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CARIBBEAN FOOD CROPS SOCIETY

45

Forty Fifth Annual Meeting 2009

**Frigate Bay
Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis**

**Vol. XLV
Number 1
T-STAR Invasive Species Symposium**

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
45th ANNUAL MEETING

Caribbean Food Crops Society
45th Annual Meeting
July 12-17, 2009

St. Kitts Marriott & Royal Beach Casino
Frigate Bay, St. Kitts and Nevis

**“Reality and Potential of Food Security and Agricultural Diversification in Small Island
Developing States”**

**“Realidad y Potencial de la Seguridad Alimentaria y la Diversificación Agrícola en
Pequeños Estados Insulares en Desarrollo”**

**"Sécurité alimentaire et diversification agricole dans les petits états insulaires en
développement: réalisations et perspectives".**

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

**INVASIVE SPECIES SAFEGUARDING: IMPERATIVE FOR CARIBBEAN
REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL DIVERSIFICATION AND FOOD SECURITY**

**Special Symposium Edition
Edited by
Waldemar Klassen, Carlton G. Davis, Edward A. Evans, Sikavas Na-Lampang
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SESSION 2: TOWARDS COORDINATED REGIONAL SAFEGUARDING

CARIBBEAN PLANT HEALTH DIRECTORS FORUM – RATIONALE AND ACTIVITIES

*Dr. Mario Fortune, Chairman, CPHD Forum and Deputy Director Research – Crops, Research Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Marine Resource, Centeno, Trinidad and Tobago.
Phone: (868) 646-6008/472 7142; FAX: (868) 646 1646/ 642 0718.
Email: mariofortune@yahoo.com*

ABSTRACT. With the signing of the WTO/SPS and the IPPC agreements, there has been liberalization in the trade of plant products and an obligation on all countries to provide sound scientific data to support the application of any plant health measures. Caribbean states face immense challenges in fulfilling this obligation because of a lack of finances, personnel, technical competence, infrastructure and baseline data. Further, the insular Caribbean is one of the few regions of the globe that does not have a functioning regional organization to protect against alien plant pests, including invasive species.

To address these problems, the first meeting of Caribbean Plant Health Directors (CPHD) was convened at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat Headquarters, Georgetown, Guyana, on 23-25 April 2008, in collaboration with the CARICOM Secretariat, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD). Seventeen Caribbean states were represented at this meeting together with CABI. A second meeting of the CPHD was held on 4-5 March 2009.

These meetings provide the opportunity to share plant health information, discuss mutual assistance opportunities among member states and participating organizations, and to formulate a regional approach against alien pests. The meetings eventually expanded to form part of a CPHD Forum, which also included (i) the formation of Working Groups on issues of regional importance and (ii) the formation of D-groups via the Internet for real-time communication among members. Participating organizations have offered to help sustain the Working Groups and to provide technical assistance.

Current activities of the CPHD Forum include the development of pest lists for member states and the region, assistance with the development of National Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agencies in member states, and the development of harmonized plant health legislation.

KEY WORDS: CPHD, Technical Working Group, D-group

INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean Plant Health Directors (CPHD) Forum has its genesis in a joint initiative between the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the United States Department of Agriculture/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA/APHIS) to strengthen the plant

health and infrastructure systems in the region. This initiative held immediate benefits to both parties, as the USA needs to protect its own borders from Invasive Alien Species (IAS) whereas most Caribbean territories need financial and technical assistance to develop effective plant health management systems.

The scope of the initiative included, but was not limited to, the following activities:

- Policy formulation
- Legislative framework establishment
- Improvement of facilities for diagnostics and testing
- Infrastructure development
- Institutional strengthening
- Capacity building
- Arriving at consensus on international issues
- Arriving at consensus before representation at international fora
- Addressing emerging issues.

Encouraged by the interest of other non-governmental organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA), and the Centre of International Research and Development (CIRAD), the initiative blossomed into a forum for discussion of plant health issues. This Forum included CARICOM member and associate states (MS), the USDA/APHIS and regional/international institutions and organizations. Member and Associate states are all encouraged to appoint the respective heads of their plant health services to the Forum, hence the name ‘Caribbean Plant Health Directors Forum’.

RATIONALE FOR THE CPHD FORUM

The formation of the CPHD Forum was timely in that it filled the gap for a regional organization for plant health. The Caribbean is one of the few regions in the world without a representative plant health organization. There has existed a Caribbean Plant Protection Commission (CPPC) since 1967 but this body is presently in a state of transition and has not met for over three years. As a result, the region has been without the benefits that such a body provides, including:

- A common voice at international fora, especially the annual Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) sessions and the WTO/SPS regular meetings. The insular Caribbean, comprising mainly small island land masses, is faced with special situations that need to be considered when international agreements are being made, including (a) a large number of vulnerable species, (b) a high number of endemic species, (c) vulnerable habitat, and (d) sensitivity to climate change/sea level rise. The territories in the region are also generally heavily dependent on agricultural trade and are subject to the uncertainties of private phytosanitary standards. The food import bill in most territories also takes a higher percentage of government spending than in other parts of the world.
- An avenue to formulate positions on agricultural trade so that CARICOM’s regional Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) can be properly advised.
- Protection of the region from invasive species.
- Planning for capacity building in pest diagnosis and management.

- Increasing the capability of member states in providing scientifically sound and up-to-date supporting data for all trade decisions –an obligation found in all international treaties on plant protection and quarantine.

It is envisioned that the CPHD Forum would eventually play a leading role in executing the above functions. At present, there is still need for an avenue specifically mandated to seek the interest of the Caribbean in the development of international phytosanitary standards and measures.

MODUS OPERANDI FOR THE CPHD FORUM

The CPHD Forum has been operating through three main channels, namely (a) annual meetings, (b) Technical Working Groups and (c) electronic communication through D-groups (Development through Dialogue).

Two annual meetings have been held to date, both at the CARICOM Secretariat Headquarters in Georgetown, Guyana. At the first meeting (23-25 April 2008), the following member and associate states were present: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Institutions and organizations present included CABI Caribbean and Latin America, The Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), CARICOM Secretariat (CCS), CIRAD, FAO, IICA, and USDA/APHIS. Voting rights are restricted to member and Associate states.

The agenda of the first meeting included (a) consensus on the need for the CPHD Forum, (b) agreement on the modus operandi of the Forum, (c) the exploration of synergies between member states and various institutions/organizations, (d) the identification of constraints to phytosanitary activities in the region and (e) the development of a work programme. Working groups and D-groups on specific topics were also formed.

During the second meeting (4-5 March 2009), Technical Working Groups reported on their progress while Member States and institutions/organizations gave updates on their activities. Three more Member States were present in the second meeting –Aruba, Dominican Republic and the Turks and Caicos Islands. The University of the West Indies (UWI) was also present for the first time.

Technical Working Groups were formed to tackle specific problems that were deemed urgent and important to the Region. The mandate of the groups is to investigate in detail the assigned problems and to develop short- and long-term plans for alleviation. The six Technical Working Groups formed so far are for the Giant African Snail, the Red Palm Mite, Palm Pest Complex, Tephritid Fruit Flies, Surveillance and Detection, and Emergency Response. With the exception of the Surveillance and Detection and Emergency Response groups, the others have met and have begun compiling data on pest and host species, distribution and management.

With the exception of the Surveillance and Detection and the Emergency Response groups (which are still to arrange their first meetings) D-groups were formed for each of the other

Working Groups to facilitate dialogue between members outside of meetings. A D-group was also formed for all Plant Health Directors.

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Arising from the meetings held so far, constraints to plant health matters, nationally and in the region, have been identified. The main constraints are lack of dialogue among Member States, lack of personnel, infrastructure, equipment and training. There is also little or no local pest data in many territories, and plant quarantine legislation is, for the most part, outdated.

Synergies have been developed between member states and the various organizations/institutions involved with the Forum. The USDA/APHIS has been holding individual meetings with Member States to inform all of its plans and to align its work programme with the needs of the states. The CCS has undertaken an assessment of laboratories throughout the region, with funding from the EU, while CIRAD has been hired as consultants. The CARICOM Secretariat (CCS) is also pursuing technical cooperation between CARICOM and the government of Chile and the OAS. The USDA is in the process of donating software and hardware for digital photography of pests, leading to the rapid identification and diagnosis of problems through the posting of these digital images to a secure network of scientists in the Region.

Agreement has been reached on information sharing especially with regard to pest lists, Pest Risk Analyses and Enquiry Point development. Member and Associate States have committed to the development of their pest lists, both regulated pests and pests present in their respective territories, as a matter of priority.

With the need for countries in the region to set up their National Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agencies (NAHFSAs), Belize has issued an invitation to Member/Associate States to tour its Plant Health Agency, the most advanced agency of its kind in the insular Caribbean in terms of development and functionality, and to train members in its operation.

The CARICOM Secretariat (CCS) has undertaken to lead in the harmonization of plant health legislation in the region.

THE WAY FORWARD

The goal of the CPHD Forum is the development of strong plant health systems, both in individual territories and in the region as a whole. For this to occur, ideally, each and every territory in the Region should be included as pests are no respectors of political boundaries. One of the goals of the Forum is the inclusion of all territories in the Forum.

Another important aspect of a strong plant health system is knowledge of the pests present in the region as well as those not present and which pose a threat to the region. Hence, plans for the future include the development of databases on the status of pests in the region. This is a matter of highest priority. The formation of Working Groups is a method designed to expedite database development.

The development of infrastructure, training of personnel and the acquisition of equipment must all go hand in hand for improvement of the capabilities and capacity of the region in phytosanitary matters. This is expected to be achieved with the help of synergies developed between member/associate states and the regional and international organizations involved with the CPHD Forum.

Legislation in member states dealing with plant health and quarantine must be updated to include all the requirements and obligations arising from the signing of international treaties. The updating of plant health legislation is therefore another one of the goals of the CPHD Forum.

The Forum to date has been supported financially mainly through USDA/APHIS funding. Other organizations including FAO, IICA, CCS, and CARDI have also supported the Forum. Member states have been supporting the Forum by sending delegates to meetings and allowing delegates the time and resources to pursue the work of the Forum. It is hoped that, as the importance of this Forum is realized, Member States would get more involved, both financially and by supporting the work/recommendations of the Forum.

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