

# Linking the Caribbean for Regional Food & Nutrition Security and Rural Development

cwa

CARIBBEAN WEEK OF AGRICULTURE



**"Linking the Caribbean for Regional Food and Nutrition Security and Rural Development"**



Guyana



# Food Security

a must for the region:  
the CIFS RF CARICOM Project

Caribbean people seem to have taken a liking to diets that are high in calories and low in nutrient value. The increased consumption of imported energy-dense processed foods—high in salt, starch, sugars and fats – is driving up the incidence of stroke, hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease in the region. This consumption behaviour has created twin problems of obesity and under-nutrition. Diet-related illnesses have become a major public health concern and is costing the region US\$1B annually; a major financial burden on the region's health care system.

Having recognised this, researchers at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus and McGill University, Canada embarked on finding solutions to this urgent problem of food and nutrition security in the Caribbean. Working with regional and local institutions, including the Ministries of Agriculture, Education and Health in Guyana, St. Lucia and St. Kitts and Nevis; the national School Dietary Services Limited of Trinidad and Tobago; the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute (CEHI); the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI); and the University of Guyana; the two universities took a multidisciplinary approach to agriculture, food, nutrition, environment and health in order to reduce the region's food import bill and to reduce the incidence of dietary-related illnesses. Experts in the areas of social, agricultural, nutrition and environmental sciences focussed on solving these problems.

In March 2011, a 42-month research project was initiated with CAD\$5M funding from the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFS RF), through the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Titled *'Improving the nutrition and health of CARICOM populations through sustainable agricultural technologies that increase food availability and diversity of food choices'*, the project is taking the innovative "farm to fork" approach, a concept that promotes locally grown and locally purchased farm produce.

## Stakeholders on the ground

One key goal of the project is to change consumer behaviour towards a more diversified diet that includes locally farmed vegetables, fruits and animal-sourced products. Recognising that healthy eating begins at an early age, children and their parents have been specially identified as target groups for nutrition and health interventions. Small holder farmers in pilot communities in Guyana, St Lucia and St Kitts are being equipped with agricultural technologies to increase

productivity of locally grown vegetables, fruits and animal products.

The project works with the school-feeding programmes in St. Kitts and Nevis and in Trinidad and Tobago. These have been identified as major vehicles for changing community nutrition outcomes and developing an appropriate 'farm to fork' model that links agriculture and health.



## Understanding the Socioeconomic and market context

The results of baseline surveys to collect data on the socioeconomic, cultural, nutritional and farming conditions of the target groups conducted in the project countries have been invaluable in ensuring that the project interventions are relevant and well-designed. The baseline information will also enable the determination of the impact of interventions at the end of the project.

Based on social network analysis, ground breaking work is also being conducted in St. Lucia to understand the role of farmer social capital in bringing about innovation in farming and food security policy.

## Nutrition interventions in schools

Changes in school lunch menus have been implemented in primary schools both in St Kitts and Trinidad. Further, in Trinidad, investigations are being undertaken to determine whether there is synergy between nutrition education and changes in the meals offered. The aim is to improve the nutritional composition of school meals by introducing fresh, locally farmed vegetables, fruits and animal products. The programmes target school children as well as their caregivers. Adults have been taught the importance of nutrition to their well-being and that of their families and the benefits of more diversified and healthy diets.

## Equipping farmers with appropriate technologies

The water and land resources component of the Project is addressing the problems of under production due to water scarcity in the dry season and excess water in the wet season.



*Forage sorghum production, St Kitts and Nevis*

Project results of drip irrigation interventions in St. Kitts show major increases in yields of pumpkin and watermelon, and substantial improvement in the diversity of crops grown by small farmers. Much of this produce is now being used in the new menus developed for use in the school lunch program for children and providing enhanced market outlet for small holder farmers. On-farm research data from Guyana on drip irrigation, rainfall and soil moisture dynamics will lead to a better understanding of crop water requirements during the

wet and dry season in the Caribbean. The quantification of post-harvest losses from horticultural crops, identification of appropriate varieties and growth media for green house crop production, and establishment and conservation (as silage) of drought tolerant forages (sorghum and mulatto grass) for small ruminant production represent additional project achievements that would increase year round availability of nutritious produce and improve economic returns to small holder farmers.

#### **Knowledge Uptake and Policy Impact**

Project activities are also aimed at regional capacity building and uptake of project knowledge and findings by policy makers. In August 2014, when the project comes to an end, the expectation is that the systematic and integrated farm to fork approach to food availability, access, safety and quality adopted by this project will be scaled up to other countries in the region with the end result being improved nutrition and health of CARICOM population. Communication materials are being prepared for widespread dissemination of project findings using all the available media in the region.

A healthier Caribbean population is in the making with this project and with goodwill and support of all food producers and regional governments, people in the region could expect to have available in the near future, a diversity in choice of safe, quality and nutritious food on a year round basis.

Such are the noble goals of the CIFS RF CARICOM Food Security project!

**Protect YOUR crops**  
*from paddy-bugs & other pests...*

**With The Powerful**  
**STIHL® SR420**  
**Mistblower**



Available at Farfan & Mendes Ltd.  
45 Urquhart Street, Georgetown  
35 High Street. Tel: 225-7373  
Tel: 226-8130, 226-6401. [www.fmlgy.com](http://www.fmlgy.com)



**FML**  
FARFAN & MENDES LTD.