



THE AgriBulletin

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A Newsletter published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise

Welcome to our first edition!

Welcome to our first newsletter here at the MAFSE- Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise. Through this means we hope to keep you updated and in contact with what goes on in the world of Agriculture, at present one our country's main pillar of socio-economic growth.

Message from the Minister

A pleasant welcome to the first ever edition of the MAFSE's newsletter, a publication aimed at keeping the public informed and in tune with the news, events and important activities of this ministry. I am happy to share with the population the Governments contribution to the blossoming of the agriculture sector. I am sure that with this information everyone will more readily support what we do to make our beloved country more prosperous and productive. Read on and let us keep on working together to make a better Belize.



Hon. Jose Abelardo Mai

Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise



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Agricultural Achievements...

It's been a busy time since November 11, 2020, the day that the nation of Belize chose a new administration to hold the reins of the country. Since then the Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise has been involved in a whirlwind of activities; making tour and visits countrywide and making policy decisions to advance the agriculture and agro-industry. The technical team he organized has taken the bull by the horns and jump-started a ministry long dormant and injected it with 100% energy. Everyone knows that the Ministry of Agriculture is now one of the lead ministries in GoB's battle against the economic hardships being experienced by our people.

The Minister and our ministry have proceeded undaunted to catalyze the farming and agro-industry sectors. The achievements have been many in such a short period of time. Below is a small list of those achievements.

- Continuous trade of cattle and chicken to markets which had a supply gap
- Formal trade of cattle with Mexico initiated
- Cattle rescued at Maypen and other major livestock producing communities
- Formal trade of chicken with Caribbean Islands initiated
- Milk and dairy imports now monitored and controlled
- Free Zone reopened
- Realignment of 2020-21 sugar crop quota estimates
- Import Permit issuances regularized
- Meetings with shrimp producers to discuss future of shrimp industry
- Meetings with banana producers to discuss industry challenges
- Re-launching of a Buy Belize campaign
- Engagement with the Central Bank and Financial Institutions to discuss favorable financing terms for agro-producers
- Collaborating partners in development consulted for assistance to farming sectors
- District familiarization tours started
- Improve the awareness of the work of the Ministry Agriculture through information sharing and visibility.
- Statutory bodies under MAFSE refocused
- Ministry re-structuring toward greater efficiency and faster response initiated

Noticortos Agrícolas

Chickens on the move!

Livestock Director Belarmino Esquivel informs us that while cattle are going, going, gone, chickens are also on the move in Orange Walk. Due to the heightened demand for chicken in nearby Quintana Roo, farmers will soon be able to move this commodity and earn much needed income. The situation will be closely monitored as it continues.

Bumper Sugar Crop

Sugar cane farmers have had a spell of dry, albeit chilly weather, as several cold fronts have moved in recently. Early forecasts and observations seem to indicate the sugar crop this year will be high-yield, perhaps up to 70% in excess of last year's harvest. Sugar roads continue being worked on as we have the support of the Ministry of Infrastructure after 13 years of being abandoned. We continue monitoring and ensuring collaboration across the industry as we support the lifeline for many small farmers in the North.

Minister Tours Toledo

Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise, Jose Abelardo Mai toured the Toledo District on Thursday, 28 January and Friday, 29 January 2021.

Minister Mai and his Ministry team firstly visited the Toledo District Agriculture staff and station. Thereafter he had meetings with several groups of farmers to discuss their agro-related concerns. Farmer groups such as the Southern Cattle, the Agro-Product Traders and Exporters, and the Toledo Cacao Growers' Association were also met. The Belize Marketing and Development Corporation rice mill at Big Falls, Aquamar Shrimp farm, BelEuro Shrimp farm, and the Naledo turmeric processing facility were toured.

During his visit Minister Mai was impressed with the work at some of the farms, such as at the Herson Blandon farm and the Leslie Parham farm, while he noted the issues and concerns presented by agro-producers at the other places that were visited. The Minister committed to finding a solution to problems and issues encountered, and emphasized his policy of supporting Belizean products as priority.

Minister Mai was also joined on his tour by Toledo East Area Rep Mike Espot, Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, and Investment.

Minister Mai will continue his national tour in the next months. He is scheduled to visit the Stann Creek District next.

The familiarization tours and visits are revealing the extent to which the ministry and attendant bodies have been ignored in the past, and how much work remains to be done to accelerate their passage to the future. Many positions at stations are not aligned properly with their terms of reference, machinery lies abandoned from the previous administration's poor planning and lackluster attention to valuable government assets, and programs have been abandoned or left to linger in the dusts of time.

There is no doubt that the Ministry holds immense skills and ability ; the personnel are also willing. The overwhelming support from Cabinet and Ministries for fundamental policy change has renewed the energy of all Agriculture officers. They are now more than ever eager to make their ministry shine at all levels.

Agriculture will ensure the prosperity of our nation, but we must remain ever willing to lead the charge and fearless to face the challenges and hard work ahead.



Minister at EuroBel Shrimp Farm



Minister Mai at Big Falls Rice Mill



Minister Mai at Blandon Farm



Did you know?

The average lifespan in Belize is 74.5 years. That's 27,192.5 days of living on Planet Earth for the average Belizean. Subtract your age x 365 from that figure and that will give you the number of remaining days you have alive on average, assuming good health, etc. *Carpe Diem!*

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Coops on the move!

The Department of Cooperatives, which falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, has been engaging clients all over the country in activities aimed at rejuvenating projects and providing means of enhanced economic activity. Coops officers are stationed country wide and are diligent in ensuring they reach out especially to the rural populations of our country as they guide, encourage and facilitate Belizeans in cooperative activities.

Below is a list of such activities listed by district.

BELMOPAN HQ

- Completed, along with BEST, project proposal for Global ICCA COVID-19 Support Initiative (GSI) – SGP GEF UNDP
- Facilitated, under FAO Contract Farming Pilot Project, consultation between FAO and honey producers of northern Belize

COROZAL

- Facilitated meeting between Corozal Southwest Taxi Co-op and Department of Transport
- Met with Concepcion and Xaibe farmers' groups to assess training needs

ORANGE WALK

- Consultation with New River Co-op for SGP GEF UNDP Project
- Facilitated honey producers for consultation with FAO
- Field visit with farmer group of Trial Farm (farms on Yo Creek Road)

BELIZE

- Consultation with Nago Bank Co-op for SGP GEF UNDP Project
- Meeting with River Valley Livestock Association on registration as co-op
- Meeting with Cinderella Taxi Co-op and BCC

CAYO

- Consultation with Sta Familia Co-op for SGP GEF UNDP Project
- Meeting with and audit of BBOC
- Discussion with VoP Association on transformation to co-op
- Facilitated exchange of Sta Cruz, Toledo farmers to Central Farm & Sta Familia

STANN CREEK

- Meeting with Sta Rosa Co-op & RRB on SWOT and ODP
- Meeting with Placencia Tour Guides Co-op – address internal issues
- Received interest in registration from "Southern Entrepreneurs" group of Independence Village

TOLEDO

- Meeting with Southern Cattle & Agro-Product Traders and Exporters Association from Pueblo Viejo on transformation to co-op
- Meeting with Los Buenos Amigos Co-op and RRB



Coops officers evaluating project in Cayo District



Coops officers conduct training in OW District

Personal Sanitizing Station, CFZ



Opening of the Corozal Free Zone

When the Corozal Free Zone (CFZ) closed early last year as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic measures to contain spread, some 3,000 workers in the Orange Walk and Corozal districts were sent home with no means of earning an income. The CFZ under the previous government had been under poor management and was not yielding results to the economy as it should have been, of course, so it was no surprise that the CFZ was in dire trouble even before the pandemic's effects.

It has taken much hard work and effort on the part of the CFZ's new administration to open the Zone again, but it has been accomplished. Under the strict new measures and protocols, and thanks to the cooperation of the businessmen involved in the CFZ, the zone opened its gates on February 1, 2021.

About 800 persons are earning a salary again and contributing to the economy. The trickle-down effect of these persons being engaged in the workforce is bound to be felt positively in almost all the communities of the North. Many villages in Corozal and Orange Walk have citizens working at the CFZ; now the incomes flowing in will be reflected in food being put on the table, bills being paid on time, school fees being honored, and a host of other economic activities connected to the workforce. And this is exactly what we need right now in Belize; with a shrinking GDP due to the other pillar of our economy, tourism having been cut down; a burgeoning trade deficit milked for years by an import-based economy, and little foreign investment in sight, we need every single job we can get our hands on. So 800 Belizeans back at work is a huge thing and should be credited accordingly. No other area at this time has contributed a proportionate number of jobs or contributions to our economy.

Buy Belizean

COVID-19 reinforced to the Belizean population the importance of food sovereignty. Many Belizeans are now aware of the quality and variety of local made products we have available for consumption; fruits, vegetables, dairy and other agro-products are available all over the country. As a people we are import biased; it's no wonder as the past 13 or so years have been spent under a government whose policies were dictated by greedy importers looking to get richer no matter what the cost.

It's now time to break free from the chains of imported products. Processed foods in cans, plastics and other containers are laced with additives and preservatives to improve shelf life and attractiveness. They are ultimately far less healthy for our bodies. The healthier choice is to consume products grown in our own country free of those additives and preservatives while supporting the employment of our own people.

Recognizing this, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise has embarked on a "Buy Belize Campaign" aimed at marketing Belizean products and increasing awareness of our local products, and enhancing our national pride.

To this end several campaigns are taking place: social media campaigns undertaken by the Ministry and the BMDC Facebook accounts; bilingual radio advertisements; newspaper advertisement, and soon, billboards with positive messages and Television advertisement encouraging the support of all local products.

We build Belize when we buy what is made from Belize! Consume healthy, fresh product while also helping to the socio-economic development of Belize. It's all to make a better Belize. Buy Belizean!

