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Farm & Business

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33rd Conference Theme:

Drivers for Agricultural and Economic Development

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Communiqué for the 33rd West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference

Kishalla Floyd and Savita Maharajh

The 33rd West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held at the Mount Irvine Bay Resort, Grafton Road, Mount Irvine, Tobago, from the 4th to 9th August 2019. The theme of the Conference was: *"Drivers for Agricultural and Economic Development".* The Caribbean Agro-Economic Society (CAES) collaborated with the Division of Food Production Forestry and Fisheries (DFPFF) of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) to host the Conference.

The 33rd Conference focused on specific needs and problems in the areas of Eco-Tourism, Extension Education, School Feeding Programmes and Functional Foods as drivers of Agricultural and Economic Development in the Caribbean. It also examined the role of Forestry and Fisheries in Economic Development. These issues were addressed at the Conference by the oral presentation of 27 papers and case studies and a field trip, which focused on the Agricultural and Economic development in Tobago.

The study titled: **Holistic Diagnosis of the School Feeding Programs in 14 Countries of the Caribbean Community** was featured in the first plenary session of the Conference**.** The lead investigator introduced the study and outlined the methodology adopted, as well as the significant results emerging from the study. He also provided insight to the relevance of the study to the theme of the Conference. Several officials from School Feeding Programs (SFPs) in the Caribbean participated in the Conference sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The next session and several other papers in the Conference focused on approaches that can improve nutrition among students in the Caribbean. One paper presented an innovative nutrition intervention methodology in St Lucia and other papers compared school feeding programs in the CARICOM member states, with those found in the French island of Martinique and in Zanzibar in the United Republic of Tanzania.

The final two plenary sessions on the first day featured papers on:

- Improving rice production in Guyana through improved production technology;
- The benefits of a Sovereign Wealth Fund for Guyana especially in light of that country's recent extensive oil discoveries;
- Vegetable purchasing behaviour among consumers; and
- Energy consumption and carbon emissions in CARICOM.

The Official Opening Ceremony was held on Monday August 5th, 2019 at 6:00pm at the Community Development Building, Glen Road, Scarborough. After welcoming greetings by Mr. Wendel Bernard, Administrator of the DFPFF, Prof. Carlisle Pemberton (President, CAES) and Mr. Hayden Spencer (Secretary, DFPFF), Remarks were presented by Mr. Kelvin Charles, Chief Secretary, THA. Mr. Willard Phillips, Economic Affairs Officer, Sustainable Development and Disaster Unit, ECLAC, Sub Regional Headquarters for the Caribbean, then gave the Feature Address, which was very well received. The Opening Ceremony then concluded with a Cocktail Reception.

The second day of the Conference featured papers focusing on the process of agricultural development, as well as technological innovations that can spur the progress of agricultural development. The technological innovations featured tissue culture, aquaponics and irrigation systems. Papers on the process of agricultural development focused on lessons to be learned from the Asian experience, as well as the theoretical contribution of Thomas Robert Malthus.

The General Meeting of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society was held on Tuesday 6th August 2019. At this General Meeting, the new Executive of the Society was elected, the accounts of the Society were approved and other important decisions were taken.

The Field Trip of the Conference was held on Wednesday, August 7, 2019. The first site visited was the Tissue Culture Laboratory located in Goldsborough, Tobago. This laboratory was established in October 2013 and produces healthy, disease-free planting materials (banana, plantain, ginger, dasheen), for distribution to farmers. A visit was also paid to the Herbs and Seasoning Project, also located nearby in Goldsborough. This Project provides planting material for local herbs and seasonings to home-gardeners and the wider farming community in Tobago.

Louis D'or Nurseries was the third site visited (Image 1). This station was originally established as a propagation unit for cocoa seedlings. Participants on the visit viewed the three current units of the Nurseries, which produce ornamental plants, vegetable seedlings and orchard plants. What was also quite in view were the problems currently afflicting the propagation of citrus plants in Trinidad and Tobago.

Image 1. A Scene from the Louis D'or Nurseries

The fourth site visited was the Dasheen Project – Fresh Greens Farm located in Bloody Bay (Image 2). Mr. Lindsay Edwards and his father, Sherwin Edwards conducted the tour of this farm. Spread over 2.5 acres, the Edwards produce mainly dasheen leaves and corn supplying supermarkets, market vendors and agro-processors weekly. At this site, participants received a delightful treat as they sampled some of the local products on the estate. These products varied from golden apple (*Spondias dulcis*), sugarcane and coconut water. The

Image 2. Mr. Lindsay Edwards among the Dasheen Plants on his Farm

foreign participants truly enjoyed sampling these products as they gave them an "island experience".

The participants then enjoyed lunch at the scenic and peaceful Bloody Bay Recreation Centre and received their printed material from the Forestry Department of the DFPFF.

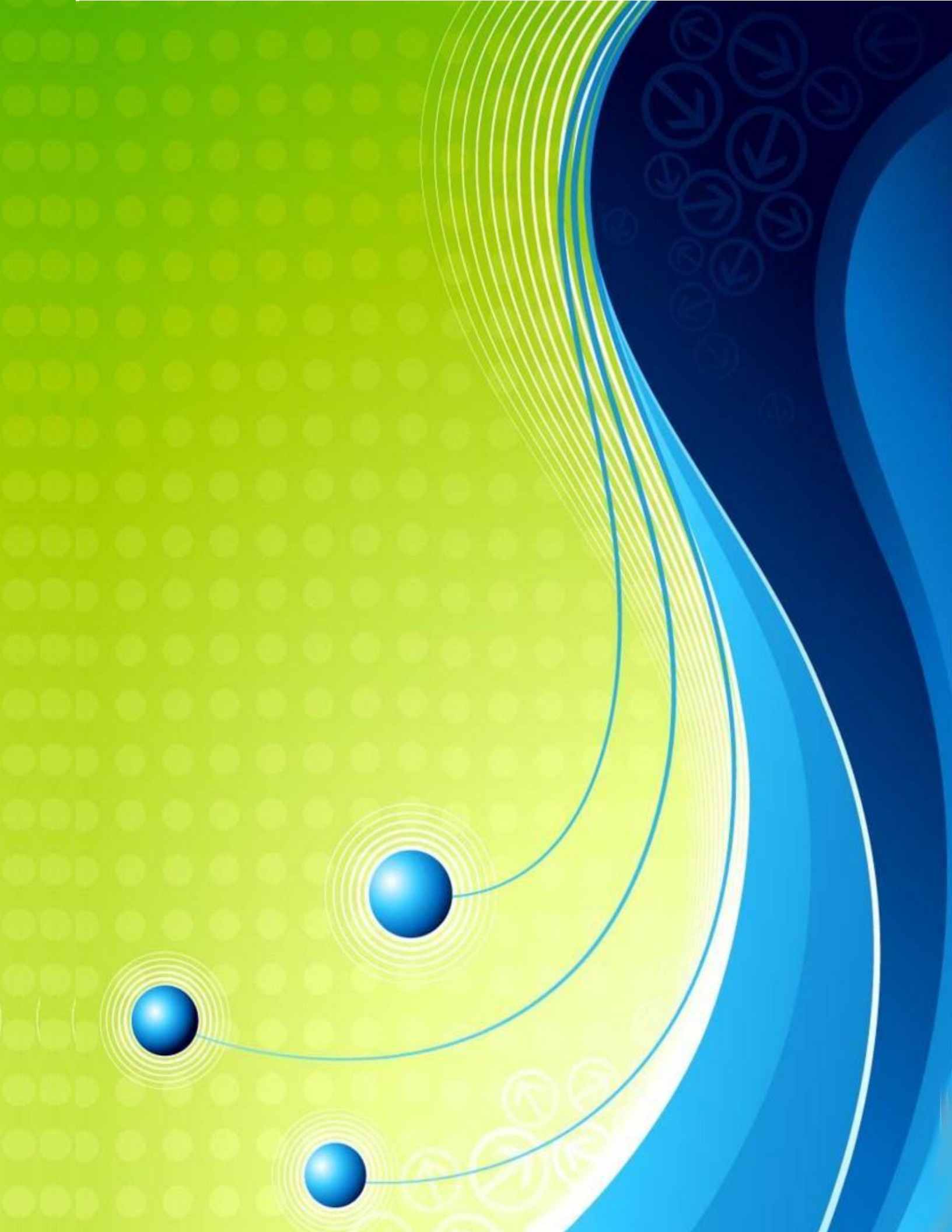
The last stop on the island tour was the Pro Health Bakery and Cafeteria, Plymouth Road - an initiative of the Tobago Mission of Seventh Day Adventists. Participants viewed the day-to-day operations of the Bakery and the operations for meal preparations for the SFP, as this organization is one of the caterers for the SFP in Tobago. At the end of the tour, participants received samples of the breads baked at the Bakery. The bread options included pumpkin bread, kale bread and even turmeric bread. The healthy options at the Bakery and the meal plans for the school meals quite intrigued the participants.

Thursday August 8th featured the special session on Tobago. Participants from Tobago presented a variety of papers illustrating issues in food, agriculture, forestry and the environment on the island. In attendance at this Session was the Chief Secretary of the THA and the Secretary for Food Production, Forestry and Fisheries and other officials from the THA. The first presentation was on the role of the Department of Agriculture in the development of the agricultural sector in Tobago. This presentation was followed by papers, which highlighted forestry and wildlife and other aspects of agriculture in Tobago. Two very interesting papers were on the utilization of the extensive bamboo forests that have been established on the island and the problems and possible solutions for the monitoring and evaluation of the SFP in Tobago.

In the afternoon sessions, the papers focused on improved agricultural production of sweet potato, lettuce and tomato. Another interesting paper was on meal consumption patterns among primary school children in Trinidad.

Friday August 9th was the last day of the Conference. Papers were presented on:

- The views of farmers in Trinidad with respect to opportunities and barriers of functional food production;
- The willingness to pay for life insurance on the part of fisher folk in Dominica;
- The potential of solar energy in the agricultural development of Caribbean countries; and
- The utilization of different coagulants including moringa and watermelon seeds for the harvesting of algae.

Conclusion

The Conference was well supported by the THA and we are indeed delighted by the support the Conference received from Assemblyman Kelvin Charles, Chief Secretary and Secretary of Education, Innovation and Energy and the DFPFF. Special tribute is extended to all members of the Local Organizing Committee in Tobago. They organized the field trip and provided invaluable logistical support to the Conference, especially in the transportation of participants. The continuing contributions of the FAO and the University of the West Indies to these Conferences are also deeply appreciated. The Conference attracted many participants from North America and the Caribbean, in a wide range of disciplines and its success bodes well for the continuation of this Conference series and its contribution to Caribbean Agricultural Development.