

**Remarks by The Hon. Indar A. Weir, M.P.,
Minister of Agriculture and Food Security on the Occasion of
the CARDI/ITC/EU/ACP Coconut Symposium at the
Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Centre, Monday,
October 8, 2018 at 11:00 a.m.**

Greetings

Commend institutions for organising workshop. European Union (EU), African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), International Trade Centre (ITC) and Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI).

Why is the Coconut important to Barbados?

The coconut is aptly referred to as “the tree of life” because of its versatility and the many products which can be made from it. Brooms, medicine, water, rope, mouthwash, furniture etc.

Business potential - For us in Barbados, we see it as having tremendous business opportunities – generating revenue and creating employment. There are not sufficient nuts on the island to meet the demand for coconut water with the result being some nuts are being harvested young. If we can increase production to such an extent to exceed demand for coconut water, there is further potential for income generation through export of water and development of value added products such as oils, milk, flour, soaps and craft items. The dry coconut husks is used in the flower (anthuriums, orchids etc.) growers. It can also be used, when ground, as a potting mixture in the coconut nurseries.

Tourism – The coconut, drinking coconut water from freshly harvested nuts and the coconut palm is a symbol of Caribbean tourism and no doubt, tourism is important to Barbados. To this end, our coconut vendors and the product which they provide are important to us. These are the persons who interact directly with the tourist and we need to provide the support necessary to upgrade their skills and practises to better service their customers conscious of health, sanitation and food safety issues.

Health - Coconut water is known to be low in calories, naturally free of fat and cholesterol, and contains significant amount of potassium. These characteristics can help us in the battle against chronic non-communicable diseases.

Achievements

It is in this context that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) has placed great focus on the coconut industry. Over the past year (June 2017-September 2018) some notable achievements (many through the efforts of this project) of the MAFS, CARDI and other collaborating institutions working on Coconuts through this project, are:

- Establishment of a private sector led National Stakeholders Platform (NSP) which will guide industry development on the island.
- Building capacity along the value chain:
 - More than 50 persons comprising farmers, investors and technicians were trained in the establishment and maintenance of coconut nurseries.

- More than 25 coconut vendors were trained in improving coconut water quality through adoption of best practises associated with harvesting, handling and processing.
- At least 3 professionals trained in coconut water quality control and monitoring, coconut germplasm management (tissue culture plants and seednuts) and weaning and hardening of tissue culture plantlets and thereby building capacity within institutions.
- More than 24 persons (coconut farmers, technicians extension officers and other relevant stakeholders) were sensitised to new strategies to stem the transboundary movement of pests.
- Plots are established which demonstrate:
 - the benefits of using integrated pest management strategies to control and manage the Coconut mite.
 - intercropping strategies to improve productivity, yields and as a means to generate additional income on coconut plantations.
- As a means of encouraging business development and at the same time, provide an avenue for disposal of shells which would sometimes end up being discarded in inappropriate places becoming a health and environmental hazard, a coconut shredder was acquired to process green and dry coconut husks. This will be used, in the first instance, for evaluation and demonstration purposes. Discussions are being held with the vendors association, BARVEN, to explore the possibility of this machine to serve as a means of income and as a group strengthening

mechanism for BARVEN while at the same time, cleaning up our highways and back roads and preventing diseases caused by rodents and mosquitoes.

- Establishment of germplasm banks of local high yielding varieties and soon to be importation of high yielding varieties to boost production on the island. We also hope to receive some plantlets in tissue culture from Mexico soon.
- Establishment of coconut nurseries (1 at MAFS and another at a private farm) are on-going. These nurseries will have a combined capacity of at least 1000 plants.
- A survey of coconut growers to acquire baseline information with regard to the local coconut industry was just completed. Results are being analysed which will further inform industry development.
- To enable/ and or enhance market and industry competitiveness, value chain studies are to begin soon with investment profiles developed to promote investment in the sector.

Conclusion

As you can see, we are taking a holistic approach to the development of the industry, working with all stakeholders across the value chain- input suppliers, growers, vendors, processors, support services etc. to ensure we build a strong, resilient and productive coconut industry in Barbados and we are happy to be a part of the discussions over the course of these 2 days.

I thank you.