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MEDIA RELEASE

Agricultural cooperation between Caribbean and Pacific regions moves forward at 13th Caribbean Week of Agriculture

Inter-regional cooperation for agricultural and rural development has moved a step closer with the announcement that the Pacific region is planning to hold a regional week of agriculture in 2015. The event has been inspired by the Caribbean Week of Agriculture (CWA), whose 13th edition is currently under way in Paramaribo, Suriname, according to the minister of agriculture for Vanuatu, attending CWA at the invitation of CTA and the government of Suriname.

The announcement came during a meeting between the agriculture ministers of Suriname and Vanuatu, brokered by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA). Both countries agreed to work together to share best practices and improve agricultural and rural development. The encounter was held during the 13th Caribbean Week of Agriculture, currently under way in Paramaribo, Suriname from October 6-10.

The future Pacific Week of Agriculture marks a new milestone in progress made by the Intra-ACP Agricultural Policy Programme (APP), which is working to enhance Caribbean and Pacific and interregional capabilities of agricultural sectors to improve food security and nutrition by increasing production and strengthening business linkages.

There are a number of parallels between conditions for agricultural production and the problems faced by producers in the Caribbean and in the Pacific. Both regions face similar challenges from climate change, natural disasters, high food import bills, small internal markets and reliance on a few export commodities.

The Intra-ACP Agricultural Policy Programme is run in partnership with CTA, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). In the Caribbean, other implementing

institutions are the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI).

Together with partners, CTA has brought together Caribbean and Pacific businesses, producers, experts and public and private sector representatives on a number of occasions in recent years, to exchange lessons on how to strengthen economic gains for smallholder farmers and rural communities, especially women and youth.

At last year's CWA, held in Guyana, women producers and entrepreneurs interacted with Caribbean and Pacific Ministers of Agriculture in order to engage the voices of women entrepreneurs at high policy level and in key policy processes. During this year's CWA, Hon. David Tosul Butulso, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biodiversity of the Republic of Vanuatu, together with his Director General, Mr. Howard Aru, are attending at the invitation of CTA and the government of Suriname.

During the meeting with his counterpart in Suriname, Hon. Soeresh Algoe, Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, the Minister of Vanuatu expressed his desire to learn from the experiences of the Caribbean about intra-regional cooperation in agriculture, and in particular the organisation of the Caribbean Week of Agriculture.

"The Pacific will build on the experience of the Caribbean Week of Agriculture (CWA) to host its first ever Pacific Week of Agriculture (PWA) whose partnerships were announced recently in Samoa at the Private Sector Forum at the start of the Third International Conference of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)," said Mr. Butulso. "The next step will be to have discussions with ministers of the Pacific countries, but I think that the first Pacific Week of Agriculture will be held next year, in 2015."

Earlier, the ministers of Suriname and Vanuatu spoke of the challenges their countries faced, and pledged their willingness to cooperate with each other. Suriname, which has good food security, has succeeded in cutting imports through increased agricultural production and now exports food including rice, bananas, fish and vegetables to other countries in the region, as well as to Europe and the United States of America. Previously an importer of products such as lettuce, sweet peppers and sweetcorn, local farmers were now growing their own varieties, said Mr. Algoe. Challenges for producers included climate change, salt water intrusion and food safety issues, he added.

Vanuatu, a country in which 80% of the population is engaged in small-scale farming, continues to import much of its food, including 300,000 tonnes of rice per year, said its agriculture minister.

"That means our food security is fragile," said Mr. Butulso. "I need to learn from your experience, how you achieved food security," he told his colleague from Suriname. "And maybe you can learn some things from me."

The Suriname minister agreed to help Vanuatu with advice and information on rice production, and offered support with the proposed Pacific Week of Agriculture. "We are here and ready to help with any needs," said Mr. Algoe.

CTA Director Michael Hailu, who attended the meeting, welcomed the opportunity for cooperation between the two countries. He said it was an example of how South-South partnerships can produce mutual benefits, and he pledged CTA support for moving arrangements to launch a Pacific Week of Agriculture forward as quickly as possible.

"At CTA, we have given support for exchanges between the two regions, the Caribbean and the Pacific, for example in agritourism, which can be a valuable source of revenue, especially for women," he said. "There are a great many things that both sides, facing similar challenges, can learn from each other. Best practices should cross borders and oceans. That way they have a chance of having much greater impact."

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(L-R): Michael Hailu, CTA Director; Hon. David Tosul Butulso, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biodiversity, Vanuatu and Hon. Soeresh Algoa, Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, Suriname.