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CARIBBEAN FOOD CROPS SOCIETY

46

**Forty Sixth
Annual Meeting 2010**

**Boca Chica, Dominican Republic
Vol. XLVI – Number 2
T-STAR Invasive Species Symposium**

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
46th ANNUAL MEETING

Caribbean Food Crops Society
46th Annual Meeting
July 11-17, 2010

Hotel Oasis Hamaca
Boca Chica, Dominican Republic

“Protected agriculture: a technological option for competitiveness of the Caribbean”

“Agricultura bajo ambiente protegido: una opción tecnológica para la competitividad en el Caribe”

“Agriculture sous ambiance protégée: une option technologique pour la compétitivité de las Caraïbe”

**United States Department of Agriculture,
T-STAR Sponsored Invasive Species Symposium**

**Toward a Collective Safeguarding System for the Greater Caribbean Region:
Assessing Accomplishments since the first Symposium in Grenada (2003)
and Coping with Current Threats to the Region**

**Special Symposium Edition
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CLOSING SESSION

SYNTHESIS AND THE WAY FORWARD

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INTRODUCTION

In 2003, the Caribbean Invasive Species Working Group (CISWG) came into being during the First Symposium on invasive species organized under the auspices of the Caribbean Food Crops Society Meeting (Klassen et al. 2003). Since then, partnerships under the CISWG have been strengthened and regular meetings have been held to review progress and discuss continued implementation of activities to safeguard the wider Caribbean Region. The historical development of CISWG and critical achievements were effectively outlined earlier during the current symposium (Brown 2010). Given the ground covered over the last seven years, it is nigh impossible to give a quick synthesis that would effectively outline the developments during the period. Nevertheless, this is my charge and below I briefly attempt to cover the topic though my jaded eyes and to give some suggestions on the way forward.

SYNTHESIS

CISWG was issues driven: Right from the very beginning, it was clear that there were a number of critical issues that needed to be addressed if the wider Caribbean Region was to develop an effective approach to safeguarding against, and/or managing existing invasive alien species (IAS). Capacity building in the broadest sense was a critical issue as there was a dearth at both the national and regional level. This ranged from a lack of, or inadequate, technical expertise in critical areas such as identification of organisms, physical infrastructure, policy frameworks, and the like. IAS is a serious issue, as its broad nature and importance, which encompasses both terrestrial and marine environments, has continued to become increasingly clear as new problems continue to emerge. For instance, in recent times, the emergence of lion fish as a serious problem has focused attention on marine environments where hitherto little was given. As a region, the wider Caribbean is highly vulnerable to IAS and this vulnerability is exacerbated by the multiplicity and complexity of pathways. Meissner et al. (2009) evaluated the importance of different pathways in the Caribbean, including human movement, airline passenger baggage, international mail, maritime traffic, hitchhikers, wood packaging material, forestry, propagative materials, and natural spread. All these pathways are rated as high or medium risk.

Whereas the hierarchy of steps required for effective management of IAS, including: prevention, early detection, and rapid response and management are widely recognized, so are the challenges posed by the complexity of the Caribbean Region. From the beginning, it was clear that a mechanism for collaboration and action was needed, hence the importance of developing a regional strategy that would form the basis for coordinated action. Additionally, given the broad range of players, the need for effective mechanisms for information and knowledge management

were also identified as important issues. These themes have been discussed in previous CISWG meetings and have been the subject of several presentations during the present symposium.

Where we were in 2003: Whereas the region was already grappling with invasive species when the first regional symposium was organized in 2003, collaborative linkages were restricted to just a few institutions, and these were largely focused on individual pest species. On the whole, regional awareness about IAS issues among policy makers was disappointingly low and activities to address IAS could best be characterized as fragmented and focused on individual problems. There was no effective common platform for dialogue between national/regional and international partners.

The first symposium set the scene for the establishment of CISWG, by bringing together a range of national, regional, and international agencies. A range of regional challenges were identified which included cross-cutting challenges, such as capacity development to individual problems focused on specific pest species. Subsequent meetings and symposia continued to galvanize action and strengthen partnerships and today, CISWG has buy-in from all the major regional/international agencies and universities in the Caribbean basin.

How far have we come and is this where we should be in terms of regional safeguarding?

The last seven or so years have been a pretty short journey for most of us. In part as a direct consequence of CISWG's efforts, awareness of IAS at high policy and technical levels has increased. For instance, IAS is been on the agenda of the Council of Ministers of Trade, Economics and Development (COTED) of CARICOM leading to endorsement of CRISIS. Many national/territorial systems are evolving to confront the realities of today's challenges as new, unpredictable problems, such as black sigatoka, orange rust, frosty pod, laurel wilt, citrus leprosis, red palm weevil, citrus greening, etc. (all topics for discussion at the present meeting), continue to emerge and cause devastation.

From the outset, a highly ambitious and optimistic approach was taken. As we conclude the present symposium, some may feel that the initial ambitious targets may not have been fully attained. However, given the highly complex political, cultural, economic nature of the Caribbean Region, one must conclude that considerable progress has been made (at least I personally, have no doubt in my mind about this).

The establishment of CISWG as a platform for intra-regional dialogue and action was a significant step. Indeed the annual symposia such as the present one organized during the CFCS meeting have done much to focus the attention of key players. Through CISWG, a Caribbean Regional Invasive Species Intervention Strategy (CRISIS) was developed. This strategy has now been endorsed by Caribbean Community nations. As part of CISWG partner's initiatives, several successful activities have been initiated. Among these, the establishment of the Caribbean Plant Diagnostic Network (CPDN), inception of the CABI Regional/Global Environment Facility funded project, and the establishment of a Forum of Caribbean Plant Health Directors that meets regularly to identify and take action against common problems. Other critical activities such as operationalization of the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA), which are essential to the development and strengthening of regional safeguarding efforts, have taken longer to get moving, but it seems that progress is being made. Clearly much still has to be done, as demonstrated by the challenges to get the Caribbean Invasive Species Surveillance and Information Program (CISSIP) funded.

Some suggested future directions: The idea of operationalizing CRISIS and thus developing a regional safeguarding capability against invasive species has gathered considerable momentum. The presence of committed champions in several agencies has been critical in driving the agenda forward. In order to maintain the momentum, it will be important to recruit more champions in the various agencies and governmental organs. The efforts will be further strengthened through the expansion of the stakeholder base to include the private sector and a broader scope of relevant government departments other than just Ministries of Agriculture.

Support at government policy and resource allocation levels will be essential to ensure sustainability of the initiatives. The actionable challenges to the implementation of CRISIS are broad, and while it will be desirable to have larger projects that can address them effectively, the difficulties with securing funding suggest that a multi-pronged approach to fund smaller components be used. Thus both large and small projects may be developed, with the latter perhaps being components of the larger projects. This may allow multi-layered implementation, and while such a piecemeal approach is fraught with challenges, it may be the most practical approach given the resource challenges. Given the limited resources available, it is important that various initiatives are coordinated to avoid duplication. It will also be immensely useful if activities by CISWG partners can be linked through a common web page. Greater networking and communication as afforded by the annual CISWG symposium or CPHD Forum meeting will help, and they must be sustained.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of an effective regional safeguarding against IAS requires collaboration and participation by all the countries/territories in the Caribbean Region. Clearly while considerable progress has been achieved over the last seven years, there is still much to be done; and every effort should be made to capitalize on the momentum gained.

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