17th edition of the Caribbean Week of Agriculture set for October

CARDI welcomes two new Country Representatives

Resuscitating Barbados’ papaya industry

Sweet potato research studies commence across the Region
The 17th edition of the Caribbean Week of Agriculture (CWA) will be held from 9-13 October, 2023 in the Bahamas, under the theme 'Accelerating vision 25 by 2025'.

This is the first face to face CWA following the COVID-19 pandemic. The last edition was held virtually in 2021. Preparations are underway for a number of events to be hosted by CARDI and other partner organizations including the CARICOM Secretariat, The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), The Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). These include the statutory meetings of regional agriculture organizations, a Meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) and the Trade Show and Exhibition. The technical seminars during the week will shine a spotlight on creating resilience in the sector; rebounding from the pandemic; food security; climate change, enhancing intra-regional trade and reducing the food import bill by 25% by 2025.

CARDI as the lead agency for agriculture development in the Caribbean, has fully subscribed to Vision 25 x 2025 and has aligned our research agenda to address production gaps and develop the value chains of some of the key commodities identified by the Ministerial Task Force for import replacement.

CARDI will be partnering with the International Trade Center (ITC) to update stakeholders on the activities under the Regional Coconut project zeroing in on those initiatives aimed at increasing the supply of planting material. The Institute will also share insights into the ongoing trade show and Exhibition. The technical seminars during the week will shine a spotlight on creating resilience in the sector; rebounding from the pandemic; food security; climate change, enhancing intra-regional trade and reducing the food import bill by 25% by 2025.

The Institute continues to support the various organizing committees and looks forward to a successful week.

The Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) is pleased to announce the appointment of two new CARDI Representatives for Antigua and Barbuda and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Agronomist, Junior Greene was appointed CARDI Representative for Antigua and Barbuda with responsibility for Montserrat, effective 1st September 2023. He replaces Paul Lucas who served as the CARDI Representative for Antigua and Barbuda and Montserrat from 2017 to August 2023. Paul is now the new CARDI Representative for Cayman Islands, taking over from Dr. Annika Minott.

Junior Greene is an Agronomist with over 19 years experience working in the sector across the Region. Prior to joining CARDI he held positions at the University of the West Indies (UWI) St Augustin Campus and various private sector enterprises. He has worked in the areas of pest and disease identification and management and training in the development of agronomists and other stakeholder groups. He has also worked closely with various Ministries of Agriculture to develop and manage improved vegetable and nursery production systems. Junior is a graduate of UWI St Augustine and holds a BSc in General Agriculture and an MSc in Crop Protection.

Donawa Jackson is also an Agronomist by training. Before joining CARDI he was the Agricultural Extension Supervisor at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour. In this position Donawa coordinated a crop expansion programme with selected crops in St Vincent and the Grenadines and worked with multiple agencies on agronomy trials for various crops. He has a passion for farmers training and education and has worked assiduously to improve their skills and knowledge in various disciplines. Donawa holds a BSc in General Agriculture and an MSc in Agricultural and Rural Development from the UWI St Augustine.

Donawa replaces Gregory Linton who tragically passed away in June 2023. Linton was the CARDI Representative in St Vincent and the Grenadines from 2017 up until his untimely passing.

Ansari Hosein, CARDI’s Executive Director noted that these new appointments will “ensure that the resources are best deployed to meet the needs of our member states as well as the successful implementation of Institute’s work programme.”
Guyana to establish multi-million dollar regional food hub

Guyana says it is moving ahead with plans to establish a US$14 million regional food hub and that land for the facility has already been identified on the Soesdyke/Linden Highway.

Agriculture Minister Zulfikar Mustapha, who met with the President of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Dr. Mohammed Sulaiman, emphasised Guyana’s desire to become the regional food hub.

“We want Guyana to be the food hub. The primary production hub of the Caribbean so that we could supply the Caribbean. What we have, our colleagues in the Caribbean, don’t have. We have arable flat land and abundant fresh water. Now with the investment coming on board, we can modernize the infrastructure, and start ramping up of the production,” he said.

Export Saint Lucia presents new and emerging markets for traditional and new products

Export Saint Lucia over the last few months has embarked on a series of interventions aimed at diversifying the export basket and seeking new markets for goods and services from Saint Lucia.

The Agency, the national trade export promotion agency of the Government of Saint Lucia, continues to work assiduously with producers of high quality goods and services which meet the required standards for various export markets.

Currently, even with a noticeable decline in exports of agriculture, owing to the after effect of Tropical Storm Bret, year-to-date domestic exports are trending similarly to 2022, confirming that exports have returned to pre-covid levels.

Following the decline of the market in the UK for Saint Lucia bananas, the Agency was tasked with finding a new home for our green gold. Research-led missions to neighbouring islands revealed that the region could absorb and even surpass the volume of bananas which would have otherwise been destined for the UK. Islands such as Antigua, Barbados, St Kitts and Trinidad were identified for specific high demand for Saint Lucia Bananas.

Regional GEF funded Blue Economy project to strengthen marine biodiversity and fisheries resilience in the Caribbean

A new US $48 million dollar project to strengthen the foundation for blue economic growth and sustainable development of marine living resources by focusing on marine spatial planning, area-based management, and climate-smart sustainable seafood value chain development has commenced. The Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF), are partnering to implement the four-year project in the region.

This initiative titled the “BE-CLME+: Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through Marine Spatial Planning in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus” project, aims to maintain and preserve cultural heritage through sustainable fisheries management, improved livelihoods, and alternative livelihoods while strengthening the integration of fisheries and ecosystem management to restore, protect and maintain marine biodiversity, productivity, and resilience of marine ecosystems.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) endorsed the Project in November 2022, including the provision of US$6.2 million for the project. The participating countries are Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, and Saint Lucia, while the partners partner organizations are CAF, FAO, CRFM, UWI-CERMES, University of Florida, which has committed co-financing of approximately US$41.7 million. The CRFM is the executive agency, while FAO and CAF are the GEF co-implementing agencies.

Youth Minister launches “Youth in Agriculture” Programmes

Four (400) hundred participants were present at the Youth in Agriculture Orientation hosted by the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service (MYDNS), which combined three of its youth agricultural programmes: the Youth Agricultural Shade House Project and the Youth Aquaculture Project. The Orientation took place on Monday 4th September 2023, at the National Academy for the Performing Arts, Port-of-Spain.

The Honourable Foster Cummings, Minister of Youth Development and National Service used the opportunity to inform the audience of two additional programmes under this Youth in Agriculture Banner: Youth Community Model Farm and Youth Agriculture Public/Private Partnership. Though each remains unique, they share three things in common, those being Youth, Agriculture and Entrepreneurship.

“Youth in Agriculture” is a model farm which will provide youth with the required knowledge and skills to become more productive farmers. The model farm is expected to produce 400 (400) new, youthful farmers by 2025. We are well on our way to achieve this,” Minister Cummings shared with the audience. Giving remarks as a partner to the Ministry was Senator the Honourable Avinash Singh, Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. “These programmes are a win-win situation as it combines youth participation in agriculture and food sovereignty.”
Resuscitating Barbados’ papaya industry

The papaya industry in Barbados has recorded a steady decline over the years, as a direct result of increased pest and disease pressures. Of economic interest has been the Papaya Bunchy Top (PBT) resistant varieties and improve the capacity of farmers in papaya production and commercialization through the creation of a series of communication products as well as the development of a papaya industry plan to guide and monitor the development of the industry. Twenty five farmers and technical staff from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security (MAFNS) will be trained in papaya production and commercialization. Project partners include MAFNS, IICA and private farmers.

In the second project, a Papaya Spacing Trial has commenced at the CARDI Field station in Graeme Hall. The aim of this trial is to investigate the impact of variations in spacing on the productivity and private farmers.

Currently, only a very small amount of papaya consumed is cultivated locally. Simultaneous with the decline in local production is the price increases for imported papaya. Import figures for 2021 ($5.71/kg) indicate that consumers paid 3X more per kg of papaya than in 2010 ($2.15/kg). Price increases have impacted consumption. In Barbados, papaya consumed for 2021 (31,259 kg) was in fact one third of the amount consumed in 2011 (103, 074 kg).

It is expected that both projects will collectively contribute to resuscitating the papaya industry resulting in a reduced reliance on imports and increasing access to fresh fruit in Barbados.

The project was conceptualized and is being led by IICA.

Sweet potato research studies commence across the Region

Implementation of activities under Component 2 of the Caribbean Development Bank’s (CDB) financed Sweet Potato Value Chain Enhancement and Technology Transfer project has started. The Department of Food Production, UWI St Augustine will lead the research activities for this component of the project which aims to improve the availability of market preferred and climate resilient sweet potato varieties/genotypes and enhance production and processing technology through field research. The UWI will work closely with CARDI to implement these research activities in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Cayman Islands, Guyana and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Five research studies will be conducted. The first is the morphological characterization of the 5 most important sweet potato varieties/cultivars from Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Cayman Islands and Belize. This will be completed using the Descriptors for Sweet Potato (CIP, AVRDC and IBPGR 1991). Molecular characterization and biochemical analyses for these varieties will also be completed at the UWI’s lab in Trinidad.

Additionally, drought tolerant studies using the sweet potato varieties identified will be conducted in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados and St Vincent and the Grenadines. Field trials will be performed inclusive of positive controls (adequate available water) to compare the productivity. Spatially replicated trials across selected agroecological zones to assess performance of 15 sweet potato cultivars from Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines under open field conditions will also be done. Agroecological zones will be identified based on soil, climate, and topography for each country. Crop growth and performance will be measured, complementing the monitoring of soil and climatic variables. The shelf life and eating quality for these tubers will also be assessed.

As an output of this work, UWI will prepare a catalogue highlighting the features and characteristics of all sweet potato cultivars used in the various studies. The information will include the origin and distribution of each cultivar among BMC countries.

A Toolbox of Training Materials and Protocols to Support the Production of Virus Free Sweet Potato Planting Materials will also be prepared. The UWI will support the production of large quantities of virus free planting materials by assisting with the review and development of micropropagation protocols and training of staff from plant tissue culture labs of the project countries.

According to CARDI’s project manager Reginald Andall, the Institute’s vision is to have a food secure region. The Institute with continue to work with stakeholders to improve the Region’s self-sufficiency whilst, exploiting our full production potential of sweet potato in a sustainable manner guided by evidence based data.

Did You Know?

Papain the enzyme present in immature papaya has diverse commercial uses. In the food processing industry it is used in meat tenderizing and for preservation. Papain also has widespread uses in the pharmaceutical and medical industries. It is used to cure various digestive ailments and is also known to have analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties. Several cosmetic and skin-care products also have papain as an important ingredient.
Happy visitors to the CARDI booth at Tech Agri Expo hosted by the Faculty of Food and Agriculture and Ministry of Youth Development and National Service from 22-24 September 2023 at UWI St Augustine Campus.

Newly installed CARDI Representative, in Antigua and Barbuda, Junior Greene (l) is accompanied by Executive Director, Ansari Hosein (r) to a meeting with Mrs Sandra Joseph, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining paid tribute to CARDI’s former Animal Productionist, Albert Fearon at the Denbigh Agricultural, Industrial and Food Show which took place from 5-7 August 2023 in Maypen, Clarendon.

On location, Consultancy Firm - MultiCrop Facility Limited commenced work on the production of various communication aids on Sweet Potato Production under the CDB Financed Regional Sweet Potato project being executed by CARDI.