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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
and Wanda Lugo**

Published by the Caribbean Food Crops Society

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Published by the Caribbean Food Crops Society

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ISSN 95-07-0410

Copies of this publication may be obtained from:

Secretariat, CFCS
P.O. Box 40108
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00940

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TOWARDS ACHIEVING ENHANCED FOOD SECURITY THROUGH COMBATING INVASIVE SPECIES: French Overseas Departments and Territories Perspective

Mr. Jean Iotti, Chef de Service, Service de la Protection des Végétaux Martinique, Direction de l'Agriculture et de la Forêt Martinique, Service de la Protection des Végétaux, Pointe des Sables BP 438, 97205 Fort De France Cedex, Phone: 596 702762; FAX: 596 739040. jean.iotti@agriculture.gouv.fr.

Thank you Dr. Davis. Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

I would like first to express our gratitude towards the Ministry of Agriculture of Saint Kitts and Nevis and the CFCS Board for their invitation to attend the T-STAR Symposium and the 45th annual CFCS Meeting. The Directorate of Agriculture of Martinique - Plant Health Service is honored to be here.

Dr. Pierre-Yves Techeney will later give an overview of our IAS activities within the PANDOEER project. I will now focus on food security, food safety and food quality issues, related to plant health.

Failure in the early detection and control of invasive species together with failure in the surveillance and control of pests and diseases already present in the country are among the major obstacles to achieving complete food security, and also to guaranteeing a high degree of food safety for consumers. We can assert authoritatively that plant health problems are a major factor in the availability of fruits and vegetables, and thus a major factor in food quality, as to the nutrition point of view.

In order to underscore the importance of these factors of food production, the French Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries changed its name last month to the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries.

Also the Ministry changed its way of tackling the food issue. At the Regional level, we are no longer speaking of a Veterinary Service and a Plant Health Service, but of one unique Regional Food Directorate, merging both animal and plant health issues, with food safety and nutrition issues.

In constructing such a “food dedicated” Service, we must take into account that food security depends mainly on development and economic strategies, i.e., food security is an issue that cuts across all government and professional organizations involved in the sustainable development of the rural/agricultural milieu.

In Martinique, food security still depends principally on imports; food transportation and imported food prices are closely linked with banana exports (200,000 tonnes per year). Thus the same boats that each week leave from Martinique for Europe full of Cavendish bananas in

refrigerated containers return to Martinique full of European or African vegetables and fruit, cheese and cooked pork meats, cereals.

Imports from Guadeloupe, Dominica, Saint Lucia, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Colombia, and Venezuela complete the picture. Clearly food security in Martinique is very vulnerable, for example, when the harbor is blocked (strikes, natural disasters) or when banana exports have stopped, as happened in 2007 as a result of destruction by Hurricane Dean.

Diversification of food production is an urgent necessity and a difficult challenge.

Food safety concerns, for the consumers, are focused mainly on pesticide residues; most of the other problems are well controlled. We are faced with a problem of soil pollution of part of the arable land in French West Indies. Actually the long use of chlordecone, also known as Kepone® (perchloropentacyclodecan-5-one, C₁₀Cl₁₀O), a pesticide used against the black banana weevil [*Cosmopolites sordidus* (Germar)] in the seventies and eighties, will have a long-lasting impact on the environment. Because some vegetables, mainly roots and tubers, were produced in contaminated soil, they were contaminated and eaten by consumers during several years. Therefore, the necessity emerged to undertake in-depth and large scale medical studies on exposed consumers; and these studies are still in progress.

There is, therefore, a strong willingness of the population to reduce pesticide use and impact. We scientists understand the need to minimize exposure to pesticides. However, we also must teach the general public the best ways to avoid chemical treatments:

- (i) to prevent the introduction of harmful alien species,
- (ii) to use preventive agronomic practices against indigenous pests, and
- (iii) to control pests with alternative methods to the maximum extent possible.

The food quality issue, which, inter alia, means the availability of all important nutrients in proper balance to people of every class, is essentially the issue of the accessibility of all people to fresh fruits and vegetables. It is obviously linked with the obesity and diabetes issues, which are two-fold more worrisome in the French West Indies than in the global French population. The prices of fruits and vegetables are real obstacles to their regular purchase by people in the poorer classes. For example tomatoes can reach 10€ for 1 kg (US\$ \$6.18/lb; where 1€ = US\$ 1.50), limes, 4€/kg (US\$ \$2.73/lb), and a large watermelon, 15€ (US\$ 22.50).

Some of the root causes of such high food prices are as follows:

(i) on the one hand: the low yields linked to plant diseases damage, e.g., high yield losses caused by tomato yellow leaf curl virus and *Ralstonia solanacearum* on tomato, and tristeza virus on citrus, or, even the scarcity of some fruits and vegetables, such as papaya due to a recent and severe virus attack, and

(ii) on the other hand, the cost of phytosanitary products, which have become progressively more scarce as a results of actions by the European Union to drastically reduce the use of toxic molecules, and concomitantly the progressively rising prices of those useful toxicants, which are still on the market.

As a conclusion, I wish to stress that the control of invasive species and the control of indigenous pests and diseases are inescapably upstream factors in achieving good food security, food safety and food quality in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Since the latter islands are located in a tropical zone, their crop production enterprises are affected by plant pests and diseases to a much greater extent than crop production enterprises in temperate zones.

Again, I would like to thank the CFCS for its kind invitation, and you, the audience, for your thoughtful attention.