



THE AgriBulletin

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The Potato Story

The Belizean potato crop is in earnest right now. Communities such as La Gracia and San Carlos are harvesting at present and aim to satisfy the Belizean craving for this root crop. Our statistics show there is an annual demand for about 7 million pounds of potato, with local production barely meeting about half that demand in the best years. We have been producing about 345,000 pounds in 2018-19, with the local crop ramping up in the past 3 years especially. Lately Minister Mai has held meetings with both potato producers and importers to ensure that producers have a chance at levelling the market. Among other measures, importers who hope to get a permit to import must now show proof of having purchased locally before they are considered for permit issuance. And DACs are constantly checking at the markets to ensure that while Belizean potatoes are on the market, contraband white potatoes are not being sold. All this as we continue moving from an overwhelmingly import-based economy dominated by an elite few to a broad-based, producer-driven economy.

Minister Mai Tours Stann Creek

Minister Jose Abelardo Mai continued his tour of the southern districts on Thursday 11 and Friday 12 February. Minister Mai completed a whirlwind of visits whilst in Stann Creek: Roseville, TexBel Farms, Kerbo Farms, Corridgeree Farm, Silk Grass Farms, the Sabal Cassava Farm facility, the Marie Sharp pepper processing facility and the Villafranco farm. The tour presented a range of diverse farming and agro-industrial experiences, some of which have been in existence for quite a few years, and others that have recently come on the scene. The Sabal Cassava Farm, for example, has been operating since 1987; Marie Sharp, similarly, has been in operation even longer, since 1981. By contrast, Corridgeree Farms started operations only since 2016. The Roseville Community plants a wide range of vegetables, from cucumbers to sweet peppers to spicy peppers. The Tex Bel farms visited specialize in coconuts. Silk Grass Farms also specializes in coconuts but also has state of the art coconut de-husking equipment and copra oil extraction machinery that produces their coconut oil. Marie Sharp's Fine Foods, of course, specializes in pepper sauces and jams, whilst the Sabals process cassava and make cassava

bread and other cassava-related products, while at Corridgeree and Silk Grass Farms we saw both vanilla and cacao being grown for harvest in commercial quantities.

Agriculture by nature is a risk-taking venture that requires proper planning and strategy to ensure a commercially intended product is market driven and has a properly balanced enabling environment for it to be successful, or even when a small family plot is being cultivated. And all this does not even start to take into account markets, both local and international, which nowadays must be factored in to the success of an agriculture product.

The Stann Creek District is poised to succeed in agriculture, with a good mix of small farmers with a range of crops grown for family use and small-business distribution, to the multi-million dollar investments producing niche Belizean products for the local market or export. The present government is keen on developing this sector and is eager to foster an enabling environment in policy and legislation to ensure the products thrive, Belizeans are employed and the economy revived.

Hats off to the agriculturalists in Stann Creek and all over the country.

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Noticortos Agrícolas

Sex-link Chickens

Whether Rhode Island Red or Black Sex-link or hybrids, the Orange Walk Agric Office has your choice of chicken. DAC Palacio is running a successful poultry operation at the Yo Creek HQ in Orange Walk, selling chicks for \$3.00 each. The chicks and eggs are in constant demand, having been sent as far south as PG and Stann Creek to start broods there. Now that's a sexy, money making link we all need!

And on the subject of chickens...links are being made to facilitate a demand gap in chicken to the border at Jalacte. Exploratory shipments of about 7,000 pounds have been carried out so far. And we are slowly but surely making progress in negotiating the export of water buffalo carcasses. With every piece that counts, agriculture is a major contributor to the rebuilding of our economy.

Thrips Outbreak in OW



They are tiny, almost microscopic in size, from .4 to 1mm. They invade fields and gardens, sucking the juices out of leaves and stems and the life from plants. They multiply sexually and asexually, often replicating populations within four days. And by the time you find them it is often too late because by that time, they are widespread.

Thysanoptera, or thrips, are the suspect affecting bean crops in Indian Creek, a thriving Mennonite community producing commercial-scale crops such as sorghum, beans and papayas, among others, right next door to San Carlos. Hundreds of acres of beans, black-eyed especially, are in danger right now due to this pest as the specie affecting the area, *Megalurothrips Usitatus*, or the Aian bean thrips, seems to have a preference for legumes.

Some of the measures that have been taken so far to deal with the outbreak include creation of a task force lead by BAHA to monitor the situation, having the Extension Service continue collecting data and assessing production, and providing the public with updated information as might be necessary. Research continues, of course, into biosanitary methods of fighting the pest.



Thysanoptera in bean plant, Indian Creek, Orange Walk District

New River Coop hosts



New River Cooperative is a standout success story in Orange Walk. From a small group of farmers that started out trying to get a piece of land they could cultivate more than 30 years ago, the villagers of San Carlos who form the coop now are successful large-scale farmers planting, harvesting and selling carrots, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, plantains and other crops.

Such has been their success as a community and coop that they were used as an example coop when the Northern Producers Coop, a start up coop in Orange Walk Town, needed a mentor coop to work with. The Orange Walk Coops department called on New River Coop to host them for a day and talk about their successes and challenges and that is exactly what happened on 18 February.



Farmers from Northern Producers Coop listen intently as onion production details are shared



Farmers from Northern Producers Coop inspect tomato plants



Did you know?

Belizeans have a taste for peppers...it could be our Mayan heritage, it could be our tasty cuisine melded from different cultures... we like peppers, hot and sweet. Most vegetable and root crop commodities lag by a factor of 2 to 1 when comparing the yearly demand and production figures, but with hot and sweet peppers we almost close the gap. In 2019, for example, there was a demand for 578,933 pounds of hot pepper with 560, 638 produced; in 2018, a demand for 778, 238 with production of 760,050. Sweet Pepper was just as good: 2018 demand of 2,999, 062, production of 2,966,760; while in 2019, demand of 2,068,497 and production of 2,038,759 pounds. Compare to broccoli: 2018 demand for 312, 767 and production of 83,800 while in 2019, demand of 308, 676 with production of 98, 640 pounds. Or look at carrots: 2018 demand, 1,976,873, production of 1,065,867; while in 2019, demand of 2,145, 546, production of 1,203, 929 pounds for the year. We really like our peppers, hot OR sweet!

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Phone: (501) 822-2241 / 42
Fax: (501) 822-2409
Email: info@agriculture.gov.bz

Spotlight on Bro. Phillip Tate



Statistics are an often overlooked part of the work a ministry does, and the humble persons behind the computer screens similarly so. However, even in humility, persons can make their mark on their colleagues. As he nears the sunset of his years at the Ministry, we make sure the spotlight is turned on Bro. Phillip Tate, friend, mentor, commentator, philosopher, avid reader and man of many colours and seasons. Bro. Tate has been at AgroStats since February, 1992. He has seen 4 governments and at least a dozen ministers of agriculture change whilst hammering away behind his desk and computer. 10, 220 days of his life have been spent employed by the government at Ministry of Agriculture; he has reported to work 2, 000 weeks in that time. He knows more about production and crop figures than perhaps anyone in that unit...we suspect one of Bautista's daily chores over the years, albeit somewhat unsuccessfully, has been to try to prod him into releasing his vast hoard of knowledge.

Ask him for a figure or number and he will give you five; comment to him about a trend in a commodity and he will give you a carefully composed treatise laced with erudite observations and mellifluous vocabulary... the essence of Bro. Tate, unlike many other tastes, is in the hearing, not in the, er, Tating.

Sabal Cassava Farm

Culture is a staple in the South of Belize. Stann Creek and Punta Gorda are home to the Garinagu, one of the ethnic groups most willing and eager to share their heritage, culture and practices. So it is with the Sabal's, a Garinagu family in the line of growing and processing cassava since 1987. The Sabal Cassava Farm in Sarawee, Stann Creek, has been working the fields, making bread and other products and showing visitors the processes involved for 33 years now. It is a tribute to the longevity and persistence of the family business that it still thrives and has not changed its cultural flavor over the years.



Cassava raw material ready for grating and prep



Cassava bread baking on comal



Sabal's Cassava Farm Products

Honey Production and Covered Structures, CDF Projects

The CARICOM Development Fund has recently granted Belize two projects, one in Honey Production training and one in Covered Structure assistance. Belize has a rich history of beekeeping and honey production. The Mayans were the country's first beekeepers producing honey from stingless bees. Honey was a significant dietary supplement for the Mayans and stingless bees remained the main honey-makers until the mid-1900's when new species were introduced and commercial production of the commodity was initiated.

Many beekeepers left the industry because there was a dearth of technical knowledge and capacity to manage the new challenge which Africanised bees with their aggressive nature presented to honey producers in Belize. With technical assistance from external sources, the Ministry of Agriculture has been able to enhance its own capacity and then transfer the requisite knowledge to bee-keepers across the country. Beekeepers who opted to return to the industry gradually began improving their skills in managing Africanized bee apiaries and by 2000, there was a gradual revival of beekeeping. With these efforts, individual beekeepers began recording increased productivity levels. However, other challenges such as pests and diseases, importation of contraband products of inferior quality into the local market, limited ongoing technical support, aging and decreasing numbers of beekeepers, access to affordable credit, constrained the progress of beekeeping from re-emerging as a sustainably viable industry.

Vegetable production is seasonal in Belize and the adverse effects of climate change can be multiplied by unseasonal drought or flood conditions. Additionally, pest problems characteristically manifest themselves during dry periods while wet periods propagate diseases especially in waterlogged soil conditions.

Under these conditions, vegetable production becomes sub-optimal, resulting in supply shortages in the domestic market. Higher market prices for and imports of vegetable are often the consequence. It is essential to overcome these constraints by securing and increasing vegetable production during these unseasonal periods. Greenhouses are the most workable means towards achieving the desired results. Covered structures provide the advantage of crop protection from direct rain, sun, wind as well as pest and diseases. This type of production also enables farmers to achieve year-round production as opposed to seasonal production thereby addressing the inconsistency of supply. Sheltered cultivation through better management of diseases, water, and mineral supplies, ensures better yield than cultivating in the open field and generally improves quality and attractiveness of farm produce and improves prospects for even better prices.

Additionally, greenhouses enable production on smaller land spaces achieving significantly greater volumes of output per unit of arable land space due to intensive crop spacing and rotation techniques. Further, rainwater harvesting systems and irrigation are easily employed by the farmers to not only collect water for their farm usage but also for their domestic consumption. The Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with the CARICOM Development Fund, is currently implementing a Honey Production Expansion Project to conduct capacity building training to beekeepers, and a Covered Structure and Capacity Enhancement Project to provide small disadvantaged farmers with covered structure materials and building assistance.

Both projects target small farmers, especially women and youth. It is hoped vegetable and honey production across the Belizean landscape will both benefit from these two projects



WE'RE HIRING
VALUE CHAIN and MARKETING SPECIALIST

The Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) invites suitably qualified nationals from CARICOM member states to apply for the position of Value Chain and Marketing Specialist, at CARDI Headquarters, Trinidad and Tobago.

CARDI is a regional, autonomous institution which serves the agricultural research and development needs of the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The Institute contributes to the sustainable development of the Caribbean by the co-generation, diffusion and application of knowledge, through agricultural research for development.

CARDI has offices in 14 CARICOM countries.

QUALIFICATION and WORK EXPERIENCE

You must have a post-graduate degree in Marketing, Agriculture Economics or related field with at least 5 years' experience working in agriculture value chains.

Strong analytical and writing skills. Working knowledge of statistical applications will be an asset.

You must be highly motivated and able to work independently as well as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

JOB DESCRIPTION

The successful candidate will provide technical guidance for the implementation of the Institute's Value Chain Services Programme. The incumbent will be required to undertake value chain analysis for selected commodities at the regional and national levels and provide recommendations and technical support for development of same.

Responsibilities also include the collecting and analyzing of market information on an ongoing basis to provide informed intelligence to internal and external clients.

APPLICATION

Applicants are required to submit a cover letter and Curriculum Vitae via email to resources@cardi.org by 02 March 2021.

More details on the position available at www.cardi.org

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