Introducing new dasheen varieties in Grenada

Farming communities to benefit from the services of bird wailers in Tobago

Regional stakeholders participate in resilient coconut production training

White potato fertilizer trial gets underway in St Vincent and the Grenadines
Introducing new dasheen varieties in Grenada

Two dasheen varieties introduced by the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) in St Vincent and the Grenadines have been shared with farmers in Grenada through the Smart Agriculture and Rural Enterprises Programme (SAEP).

The Samoa and IND 512 varieties were supplied to farmers in the Clozier, Belvidere and Morne Longue communities as part of a pilot programme. Both varieties were part of fifty cultivars initially obtained from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePaCT), under the European Union supported, International Network for Edible Aroids (INEA) project – Adapting clonally propagated crops to climatic and commercial change. After evaluations in the different agroecological zones, both varieties were identified for adoption. The project’s overarching goal was to increase the genetic diversity of the crop so strengthening smallholders’ capacity to adapt to climate change.

Based on the results of a survey done in 2022 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry & Labour (MAFFRTIL), both varieties were found to be preferred by farmers over the traditional varieties. They were also found to be more adaptable to climatic and soil conditions, produced higher yields, had faster growth rates, reduced post-harvest losses and were less susceptible to pests and diseases. In addition, they have reduced cooking times with good eating quality.

Speaking on the introduction of the new varieties in Grenada, Executive Director, Ansari Hosein said that this was “The perfect example how investments in agricultural research in the Region can yield results that can be scalable and transferable.”

The SAEP is a 6 year programme focused on assisting beneficiaries to improve their livelihoods, through skills training, investments in agriculture, teaching climate smart practices and providing business skills training and technical services to rural enterprises. It is funded by the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Government of Grenada. Improving production of root crops like dasheen in Grenada will allow farmers to enter new markets.

Farming communities to benefit from the services of bird wailers in Tobago

On 12 March 2024, the Pilot Project, “Demonstration of a solar powered wailer bird deterrent system to reduce crop losses caused by Parrots and Cocrico in Tobago” was launched at the Goodwood Secondary School. The project, jointly implemented by CARDI and the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development is the recipient of an EPIC Grant financed by the Digicel Foundation Trinidad and Tobago and Tobago and Shell Trinidad and Tobago Limited.

In 2022, the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development (DFSNRESD) sought the assistance of CARDI to control two bird pests – the cocrico and parrot. Both have been wreaking havoc in farming communities across the island, causing persistent damage and losses, leading to a ripple effect throughout a variety of vegetable and tree crop value chains.

In November 2023, CARDI procured two solar powered bird deterrent systems from Canadian based company Agritech. The systems deter birds through a series of pre-programmed alarm and distress calls at 4 minute intervals. They are programmed to automatically turn on at dawn and turn off at dusk. The Institute also provided training to staff of the Forestry Department at the Division on the use and maintenance of the systems.

Initially, one of the systems was installed at Tobago Cocoa Estate, which in the past reported a 50% decline in production as a result of parrot damage. Preliminary results from the systems were promising. Owner Duane Dove reported that “After 3 weeks at the Tobago Cocoa Estate, there were no sightings of parrots or evidence of parrot damage. And three weeks after the machine was relocated there was still no evidence of habituation taking place.”

Participants at the launch had the opportunity to see the system in operation. Delivering the feature address at the launch, Secretary at the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development, Nathisha Charles-Fantin said she was deeply grateful for the support of all agencies stating that they “Steadfastly supported the shared goal of enhancing the resilience and sustainability of Tobago’s agriculture industry.”

Cindy Ann Currency, Operations Manager at the Digicel Foundation remarked that this is one of many agriculture projects financed by the EPIC Grant. She notes that the project was aligned to the Foundation’s vision of empowering communities and they were happy to see the wailers bringing ease to farmers.

Speaking on the sustainability of the project, Manager, Fayaz Shah said the Division is working out a system to move the wailers across the farming districts in Tobago. With farmers experiencing the benefits of the wailers, he is hoping that investments can be made towards the increased adoption of them making it part of the integrated approach for managing these bird pests.
$5.3million Caribbean Agriculture Project to benefit farmers in Dominica

The Caribbean Agriculture Productivity Improvement Activity Project (CAPA) aims to empower farmers with market-driven technologies. The initiative is set to strengthen livelihoods, enhance food security, and foster sustainable agricultural growth. Launched earlier this year, CAPA heralds a new era for Dominican farmers.

Under the support of the International Executive Service Corps (IIESC), this initiative introduces a three-year USAID-funded programme in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean. The initiative aims to positively impact on food security and farmers' livelihoods.

A substantial investment places emphasis on CAPA’s commitment to supporting farmers and stakeholders. This financial muscle will promote market-driven agricultural practices and technologies, facilitating seamless connections with domestic and regional markets.

CAPA’s initial focus on key crops for the first seven months includes dasheen, sweet potatoes, passionfruit, and cassava.

CAPA’s strategic objectives revolve around boosting smallholder market-led production of fruits and vegetables. This will enhance domestic and regional market linkages for smallholders and agro-processors and transferring best practices to smallholder farmers.

As CAPA takes its first steps, the anticipation is high for the transformation it will bring to Dominica’s agricultural landscape.

Guyana President calls for a review of global food production system

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) regional conference opened with President Irfaan Ali calling for a review of the global production system as well as the political will to end malnutrition, obesity and hunger in the region.

Addressing the opening ceremony of the four-day FAO’s 38th Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (LRAC38), Ali said the conference was taking place at a time when “we are confronted with many challenges on how we can better resolve food crises, develop a global system that is equitable, fair, just and one in which plenty is transformed into equals. Whilst we have great starvation and hunger across the world we still have plentiful waste across the world. It is how we get to this equilibrium; how do we get to this balance that is important.

“There are a number of thematic areas that I think this conference must address. The issue of technology and the use of technology in the food production system,” he told the delegates, adding “but for me the future of food production revolves around women and young people. How do we get women and youths more involved in the food production system,” he said, distinguishing between food production and agriculture.

Unprecedented hike in produce coming

Contrary to the usual expectations of lower prices during the dry season, fuelled by a glut of produce, this year tells a different story. A check with some of the country’s (Trinidad and Tobago) markets showed that for instance, tomatoes which usually fluctuated between $3 to $4 in the dry season are now being sold at between $10 to $12 per pound and in some cases as much as $18 per pound, depending on where it is bought.

Cucumbers which were $3 and $4 a pound are now priced at around $8 to $10; sweet peppers which were usually sold at $6 are now going for $12; melongene which retailed at around $8 to $10; sweet peppers which were usually sold between $4 to $5 is now priced at between $8 to $12 per pound and pumpkin which was cheap at $2 per pound has now gone up by three dollars more a pound.

To compound matters, there has been no surplus of goods such as dasheen, celery, hot peppers, lettuce, patchoi (bok choy), chayote, callaloo, cabbage, cauliflower, bell (long bean), cucumber and sweet peppers as the cost of these goods also continue to steadily climb when compared to prices last year.

A comparison was conducted between the average prices at the Norris Deonarine Northern Wholesale Market (NDNWM) for January to March 2023 and January 2024 which also showed a steady hike. ‘For root crops, the average price of eddoes increased by 8 per cent, and ginger saw a substantial increase of 163 per cent when compared to the previous year. Minor fluctuations were observed in the prices of other root crops traded during the same period,’ Debysingh explained.

Ministry of Agriculture launches state of the art Plant Diagnostic Laboratory to enhance food security in crop production in St Kitts and Nevis

The Government of St. Kitts and Nevis, through the Ministry of Agriculture, launched its brand new Plant Diagnostic Laboratory, as part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen food security and ensure that the Federation attains its ambitious 25 by 2025 Agenda of reducing its food import bill by 25 percent by the year 2025.

Located at Needmust, St. Kitts, the plant diagnostic laboratory will provide invaluable services such as developing and testing crops that can withstand climatic changes and contribute to enhancing yields, nutritional value and overall crop resilience.

Special Advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture, Dr. Ashton Stanley stated that through meticulous testing and experimentation, the ministry will endeavour to uncover innovative solutions to address the pressing issues affecting farmers today.

“Our lab will play a pivotal role in monitoring and evaluating plant performance, resilience against pest and disease and the impact of climate change on crops. This enhances our ability to conduct field and border surveillance which positions our country at the forefront of proactive agricultural management, guarding against the infiltration of exotic pests and diseases that can threaten our crops,” Stanley stated.

Read More
Regional stakeholders participate in resilient coconut production training

More than 50 persons from across the Caribbean participated in the Regional Workshop on Sustainable and Resilient Coconut Production within a Changing Climate co-hosted by CARDI, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the Coconut Industry Board (CIB) from 4–8 March 2024 in Jamaica. This workshop was an activity under Phase 2 of the regional Coconut Project - Alliances for Coconut Industry Development, Expansion and Enhanced Support in the Caribbean financed by the European Union and CARIFORUM.

One of the objectives of the project was to build the capacity of participants in areas related to improving coconut production while highlighting opportunities for value addition.

During the workshop, theoretical and practical sessions covered topics such as the establishment of coconut seed gardens, selection of quality mother palms, harvesting of pollen from coconut mother palms, hybridization techniques, practices and processes, coconut nursery establishment and management and processing for value addition. Twelve countries were represented, with workshop facilitators coming from Alligator Head Foundation, the ITC, the CIB and CARDI.

While delivering remarks at the opening ceremony, CARDI’s Executive Director, Ansari Hosein noted the 8 year regional project will end in April 2024 and one of the key responsibilities of the Institute was to increase the availability and accessibility to quality planting material. He said during the project CARDI contributed to the establishment of 71 nurseries across 12 countries with the collective capacity of producing between 300,000 - 400,000 seed nuts annually. Additionally, new high yielding tolerant varieties were introduced in Barbados, Belize, Dominica and Grenada - greatly improving the genetic stock in these countries.

Minister of Agriculture, The Honourable Floyd Greene, delivered the Feature Address at the workshop and underscored the importance of collaboration, noting that partners from the public and private sectors have positioned the industry on a productive and sustainable footing. He continued by saying that through the work of one of the project’s key partner in Jamaica – the CIB, the country has been able to reduce the spread of the Lethal Yellowing disease by 70 per cent. Our research in this area has allowed us to develop varieties and hybrids with optimum resistance/tolerance to Lethal Yellowing, which has been plaguing the coconut industry, causing severe economic losses in the industry said Minister Greene.

Feedback was positive from participants with one remarking that the workshop offered “a stark juxtaposition between farms in transition and fully productive ones, providing an honest portrayal of the coconut industry’s dynamics.”

White potato fertilizer trial gets underway in St Vincent and the Grenadines

St Vincent and the Grenadines is targeting to produce 5 million EC dollars’ worth of white potato annually for local consumption under their National White Potato Production Project. This initiative is a key component of St. Vincent and the Grenadines commitment to the CARICOM 25 by 25 initiative and the country’s National Diversification Programme. It is led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour (MAFFRTIL), in collaboration with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Government of Dominica, and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI).

The Spunta and Desiree varieties were introduced to St Vincent and the Grenadines from Dominica. In February, a fertilizer trial was established at the Institute’s Research Station in Orange Hill to assess the impact of different fertilizer rates on growth and yield. A split plot design was set up with 4 treatments (3 different fertilizer rates and 1 control (no fertilizer). The assignment of treatments were randomized with each treatment replicated 4 times to account for variability in the field.

The treatments being investigated are standard NPK recommendation for white potato (T1), 25% increase above the recommended rate (T2) and 25% decrease below the recommended rate (T3). A control, where no fertilizer was applied was also established.

The plants have begun flowering and data collection is ongoing. Some of the parameters being assessed include the plant height, time of flowering, tuber weight, size and number of tubers at harvest.

White potato is a non-traditional crop in St Vincent and the Grenadines and the objective is to provide farmers with the best information to guide them to successfully produce the crop says CARDI Representative, Donawa Jackson.

The project is timely as the country is experiencing a growth in the hospitality sector. The local production of white potato will support the sustainability of the sector while contributing to the livelihoods of farmers and economic prosperity for the country.

Lethal yellowing is caused by a bacterium that is carried by plant hopper (Mopafua cactorum). The disease was first recorded in 1884 in Jamaica. Symptoms include premature falling of nuts, necrosis of inflorescence, discoloration of foliage and in the advanced stage the tell-tale sign is the withering and toppling of the crown, leaving a bare trunk (telephone pole). The disease results in widespread losses to farmers. There is no known control method to discourage the spread of the disease. However, strategies such as the movement of palms from infected areas should not be done. Breeding for resistant varieties is recommended. Some cultivars with tolerance are the Brazilian Green Dwarf, BraPan and MayBraz.

Did You Know?

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Early detection, removal and incineration are recommended.

The establishment of multi-varietal orchards and ensuring proper plant nutrition are also encouraged.
St Vincent and the Grenadines

Participants at the Sweet Potato Open Day hosted by CARDI had the opportunity to view the performance of 7 lines of sweet potato morphologically characterized under field conditions. This was an activity under the Caribbean Development Bank’s Regional Sweet Potato project.

Belize

CARDI facilitated a training for Field Officers from the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) on the identification and management of the South American Palm Weevil. The training was organised by NAMDEVCO as part of the Biodiversity Conservation and Agroecological Land Restoration in Productive Landscapes of Trinidad and Tobago (BIOREACH) project.

Trinidad and Tobago

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St Kitts and Nevis

Field evaluation trials for 7 tomato, 9 broccoli and 3 sweet pepper lines have been completed in St Kitts and Nevis. The lines have been produced by the Taiwanese based World Vegetable Center and aims to identify new adapted vegetable varieties for production under Caribbean conditions.

A farmer receives sweet potato planting material from the CARDI Representative, Donawa Jackson (r). The CARDI implemented Regional Sweet Potato project funded by the CDB has generated high interest on the island with many farmers requesting planting material from the Institute.