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CARDI, World Veg host successful capacity building workshop
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On 17 April, 2024 the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) hosted a Regional Symposium on Red Ring Disease and South American Palm Weevil Monitoring and Management in Coconuts in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Financed by the European Union (EU) and CARIFORUM, under the Alliances for Coconut Industry Development, Expansion and Enhanced Support in the Caribbean project, the symposium targeted researchers, farmers, agroprocessors and technical staff from the Ministries of Agriculture across the Region.

Over than one hundred and eighty persons attend the hybrid event. The aim was to highlight control strategies for the South American Palm Weevil (SAPW) and management of the Red Ring Disease based on research conducted by CARDI and MALF in Trinidad and Tobago as well as deepen collaborative linkages with other research institutions in Latin America who have been working in this area.

Speaking at the Opening Ceremony, Ben Morrison from the International Trade Centre - the co-implementing partner for this project praised the resilience of Caribbean coconut farmers while calling for wider collaborative approaches for managing pests and diseases as they remain major barriers to the growth and expansion of the industry.

His Excellency, Mr Peter Cavendish, Ambassador and Head of the European Delegation to Trinidad and Tobago respectively said that the EU considers the coconut industry as a facilitator for the much-needed transition towards more sustainable food systems, sustainable farm incomes, and improved product choices, aligning with the Farm to Fork strategy of the European Green Deal. He also reiterated that the EU’s support for Caribbean agriculture and food production will continue, with a €19 million program already in the early stages of implementation to boost sustainable production and enhance food security, including developing value chains with the ITC.

Ansari Hosein, CARDI’s Executive Director, underscored the importance of partnerships, guided by a clear vision to achieving success. He also emphasised the importance of continuous investment in agriculture research - noting that without it ‘we are fighting a losing battle’ in the sector.

Philippe Agostini, Chairman of the Coconut Growers Association said that effective management of the Ring Disease requires a multi-faceted approach, including improved disease identification, targeted tree removal, and area-wide management strategies. He noted that with “sustained efforts and collaboration, it may be possible to revive the coconut industry in Trinidad and mitigate the devastating impacts of Red Ring Disease. Pheromone-based trapping program shows promise, but its effectiveness is dependent on widespread adoption and coordination among all interest groups.

Senator the Honourable, Avinash Singh, Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries delivered the feature address and said that implementing a comprehensive strategy which addresses genetic diversity, pest management, climate change adaptation, replanting efforts, capacity building, and market development, will position the coconut industry to regain its prominence and contribute to the economic growth and food security of the nation. He praised the Regional project and the investments made towards the development of this important sector.

From the technical sessions that followed, participants gleaned a deeper understanding of the work agencies, like ChemTica, the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA), CARDI and MALF have been doing to manage the weevil and the nematode.

In Costa Rica, Dr. Francisco Gonzales from ChemTica said that mass trapping was effective in controlling the weevil population in oil palms by 80% and at present not one tree is lost to Red Ring Disease. He notes that while new trends and technologies may appear mass trapping continues to be the successful and convenient technique for controlling the pest.

Dr. Elio Cesar Guzzo from EMBRAPA said that while mass trapping using pheromone traps is a widely adopted strategy in Brazil. Entomopathogenic fungi like Beauveria bassiana and Metarhizium anisopliae are also employed through two methods - release of fungus-inoculated male weevils and self-disseminating fungus traps. Field trials have shown reductions of 58-76% in weevil populations using these approaches. They are also exploring the use of botanical extracts to kill nematodes in the soil.

CARDI and Ministry of Agriculture highlighted the research activities on the use of the improved funnel trap design for managing the SAPW and the use of Metarhizium and Beauveria bassiana to control the SAPW in Belize and Trinidad and Tobago respectively. From the trapping exercise conducted in Trinidad and Tobago, the team found Ryncholure pheromone combined with the ethyl acetate synergist (Rynchomagnet) and sugar cane was more efficient, trapping the weevils when compared to the traditional farmer treatments of Ryncholure pheromone combined with sugar cane and molasses. The traps positioned on the ground were also found to trap more weevils than the traditional traps placed 1.5 meters above the ground.

Following the Symposium participants got a first-hand view of the use the improved funnel traps to control the SAPW in the field as well as the opportunity to learn more about farmers’ experiences in managing the pest.

Since 2015, CARDI and ITC with the financial support from the European Union, ACP Secretariat and CARIFORUM have been working to strengthen the coconut value chain. Fast forward nine years later with a total investment of 9.3 million the project has laid a good foundation from which the development of the coconut industry can be accelerated and expanded.
'More business, less talk' agriculture, digitalisation key focus of Caribbean Investment Forum 2024

With rapid transformation ongoing and a keen focus on collectively building economic resilience in the region, the 2024 Caribbean Investment Forum, was on Wednesday launched talks about placing priority on building partnerships and attracting investors in key non-oil sectors. This year's forum will focus on three investment sectors – sustainable agriculture, green economy transition and digitalisation of businesses.

The Caribbean Investment Forum 2024 is slated for July 10-12 at the Arthur Chung Conference Center under the theme: Transforming Futures, Empowering Growth.

It is expected to attract more than 500 investors from across the region.

Delivering the feature address at the launch which was held at the Marriott Hotel, Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce Oneidge Waldron said the forum will provide the platform to foster economic resilience that will enable the region to recover and possibly withstand inevitable external shocks and natural disasters.

Field trials on the horizon for Sargassum-derived fertilizer

A multi-country mission to monitor progress with the regional Sargassum Products for Climate Resilience Project funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, has recently concluded. Representatives from the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and the New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research Limited (PFR) met with key partners in Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica in February and March 2024 to review progress and plan future activities.

Based on the successful outcome of recent scientific studies and greenhouse trials for a Sargassum-derived liquid fertilizer, the partners will commence field trials within the next few weeks. These efforts, which will be advanced in collaboration with the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) and regional private sector partners, signal promising progress towards valorization of Sargassum and strengthening the Caribbean’s food security and climate resilience.

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of fertilizers has skyrocketed, and farmers across the region need more affordable, high-quality fertilizers to improve their yields, especially in the stressful environment brought about by warmer temperatures and drought conditions. Anything that we can do to improve the supply and reduce costs and dependence on imports will be impactful," Milton Haughton, Executive Director, CRFM Secretariat, stated.

"The project is working with multiple reputable research organizations to ensure a strong evidence-based approach to the product development process. We understand the complex nature of the Sargassum issue and concerns in the agricultural sector and are prioritizing human, environmental and plant health in our research and development," Sophie Jones-Williams, PFR’s Program Manager - International Development, said.

2024 could be record year for chicken production – officials

Demand for chicken is up, prompting poultry production to bounce back to pre-COVID-19 levels and set a new record for 2024, Caribbean officials predicted on Friday.

The strong comeback is marked by a ten per cent increase in chick orders for the first quarter of the year at the island’s largest hatchery, Gale’s Agro Products, when compared to the same period last year, they said.

Based on these projections, Barbados is set to produce about 11 million birds in 2024, edging past 2019’s peak of 10.7 million.

"We are going to be at a record 11 million chicks this year," Managing Director at Gale’s Agro Products Barry Gale hailed the development: ‘In 2019, 10.7 million broiler chicks went into the industry. In 2020, we were on track to do better than that but then COVID-19 hit. This year, the statistics for the first four months of the year suggest that we are about ten per cent above last year’s production. By the end of April, 3.3 million chicks would have been ordered. If production continues the way it is going we should expect this year to beat the 2019’s record.’

Agriculture sector grew by 10% in 1st quarter of 2024 amid drought

Despite challenges with drought conditions affecting farmers locally, preliminary figures show that the agricultural sector grew by more than 10 per cent for the first quarter of this year.

The announcement was made by Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining, Floyd Green, at a post-Cabinet press briefing at Jamaica House on Wednesday.

Given the growth in the sector, Green shared. "Two things happen when you get a good tourist season that ended on Monday. The announcement was made by Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining, Floyd Green, at a post-Cabinet press briefing at Jamaica House on Wednesday.

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Given the growth in the sector, Green said it is critical for the ministry to support the nation’s farmers as the drought cycle continues.

"What we did is that we recognised from January that there were significant issues across the country, especially in parishes like Manchester and St Elizabeth, where they were having extended dry spells, and, as such, we started about the end of January (by) trucking water to our farmers," said Green.

In fact, the minister said between January and March, the ministry trucked approximately nine million gallons of water, helping 900 farmers in the process.

Additionally, the ministry has been working with farmers to better withstand the current drought by making them more resilient.

"We’ve worked with about 45 farmers to develop catchment areas and provide them with pond liners, and that work has helped about 1,000 farmers in enhancing their water management practices and their agricultural sustainability," Green shared.

Six areas, dubbed “highly productive zones”, have been targeted for the building of water catchment areas, for which $8 million have been earmarked for those projects.

Photo courtesy: Jamaica Information Service (JIS)
Congratulations to the Region’s top Agriculture Science student for 2023!

Congratulations to Ms Avia Findley – the recipient of the Region’s Top Award for Outstanding Performance in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Agriculture Science (Double Award) exam for 2023. Avia is a student at the Guy’s Hill High School in Jamaica and is the second student from that school to cop this prestigious award. On 23 April, 2024, the CARDI Representative in Jamaica, Mrs. Dionne Clarke-Harris visited the school and presented Avia with her CARDI sponsored prize package.

Avia is currently in 6th form and pursuing a number of subjects including Agriculture Science. She has plans to pursue a career as an Anesthesiologist.

Seventeen year old Avia says her love for Agriculture was instilled at an early age by her mother who practiced vegetable farming in the past for helping her studies, especially the practical aspects. Speaking with CARDI, Avia was very grateful for her strong support system. She attributed her success to her mother and later by her community. She credits the knowledge and experience gained from her mother who practiced vegetable farming in the past for helping her studies, especially the practical aspects. Speaking with CARDI, Avia was very grateful for her strong support system. She credits the knowledge and experience gained from her mother who practiced vegetable farming in the past for helping her studies, especially the practical aspects.

School principal Cecil Donald said that that he is happy to see the investments made by Guys Hill High School in Agriculture Science start to pay dividends.

Avia believes that more should be done to make agriculture attractive to youths in the Region. She noted that other careers are in the spotlight and are often promoted as being more lucrative and fulfilling than a career in Agriculture. Avia believes that this narrative must change and proposed a “simple solution of the encouraging planting tomatoes or ground provision to the younger ones at primary school, therefore instilling a love and curiosity from an early age.”

In closing, she encouraged youths to “stay in school, stay determined, work hard, have a goal, and always remain self-motivated.”

CARDI congratulates Avia on her outstanding achievement and wishes her all the best in her future endeavours.

Did You Know?

Since 2008 CARDI, has been honouring the Region’s top performing Agriculture Science student at the CSEC level.

This award was created in partnership with the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) to recognize and motivate students to study Agriculture Science at a higher level as well as pursue a career in this field.

The CXC offers Agricultural Science at the CSEC and CAPE levels. The CAPE Agricultural Science Syllabus is organised in two (2) Units: Unit 1: Fundamentals of Agriculture and Crop Production and Unit 2: Animal Production and the Environment.

At the CSEC level the Agricultural Science Syllabus is arranged in six sections: A, B, C, D, E and F. Candidates presented for the Single Award examination must complete Sections A, B, C and D ONLY. Candidates presented for the Double Award examination MUST complete Sections A to F (all six Sections).

CARDI, World Veg host successful capacity building workshop

CARDI and the World Vegetable Center (WorldVeg) through funding from the Government of Taiwan hosted the “3rd Annual Workshop and Training Course – Promoting vegetable diversity for more resilient livelihoods and healthier diets in Latin America and the Caribbean” from 22 – 26 April 2024 in Belize. This workshop is part of a wider project that began in 2021 which aims to conserve available vegetable biodiversity for future use and introduce and promote new vegetable varieties for domestic and export markets to sustainably improve the livelihoods of resource-poor populations in Central America and Caribbean countries. The new varieties were produced by the WorldVeg.

At the workshop, representatives from the project countries: Belize, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, Paraguay, Guatemala and Haiti shared updates from their work.

The 4-day training event also aimed to improve the proficiency of researchers in the Region on disease diagnosis and management, breeding strategies, and seed production, with a special focus on pepper and tomato. Trainers included WorldVeg researchers Derek Barchenger (pepper breeder), Assaf Eybishitz (tomato breeder) and Lourena Maxwell (plant pathologist).

The opening of workshop on 21 April, 2024 was attended by the Minister of Agriculture, The Honourable. Jose Abeldauro Mai and Ambassador of Taiwan to Belize, Hon. Li-Wen Hsu.

The results were promising for the 7 tomato lines. In Belize, CARDI evaluated the performance of 7 tomato varieties. These lines were evaluated for their adaptation to local conditions, tolerance to pests and diseases and consumer preference. The results were promising for the 7 tomato lines. Subsequently, the Institute identified farmers to evaluate these selected lines in, on-farm trials following best management protocols and practices. The aim is to introduce, new productive, adaptable vegetable varieties to farmers.

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Evaluation trials for 7 tomato, 9 broccoli and 3 sweet pepper lines were completed by CARDI in St Kitts and Nevis. As a follow up, 4 lines of broccoli and 3 sweet pepper and 6 tomatoes are being planned in 4 agro ecological zones across the country. Similar evaluation trials will take place at CARDI’s Field Stations in St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Upcoming Events

The Eighth Meeting of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Council of Ministers of Agriculture and Fisheries

Montserrat

4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States Charting the Course Toward Resilient Prosperity

Belize

ICTforAg

https://www.ictforag.com/
The Bahamas
CARDI was pleased to welcome The Honourable Prime Minister, Phillip Davis, Minister Jomo Campbell, Permanent Secretary (Ag) Neil Campbell and other Ministers of Cabinet to the institute’s booth at the Agri Business Expo from 12-13th April 2024.

Among the technologies highlighted was the recently refurbished Small Scale Climate Smart Greenhouse equipped with aluminium netting technology to reduce the days’ external high temperatures. The greenhouse will be utilized as part of CARDI’s in-kind contribution to the GEF 7 Project “Integrated land Landscape Management for Addressing Land Degradation, Food Security and Climate Resilience Challenges.”

Trinidad and Tobago
CARDI staff from across member states participated in a Review Session of the EU/CARIFORUM financed Alliances for Coconut Industry Development, Expansion and Enhanced Support in the Caribbean project in Trinidad, ahead of the Regional Symposium on Red Ring Disease and South American Palm Weevil Monitoring and Management in Coconuts.

St Vincent and the Grenadines
Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF) and the Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines hosted the “Challenges and Responses to Agriculture Development in the Caribbean Forum from 25 - 26 April, 2024. CARDI participated in the Forum and was pleased to welcome participants to the Research Station in Orange Hill where they were updated on ongoing research trials for sweet potato, white potato and vegetables.

Belize
Winners of the Farmers’ of the Year competition visit the CARDI Booth at the National Agriculture Trade Show. CARDI was a proud sponsor of the prize package, presented to the winners. Congratulations, to Sara Chub (Female Farmer of the Year), Nandy Aldana (Senior Farmer of the Year) and Maura Escobar (Junior Farmer of the Year).