

Technical Workshop Report
Coconut Industry Development for the Caribbean:
Towards a Shared Vision & Road Map
October 7th & 8th, 2013
Caribbean Week of Agriculture, 2013
Georgetown, Guyana

Background

The coconut industry is of vital importance to future economic development of Caribbean countries. Growth in regional and international markets suggests that urgent attention be paid to revitalizing the Caribbean coconut industry in a strategic and purposeful manner. This requires CARIFORUM governments and industry stakeholders to work closely together at national and regional levels to address the challenges confronting the sector.

The European Commission on behalf of the Secretariat of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States and the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM) missions funded a needs assessment study to assess the social, economic and environmental relevance of revitalizing the Caribbean coconut industry. Two priority interventions for future industry development were identified: (i) Enhancing the range of value added products, particularly higher valued products and growing business and entrepreneurial activities and; (ii) Improving production, productivity and efficiency.

Within the framework of strategic intervention area 1, the following actions were indicated: (i) product and process technology improvement in cottage scale coconut water and virgin coconut oil; (ii) developing other cottage/artisan value added products in coconuts and; (iii) modernization and upgrade of value added processing plants to improve efficiency & competitiveness and consumer awareness campaigns.

Within the framework of intervention area 2, the following activities were indicated: (i) widening the gene pool, phased rehabilitation of plantations and special development projects; (ii) enhancing the scientific capacity (iii) conducting collaborative research on lethal yellowing, red palm mite and red ring diseases.

These interventions if successfully implemented are expected to lead to: (i) improved and enhanced sustainability in production and productivity; and (ii) expansion of the range, quality and marketability of coconut based value added products.

Workshop Objectives:

CTA and CARDI in consultation with the Caribbean Ambassadors based in Brussels organized a two-day workshop during the Caribbean Week of Agriculture (CWA):

- To review in-depth the results of the Intra-ACP 10th EDF needs assessment study on the coconut industry in the Caribbean region;
- To agree on the priority interventions and a roadmap for developing the Caribbean coconut industry within a three - five year period at national and regional level;
- To seek endorsement from Caribbean ministers attending the CWA on the indicative road map for developing the Caribbean coconut industry over the next three to five years.

Participants:

Over 80 delegates representing the public and private sectors from: the Caribbean (Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Suriname, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago); the Pacific (Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) and Europe (United Kingdom and The Netherlands) participated in the workshop. They were drawn from small, medium and large scale producer and processing enterprises and technical, training and research organizations (plant health, food technology, agronomy, genetics, academia). There were eleven 15-20 minute technical and industry presentations on strategic issues, plenary discussions and, working group discussions leading up to the elaboration of the three to five year road map.

Results:

The participants -

- (i) Endorsed the findings of the Intra-ACP 10th EDF needs assessment study;
- (ii) Achieved consensus on the strategic interventions and developed an indicative three to five year roadmap for coordinated regional and national action for developing the Caribbean coconut industry and;
- (iii) Agreed that the priority issues and recommendations be presented for endorsement by the Alliance.

Key Issues:

The priority issues to be addressed at national and regional levels are summarized as follows:

1. Limited availability of high quality planting material, narrow genetic pool and high economic losses due to pests (yields and loss of trees).
2. Limited market intelligence on local, regional and international markets for both mainstream and niche products.
3. Limited scientific capacity for addressing issues across the value chain (.e.g. in characterizing indigenous genetic resources, production, pest and disease research, management and surveillance, processing, new product development and related areas).
4. Limitations in finance and business development especially for small-scale and artisanal industries.

Recommendations

The following are recommended for endorsement by the Alliance and for further consideration and implementation at national and regional level within six to eighteen months:

1. Improve access to certified quality planting material from endemic and exotic sources and accredited facilities and manage pests. Caribbean Plant Health Directors Forum to develop and implement strategies to safeguard and manage the major and emerging pests that threaten the industry.
2. Enhance scientific capacity e.g. characterizing indigenous resources; ongoing pest and disease research on the three major pests – red palm mite, lethal yellow and red ring and new product development for niche markets.
3. Intensify efforts to gather market intelligence on local, regional and international markets for both mainstream and niche products.
4. Finance and business development – prioritization of the key issues for improving industry competitiveness – mobilization of private and public sector funding, clustering and capacity building. Explore opportunities for international funding including the 11th EDF.