CARDI at the 17th Caribbean Week of Agriculture

Rewarding youth excellence in Agriculture

Senator, Adrian Thomas welcomed as new Chairman, CARDI Board of Governors
The 17th edition of the Caribbean Week of Agriculture was officially opened by Prime Minister the Hon. Philip Davis on Tuesday 9 October 2023 at the Breezes Resort and Spa in the Bahamas under the theme ‘Accelerating Vision 25 by 2025’. The opening ceremony featured remarks from the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Dr. Carla Barnett, the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Dr. Manuel Otero; the Executive Director of the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), Mr. Ansari Hosein; the Sub-Regional Coordinator of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Dr. Renata Clarke; Representative and Country Director of the World Food Programme, Mr. Regis Chapman; and the Minister of Agriculture of The Bahamas, the Hon Jomo Campbell.

Prime Minister Davis, delivered the keynote address in which he noted that while collectively 50% of the 25 by 2025 target has been reached, ‘united action, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to feeding ourselves as a regional policy priority’ remain critical across CARICOM. He encouraged member states ‘to think beyond just feeding our communities and look into the potential for valuable non-food crops for industrial and medicinal use.’

Meanwhile, CARDI’s Executive Director underscored the need for increased investment in research and development. He declared ‘that continuous research and development together with our collective endeavours are needed to increase production and productivity to achieve Vision 25 by 2025.’

During the week, CARDI in collaboration with various regional and international partners hosted 7 seminars on various thematic areas. They were hybrid events which facilitated wider participation and engagement among stakeholders.

CARDI, CARICOM, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) collaborated to host the seminar ‘Linking production to productivity’.

This seminar highlighted some of the newest techniques and latest research to improve the production of key commodities – sweet potato, soybean, corn and cassava in CARICOM. Increased investment to optimize production and the creation of innovative value added products were recognized as being crucial to the development of these commodities.

The ‘Towards 2025: New Initiatives in Livestock Feeding Systems Utilizing available Tropical Forages and Non- Conventional Feed Resources’ seminar hosted by CARDI tracked the origins of small ruminant production in the Region and highlighted tropical forages and non-conventional feed options for small ruminants. Two Bahamian farmers as well as the Minister of Agriculture in Belize, Jose Abelardo Mai shared their practical experiences with the availability and accessibility of commercial feeds and their impact on cost of production.

In collaboration with IICA and FAO, CARDI also co-hosted a seminar on ‘Digitizing the future of Caribbean Agriculture’. This session zeroed in on some of the current initiatives in marketing and market access for regional agricultural stakeholders.

In the second session ‘Digitizing the Future of Agriculture- Current Digital and Spatial Solution Applications in the Caribbean’ - CARDI formally launched the Hit Reset Project. Dr Graham King, Project Lead HIT RESET Caribbean and Director of the St. Augustine Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship gave an overview of the Hit Reset Digital Project. Executive Director, Ansari Hosein followed with a summary of the CARDI project - ‘Innovative Early Detection Pest and Disease Management System using IoT® sensor in the Real-Time Digital Monitoring of South American Palm Weevil (SAPW) for Conserving Coastal Coconut Palms in Select CARIFORUM Countries.’ The project will introduce never before used technology in the Region to monitor and detect the presence of SAPW in coconut palms in 9 coastal communities in Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and St. Lucia. The deployment of this technology will monitor coconut trees and facilitate early detection of the larval stage of SAPW to inform timely mitigation and control strategies for the pest. A special presentation was done by Yehonathan Ben Hamozej from Agrint on the Digital IOT Real time system. Agrint is an AgTech company specializing in the use of ‘in-tree sensors with patented technology for early detection of pests.

The seminar on Status of new initiatives to advance the supply of coconut planting material within the CARIFORUM- Hybridization and Tissue Culture presented on the various approaches utilised under the Regional Coconut project to increase the supply of coconut planting material in CARICOM. Hope Nursery in Guyana, a success story under this project, presented their model. On the brink of bankruptcy 7 years ago the nursery is now a sustainable profitable enterprise that has the capacity to export coconut seedlings across the Region. The Coconut Industry Board (CIB) a key project partner presented on their tissue culture initiatives.

The seminar ‘Transboundary Pests and Diseases of concern to CARICOM countries’ focused on some pests and diseases that are of quarantine importance to the Region. These were the African Swine Flu, Fusarium Wilt TR4 and Lethal Yellowing in coconuts. This knowledge sharing session was aimed at improving stakeholder education on these threats and the interventions required to prevent their introduction and spread. This session was a collaboration between CARDI, IICA, Caribbean Plant Health Directors (CPHD) and the Caribbean Agriculture Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFS).

In addition the Institute co-hosted seminars on Leveraging Opportunities for Enhanced Plant Breeding Innovation by Building a Regional Road Map for Plant Breeding and Plant Variety Right Systems and Advancing Movement of Plant Germplasm within CARICOM. The former was a collaboration among CarIPI (CARIFORUM Intellectual Property Rights & Innovation Project), The International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) and The Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO) while the latter was co-hosted with CAHFS.

On 11 October, the Institute also hosted its 36th Board of Governors meeting. At this meeting the results of the 2023 work programme were presented and the 2024 work programme approved by the Board.

The Institute also participated in the Trade Show and Exhibition where our work on small ruminants, roots and tubers and coconuts were showcased.

The Executive Director also participated in the OECD’s Round Table Discussion on ‘Applying technology and innovation across agriculture: value chains to support food and nutrition security’ as a panelist. The CARDI presentation noted that while technology adoption and innovation are keys to accelerating the agricultural transformation process, the Caribbean’s food and agriculture systems are years behind the technology adoption curve. Insights into how innovation is fostered in the Institute’s work were highlighted as well as areas along the value chain where technology can be integrated to improve productivity and efficiency.
Agriculture Minister says farmers should grow more ginger for global market

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining, Floyd Green, says Jamaican farmers should tap into the growing global demand for spice crops, by embracing the cultivation of ginger.

Green, who was speaking following a tour of the Reynolds Pier in Ocho Rios, St Ann on Wednesday, said the country is at a stage where spices, notably ginger, is in such high demand overseas that it would be tantamount to “agricultural malpractice” not to get it right.

“Jamaica possesses the ideal climate and fertile soil to cultivate ginger of exceptional quality. By capitalising on this advantage, our farmers can tap into the ever-expanding global market, securing a sustainable source of income and contributing to the country’s economic development,” Green said.

Rampant heatwaves are a growing threat to Caribbean food security

Record-breaking heat that has been beating down on the Caribbean for the past few months poses a grave threat to regional food security. Unprecedented temperatures are impacting soil and water, worker productivity and income, food prices and trade—with consequences for the availability, accessibility and affordability of major crops, fish stocks, livestock and even imported food.

Driven by climate change, a strong El Niño climate pattern and a much warmer than usual tropical north Atlantic, heat waves—temperatures that exceed the 90th percentile of the region’s historical range—have affected both marine and terrestrial food sources.

“Through successive COPs [United Nations Climate Change Conferences] we have heard repeated warnings about the imperative of limiting global temperatures to 15 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels,” says Dr. Didacus Jules, Director General of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

“Global warming is creating hell on earth for Small Island Developing States (SIDS)—a rapid onslaught apocalypse.”

Octagonal warning labels help consumers act on facts

The Caribbean is facing a health crisis that is largely being driven by unhealthy diets filled with ultra-processed food products (UPPs) that sometimes masquerade as healthy options. Although some industry players propose alternative labelling options, with our people’s health on the line, we need the label that is backed by sound, scientific research; and the Octagonal Warning Label (OWL) is 9 TIMES more effective at helping us quickly, correctly and easily identify products that are high in sugars, sodium and fats than other labeling system.

The Octagonal Warning Label enables other healthy food policies because it clearly and effectively identifies products that are high in sugars, sodium and fats and, therefore, harmful to health of our families and children.

Modern diets lack fresh, minimally processed food and are inundated with ultra-processed food products high in sugar, fats and salt which lead to our region’s biggest killers: obesity, diabetes, hypertension, high blood pressure and even some cancers.

With these ultra-processed food products being made easily accessible, attractively marketed, cheap and convenient, it’s more important than ever to have clear facts about the food we buy and consume.

Agricultural officers now certified as drone pilots and drone data analysts

The technical personnel in the Ministry of Agriculture, St Vincent and the Grenadines are now in a better position to gather and interpret accurate data derived from the use of drones.

The Agricultural Officials have completed a three-month comprehensive Drone Technology training exercise, and are now certified as Drone Pilots and Drone Data Analysts. The Drone Mapping & Geospatial Analysis training programme was conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Addressing the closing ceremony, one of the co-ordinators of the project, Agricultural Officer Karoma Browne, said extensive work was done in relation to data management.

The goal of the Drone Mapping & Geospatial Analysis training programme was to improve the knowledge and practical skills of the technical personnel in the Ministry of Agriculture in the use of drones for environmental mapping, geospatial analysis, and participatory data gathering.
Rewarding youth excellence in Agriculture

Agriculture, is a vast, beautiful sector which is overrun with an immense, yet untapped potential. The recipient of this year’s CARDI sponsored TP Lecky Prize from the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, Xavier Joseph is committed to helping the Caribbean agriculture sector realize its true potential. Xavier graduated at the top of his class with a B.Sc. in Agriculture Science (First Class Honours) from the University of the West Indies (UWI), St Augustine Campus. His journey in agriculture began through an epiphany of sorts, having more to do with ‘what’ inspired him rather than who. Travelling back to his secondary school days, Xavier was never enchanted by, what he explains as ‘elite’ professions, such as doctors and lawyers and by the time he had registered for UWI in 2020, the Caribbean’s food supply chains were already being negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This therefore propelled a younger Xavier to question, what he wanted to do, to positively impact society and it was then he saw his impact resonating within food and agriculture.

His university journey though rewarding was not without its challenges and hardships. However, he notes that his experience during this time, especially the practical field activities have allowed him to better appreciate the work of farmers to make healthy, wholesome food available to consumers. Also his interactions with students from across the Region was particularly enriching and enabled him to better understand and appreciate the Caribbean’s unique and vibrant culture.

Currently, Xavier is pursuing his MPhil in Crop Science at the Faculty of Food and Agriculture. His research is focused on the Agronomy of Breadfruit – a crop that he says is neglected and underutilized but has immense potential for alleviating food insecurity. His aim as a postgraduate student is to provide evidence base data to help farmers optimize production and see the profit potential and viability of the Caribbean’s breadfruit industry. Xavier also has another goal in mind, which is to challenge society’s lingering negative perception of agriculture. He hopes that his success becomes a beacon of motivation, encouraging others to follow in his footsteps. His advice to young people is to remain focused and get creative as innovation and technology are crucial to driving the industry forward.

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Senator, Adrian Thomas welcomed as new Chairman, CARDI Board of Governors

Senators the Honourable Adrian Thomas, Minister of State with responsibility for Agriculture and Lands, Fisheries and Cooperatives, Grenada has been appointed Chairman, CARDI Board of Governors, for the period October, 2023 to October, 2026. Senator Thomas’ appointment was confirmed at the 36th Board of Governors Meeting held on 11th October, 2023 during the Caribbean Week of Agriculture in Nassau, The Bahamas.

In welcoming the new Chairman, Executive Director, Ansari Hosein says the CARDI team looks forward to working with Senator Thomas to ensure a stronger, thriving and impactful Institute which continues to deliver relevant agricultural research and development outputs to the benefit of its Member States. He also thanked outgoing Chairman the Honourable Crenston Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment, Montserrat for his dedication and outstanding stewardship during the period November 2019 to October 2023.

Senator Thomas holds a Master of Laws (University of Leicester), a Bachelor of Laws (University of Wolverhampton) and a Diploma in Agriculture (Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry).

Prior to his appointment, Senator Thomas was a Lecturer at the University of the West Indies Open Campus and worked at the Pest Management Unit, Ministry of Agriculture. He also served as the Deputy Labour Commissioner, Ministry of Labour, Grenada and as a Director & Properties Manager at the Grenada Co-operative Nutmeg Association.

Outgoing Chairman CARDI Board of Governors, the Honourable Crenston Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment, Montserrat

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 in concert with farmers 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.

Cardi Field Station, Betty’s Hope, Antigua Senator the Honourable Adrian Thomas, Minister of Agriculture and Lands, Fisheries and Cooperatives, Grenada

CARDI Field Day - Use of biostimulants in sweet potato and cassava production

CARDI Field Station, Betty’s Hope, Antigua and Barbuda

COP 28

Expo City, Dubai, UAE

Nursery Management Training Belair, Carriacou

Photo courtesy: Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Fisheries and Cooperatives (Facebook page)
Fayaz Shah, Manager, Science, Technology and Innovation participated in the panel discussion on ‘Improving food security, agricultural productivity and agribusiness opportunities’ at the AfriCaribbean Trade and Investment Forum on 30 October 2023.

CARDI participated in World Food Day celebration at the Orange Walk Technical High School. More than 500 persons, including the Governor General of Belize, Her Excellency Dame Froyla visited the CARDI booth. Donations of red bean, black bean and hot pepper seeds and cassava and sweet potato planting material were made to the school by the Institute.

Jamaicans Peter Mc Connell and Diandra Rowe were awarded the CARICOM Farmer of the Year and CARICOM Young Farmer of the Year respectively for Innovations in Agriculture at the Caribbean Week of Agriculture.

Executive Director, Ansari Hosein and CARDI Representative in St Vincent and the Grenadines, Donawa Jackson paid a courtesy call to Prime Minister, Dr. the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour, the Honourable Saboto Caesar. Discussions focused on ongoing CARDI projects and future plans to assist with the development of the country’s agriculture sector.