in Plant Protection and was also qualified as an Agricultural Engineer specializing in Agricultural Parasitology (Plant Parasites) from the Chapingo Autonomous University, Mexico.

Before being promoted as the CARDI Representative, Greg was employed as a Research Assistant at the Institute’s Dominica office, working primarily under the Black Sigatoka project, evaluating banana and plantain accessions for tolerance to black sigatoka disease (BSD).

In St Vincent and the Grenadines, Greg was involved in the implementation of the Regional Coconut and Sweet Potato projects. Days before he passed Greg participated in a Regional Coconut Workshop in Grenada where he shared his experiences with managing coconut pests. Perhaps one of Greg’s most significant achievement was being part of a team which developed a locally-produced lime sulphur organic post-harvest treatment for dasheen. This treatment allowed farmers to successfully restart dasheen export to the lucrative European market. At the time of his passing he was working with local and international partners to fine tune this treatment.

Greg was the face of CARDI on multi agency teams that conducted post disaster risk assessment for the agricultural sector following natural disasters across CARICOM. He was involved in assessments following the passage of Hurricane Maria (Dominica, 2017), Hurricane Dorian (the Bahamas, 2019), flooding (Guyana, 2021) and the eruption of La Soufrière volcano (St Vincent and the Grenadines, 2021). His leadership on these missions was always efficient and highly commendable, facilitating quick decision making to minimize loss of livelihoods and reduced suffering.

Greg was an outstanding researcher. He will be remembered by his CARDI family as a dedicated, compassionate, humble professional always willing to go the extra mile - many times at short notice. His insightful interactions, cool temperament and hearty laughter will be missed.

Before his time at CARDI, he served as a Plant Quarantine Inspector at the Ministry of Agriculture, Dominica. Greg led the Ministry’s Biological Control program for economic pests and through his leadership the citrus weevil, citrus aphid, black fly, fruit fly and the pink mealy bug were successfully controlled.

The management and staff extend deepest sympathies to Greg’s family and friends. May his legacy continue to inspire others to pursue excellence in agricultural research and development.

Rest in eternal peace!
St Kitts and Nevis take steps to substitute lettuce and sweet pepper imports

The Government of the twin island state, through its Ministry of Agriculture, Marine Resources and Cooperatives, is working alongside the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to develop the lettuce and sweet pepper value chains. The value chains were shortlisted for further analysis and consideration in the face of potential supply shortages and price fluctuations.

During a series of Value Chain Selection workshops, held virtually in April and May 2023, stakeholders met to analyse lettuce, sweet peppers, carrots, and cabbage, which were shortlisted for further analysis and consideration. Of the four commodities, lettuce in St Kitts and sweet peppers in Nevis were selected as the commodities with the greatest potential for balancing demand with supply.

Dominica’s Agriculture Minister calls for increased cooperation to achieve regional food security

Dominica’s Agriculture Minister, Roland Royer, has called on OECS Governments to improve coordination and technical cooperation on agriculture to achieve the region’s goals for food security and increased productivity.

Royer, the Chair of the OECS Council of Ministers: Agriculture, addressed the 7th Meeting of the Council in Grenada on Friday, June 30.

“We believe that through shared knowledge, best practices, research and development, innovation and the facilitation of agricultural trade, finance, and investment we can achieve much as a grouping. “We must prioritize technical and business activities that strengthen our capacity to increase the productivity and regional trade of agricultural products and the demand for healthy food to reverse the increasing trends of the incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs),” the Minister stated.

He said there is a need across the region to address labour shortages in farming, the potential loss of the rich biodiversity of the islands and the threat posed by emerging agricultural pests and diseases.

CARICOM’s food market can become “high value, specialised” - President Ali

President Dr. Irfaan Ali has said that the Caribbean has an opportunity to position its market as a high-value specialised one.

Speaking at the Caribbean Agri-Food Investors Conference, he said: “The Caribbean Market must be positioned and as we are saying now, positioning the market as a high-value specialised market because of scale and because of our location and our own competitive advantages, we have a great opportunity of positioning this market as a high-value specialised market.”

“With these changes come the opportunity to invest, come the opportunity to modernise, come the opportunity to transform…today I want us to re-examine the way in which we are capturing this subject matter and I want a position to the forum that we capture it under the heading and this is where we’re going; a highly integrated food production system,” President Ali related.

National soil sampling survey launched

On Monday 5th June, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in collaboration with the Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Land Management (PISLM) hosted the National Soil Sampling Survey Launch on the Ministry’s compound. Under the theme Caribbean Small Island Development States (CSIDS) Multi-country Soil Management Initiative for Integrated Landscape Restoration and Sustainable Food Systems (CSIDS_SOILCARE Phase1), the project has several phases that are expected to span over the next four years.

Remarking on the technical and scientific aspects of the project modalities was Dr. Gaius Eudoxie of the University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine. Dr. Eudoxie expressed the significance and importance of the project in relation to healthier soil and producing healthier food that would contribute to healthier lives.

The samplings are scheduled to commence on Barbuda on Tuesday 6th June. It is intended that a total of a hundred and twenty (120) samples will be collected.
CARDI and IICA ink new agreement to collaborate on the sustainable development of regional agriculture

CARDI and IICA and have signed a new General Agreement for Technical Cooperation (GATC) to collaborate on areas which contribute to the development of a sustainable agriculture sector, that is resilient to climate change, supports vibrant rural economies and livelihoods and regional food and nutrition security. The agreement, signed in March 2023 by CARDI’s Executive Director, Ansari Hosein and Director General of IICA, Manual Otero will run for a period of 2 years.

CARDI and IICA have shared a long, beneficial relationship in the Region dating back to 1989. This new agreement reaffirms the commitment of both institutions towards development of the regional agriculture sector through strategic, high impact interventions, shares Executive Director, Ansari Hosein.

Under the new agreement collaborative efforts will focus on supporting agricultural research, technical advisory services, innovation and technology transfer. Among the commodities and priority areas targeted for development are: livestock, crop industrialization and utilization, germplasm management, food safety, biotechnology, climate change mitigation and management and knowledge management.

Under the present agreement both institutions will also pursue initiatives such as the joint proposals for resource mobilisation, technical missions, staff exchanges and training courses that contribute to the development of the sector’s human capital. The implementation of these activities in member states will be governed by specific cooperation agreements and/or Letters of Understanding.

A digital revolution is taking hold and changing the face of modern agriculture. CARDI and IICA will therefore focus efforts and resources on the integration and use of artificial intelligence, block chain, drone technology, robotics and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in Caribbean agriculture. Youth engagement is important to both institutions and innovation and technology are two ways of attracting and retaining this important target group in the sector.

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CARDI scientists participate in Chinese government sponsored training

Two CARDI scientists, Dr. Annika Minnott and Dr. Melissa Williams participated in a 2 week training programme on the Application and Development of Smart Agriculture for Developing Countries in China. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, along with the Centre of International Cooperation Service, funded the program which ran from 14-27 April 2023 in Beijing and Shandong. The training was organized by Center of International Cooperation Service, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA).

Altogether, 27 participants from 9 countries were introduced to China’s agriculture sector, specifically, the role of agricultural insurance, sustainable agriculture practices, the greening of agriculture and smart agriculture. Class room sessions were complemented by several field trips which allowed participants to witness first-hand, the outputs and impacts of the country’s developmental initiatives in agriculture.

The group visited the 24th International vegetable science and technology fair where they saw various vegetable crops such as squash, pumpkin, eggplant; watermelon; sweet potato cultivated under protected agriculture. Two factory set ups that produces prefabricated and prepackaged foods including garlic, ginger and mushroom, that targets China’s export market were also visited. The team toured the national vegetable quality standards center, which highlighted the value chain approach adopted for tomato production under protected agriculture system. Here, they were also exposed to the research and development components as it relates to new production mode, and optimization of production, the greening of agriculture and smart agriculture. The group also benefited from a field trip to a farm equipment manufacturer specializing in combine harvesters and tillers.

The CARDI team presented on the work of the Institute across the Region and provided an overview of the status of the Regional sector.

China’s agricultural sector has grown rapidly in recent decades, contributing to poverty reduction and food security. The countries climate smart initiatives, are part of their new agricultural development concept and model, which is gradually becoming the mainstream approach for sustainable agricultural development worldwide. Its aim is to improve the overall efficiency, adaptability, resilience, and emission reduction, of agricultural production, through political and institutional innovations, transformation of production mode, and optimization of management technology. Through this training approach this has now reached an additional 9 countries.

Did You Know?

Between May 2021 - June 2023, CARDI and IICA collaborated on more than 15 joint activities across 8 CARDI member states, directly impacting the livelihoods of hundreds of stakeholders. The majority of this work was focused on provision of technical assistance, capacity building and improving agriculture production and productivity.

Some of areas of collaboration were training in compost making, environmental rehabilitation and development of the papaya, sweet potato and beans value chains.

CARDI provided technical assistance to IICA and project partners to establish and maintain 2 vetiver nurseries in Antigua.
Trinidad & Tobago

CARDI was pleased to welcome a delegation from New Zealand. Discussions focused on the work CARDI will be doing under the CRFM implemented Project ‘Sargassum products for Climate Resilience in the Caribbean’, financed by the Government of New Zealand.

Photo Left to Right: Inaki Alvarez Camps (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand (MFAT), Joanna Kempers (MFAT), Ansari Hosein (CARDI), Sarah Lee (MFAT) and Lee Nelson (Ministry of Primary Industries, New Zealand).

Grenada

Participants at the Regional Coconut Training hosted by CARDI, MALFC and the International Trade Center benefited from practical exercises in managing the South American Palm Weevil. Other topics covered in the training were nursery and tissue culture management and agro processing.

Photo courtesy: MALFC (Facebook)

Suriname

CARDI staff participated in the Kick Off meeting for the Hit Reset Caribbean Programme in Suriname in May. The Institute is implementing the ‘Conserving Coastal Coconut Palms’ project under this programme.

Left to Right: Dr. Graham King (STACIE), Dr. Perry Polar (Programme Manager, Hit Reset Caribbean), Simon Moo and Dr. Annika Minott (CARDI) and Mr. Gerard den Ouden (OACPS Secretariat).

Barbados

CARDI in collaboration with IICA and MAFNS have established an evaluation trial to investigate the impact of spacing on the productivity of 2 Papaya Bunch Top (PBT) varieties-Bella Nova and Maradona. This is part of a wider programme aimed at Resuscitating Barbados’ Papaya Industry.