

## COMMUNIQUE #1

### *From the 27<sup>th</sup> West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference and 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ALACEA*

The Caribbean Agro-Economic Society which has its secretariat in the DAEE (Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension) held the 27<sup>th</sup> West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference in Belize, City Belize from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2007. This brought together experts from regional, international and academic organizations to address issues related to improving markets and sustaining natural resource systems in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This Conference was held jointly with the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of ALACEA (The Latin American and Caribbean Association of Agricultural Economists) which also has its secretariat in the DAEE.

The feature address at the opening ceremony was given by the Prime Minister of Belize the Honorable Said Musa. The Conference was further focused by Lewis/Becford Lecture by Prof Ralph Christy. He called for new institutions to bring about improvements in marketing and resource use in the Caribbean.

Some of the major points coming out of the conference were:

#### **1. Sustaining Natural Resource Systems**

The Conference highlighted the need to protect Caribbean natural resources in the new scenario of climate change. The evidence for climate change was discussed as well as ways to improve agricultural management to reduce green house gas emissions and measures that can be taken within agriculture to mitigate the effects of climate change on the sector.

One interesting area of resource use that was discussed at the Conference was the production of biofuels. While it was noted that biofuel production had benefits in terms of increased trading opportunities and also the reductions of greenhouse gases, the Conference discussed the possible negative impact of biofuel production on food security.

#### **2. Marketing and Agribusiness**

Another important area discussed at the Conference was the importance of agribusiness to the regional economy. It was noted that primary agriculture's contribution to the economy has been declining, while there have been increased food imports. Several new agribusiness initiatives were highlighted including the pork industry in Jamaica, prepackaged vegetables in the Eastern Caribbean, and the citrus industry in Belize.

With respect to marketing the Conference highlighted the need to develop institutions to maintain food safety as well as allow small producers to make greater contributions to food marketing especially for Caribbean tourism industry.

### **3. Fisheries**

The Fisheries Session focused on:

- (i) The development of a common fisheries policy under the CSME and
- (ii) The importance of pelagic fisheries to selected CARICOM countries. There was also a presentation from Guatemala on fishing on the Izabal Lake.
- (iii) A review of world aquaculture trade and the status of aquaculture development in Belize.

### **4. Other Sessions**

A special session was held on Belize which highlighted its tourism development and the demands with natural resources, and the initiatives being taken to boost rural development by empowering local communities.

### **5. Development Forum**

A special “Development Forum” was held the objectives of which were:

- 1. To forge a common developmental path for agriculture in the Region, and
- 2. Sharing ideas on the development thrusts of different organizations in the Caribbean

The highlights of the presentations were:

- (i) FAO’s process on the development and funding of bankable investment projects to bring about regional agricultural transformation, culminating in the recent Donor’s Conference in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
- (ii) CARDI’s range of activities throughout the Region and especially its dynamic programme in Belize
- (iii) The great strides being made in agricultural development by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in Belize especially with the establishment of the new soyabean processing and organic farming.
- (iv) The new thrust in research and post graduate training in agricultural development at UWI with a research programme in climate change and its impact on agriculture, the effects of urbanization on agriculture and the economics of biofuel production in the Region.

The subsequent discussion highlighted the following issues:

- (i) The need for a common policy for agricultural development in the region and a path to renewed regional agriculture development
  
- (ii) The need to highlight success stories in Caribbean agriculture as a means of asserting the dynamism of CARICOM agriculture and to remove the cloud of gloom over the sector and to inspire new ideas and approaches for Caribbean agricultural development.

At the Conference a new Executive of the CAES was elected with:

- I. Dr. Carlisle Pemberton, Head of DAEE at UWI, as the new President
- II. Dr. Neela Badrie, Department of Food Production, the new Vice President
- III. Sarojini Ragbir, Secretary, from DAEE
- IV. Dr. Sharon Hutchinson, Director of Publications, from DAEE