

Regional Meeting to Launch Rural Advisory Services Network

The Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension (DAEE), The University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, will be facilitating a meeting of Senior Regional Agricultural Extension Officials from Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, St Kitts, Antigua, Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago, with the objective of launching a Regional Rural Advisory Services (RAS) Network.

The meeting is being supported by the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS), which is based in Switzerland. GFRAS's mandate is to provide a forum to bring together and promote interaction and learning among the diverse stakeholders involved in Rural Advisory Services.

Rural Advisory Services (RAS) are about strengthening capacities, empowering rural people, and promoting innovations. RAS support people to obtain skills and information, and to address challenges so as to improve their livelihoods and well-being. Dr Wayne Ganpat, of the DAEE, is the focal point for GFRAS in the Caribbean.

At the CTA international extension conference titled *Innovations in Extension and Advisory Services* which was held 15th -18th November 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya, GFRAS held a side meeting of extension representatives from existing regional extension organisations with an interest in forming a regional network. The Caribbean region's representation in Nairobi included Dr Wayne Ganpat, Dr David Dolly and Ms Wilhelmina Kissoonsingh. This became the genesis of this regional meeting.

The Caribbean meeting will be held from 28th February 2013 to 1st March 2013 on the UWI St Augustine Campus. On the first day of the meeting participants will discuss and report on the present state of Agricultural Extension in their respective country. Also, GFRAS Programme Officer, Dorothee Loetscher, will engage participants on discussions on GFRAS's programmes and projects.

On the second day, the meeting will address the new roles and responsibilities of Extension in the region, the role of networking, professional development for Extension Agents, funding, local and regional promotions, and follow-up actions. These deliberations will conclude with a debriefing session, which will also be attended by representatives from farmers' groups, regional organisations, based in Trinidad and Tobago, and input suppliers.