Strengthening ties between the Faculty of Food and Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

(see story on page 2)
Strengthening ties between the Faculty of Food and Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service continued from page 1

The UWI signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the US Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), as an expression of collaborative engagement for combatting animal and plant diseases throughout the region. An important area of the collaboration has been the training of plant quarantine officers. Through this programme, which started four years ago, 75 regional plant quarantine officers have been trained in plant quarantine principles and procedures.

Strengthening of the phytosanitary capabilities of Caribbean territories has long been recognized as one of the ways to improve the capacity of these countries to further develop their trade in agricultural commodities. Rigorous phytosanitary protocols are key in attempts to reduce the entry of invasive alien species.

Improving phytosanitary capabilities will enable these countries to meet their obligations under the international agreements to which they are signatories, notably the International Plant Protection Conventions (IPPC) and the World Trade Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures.

A team of scientists from the FFA has joined a group of scientists from universities in Canada, India and East Africa to assess the role of nanotechnology in enhanced preservation of fruits. The project is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (FATDC), under the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFSRF), which supports partnerships between researchers in Canada and developing countries for projects on food and nutrition security, hunger and malnutrition.

The project involves the use of pre- and post-harvest treatments to delay fruit drop and fruit ripening in selected commodities of commercial interest and has the potential to enhance food security by improving fruit production in many tropical regions.

Improvements observed were a result of the use of a natural plant product, an FDA-approved food additive, that delays fruit ripening and aging. Work is also being done on the development of treatment packaging and coatings to be used during handling and shipping of fresh fruit.

The project is led by Dr Jay Subramanian, University of Guelph, Tree Fruit Breeding and Biotechnology Programme, and includes other researchers at the University of Guelph, the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University in India and the Industrial Technical Institute in Sri Lanka.

Phase II of the project includes new partners: University of Nairobi, Kenya; Sokoine University of Agriculture, Tanzania; and The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago. Participating in this effort from FFA are: Dr Lynda Wickham, Dr Majeed Mohammed and Dr Sharon Hutchinson. Their research focus is on banana, mango, and papaya, with intent to check the efficacy of the technology on other fruits of importance to the Caribbean region at a later date. The FFA is excited about the potential benefits to the fruit industry, and by extension, to food and nutrition security of the region.

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Enhanced Preservation of Fruits Using Nanotechnology

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A team of scientists and engineers from the Chinese Agricultural University (CAU) involved in the planning and design of the Agricultural Innovation Park in Orange Groove, visited the St Augustine Campus for the second time in February 2015, to identify and schedule the next phase of activities with counterparts from the FFA. The main goal of the visit was to kick-start the collaborative research and development activities and to identify technological and other resource needs.

Based on deliberations, the team made recommendations for the construction of specially modified green houses. In addition it was decided to commence evaluation of a number of corn lines and vegetable crops from China, for selection to distribute to farmers. The green houses will be expandable and fitted with sensitive electronic controls and will be evaluated for their suitability for sustained use. An agricultural technologist from CAU will be attached to the Park to guide the building and management of the green houses. The technologist will also train local counterparts in managing these sophisticated green houses.

Canadian Trade Delegation Visits FFA

Ms Debra Boyce, Senior Trade Commissioner attached to the Canadian High Commission in Trinidad and Tobago, visited the FFA with a delegation led by Senator, the Honourable Dr Don Meredith, on January 15th, 2015. The visitors were informed of the status of the Caribbean’s agricultural sector and were apprised of the Faculty’s programmes and research, which were developed to address the needs of the Caribbean.

Ministry of Food Production staff get training in irrigation systems at FFA’s Agricultural Innovation Park

As part of a training course in irrigation systems, Extension Officers of the Ministry of Food Production visited the FFA’s Agricultural Innovation Park to study the submerged aerated drip irrigation systems for peppers, that was set up as a trial by collaborator and Faculty alumnus, Dr Dave Goorahoo. Dr Goorahoo is currently located at the Centre for Irrigation Technology, California State University, Fresno.
In vitro Clonal Propagation Training Course

Clonal Propagation of Tropical Plants is the title of a Mexican Government funded training course, to be offered in collaboration with the Yucatan Centre for Scientific Research (CICY), Inter-American Institute for collaboration on Agriculture (IICA) and the Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA). This training course will take place at the newly installed FFA tissue culture laboratory, which has been furnished with state-of-the-art equipment. Planning meetings have taken place among Dr Carlos Borroto, Director General at CICY; Dr Isaac Bekele, Dean FFA and Dr Lynda Wickham, Deputy Dean Outreach and Internationalization, FFA. The aim of this course is to instruct participants in the techniques of plant tissue culture to mass clonal propagation of tropical plants, with special emphasis on the scaling up of production with commercial purposes.

It is envisaged that by the end of this course, which runs from June 15th to June 27th 2015, the 20 selected participants from the English-speaking Caribbean, would have been trained in the implementation and management of a commercial plant tissue culture facility (Biofactory).

Becoming an Agricultural Entrepreneur

How does an agricultural entrepreneur take an idea and transform it into a million dollar industry? How does he manage his products across borders and maintain a proper supply chain? These were some of the questions answered at a recently concluded training programme, Agricultural Entrepreneurship and Supply Chain Management, hosted by the Indian Technical Economic Cooperation Programme at Gujarat, India and attended by Mr Alpha Sennon, graduate student at the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension.

Among the topics discussed were: opportunities in agribusiness; cultivating an 'entrepreneurial attitude' that will encourage innovation combining knowledge, ideas and skills to develop solutions to economic issues in the food and fiber system; assisting in developing a comprehensive business plan; and understanding the commodity market and supply chain management.

The training programme included a study tour to Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Agra and Mount Abu. The tour gave the participants, who represented 18 countries from around the world, exposure to Indian industrial scenarios and cultural milieux and they were able to better understand the theory learnt in the classroom through the practical exposure. Mr Sennon attended the Vibrant Gujarat, a biennial investors' summit hosted by the Government of Gujarat and had the opportunity to interact with business leaders, investors, corporations, thought leaders as well as policy and opinion makers.

Dr Carlos Borroto receives a token from Campus Principal, Professor Clement Sankat

Alpha Sennon at the Taj Mahal
Students of the Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA) Kris Grogan and Shaquille Watkins, along with Deputy Dean, Outreach and Internationalisation, Dr Lynda Wickham represented the Faculty at Agrofest 2015: The National Agricultural Exhibition, held in Barbados from 27th February to 1st March, 2014.

Activities on Friday 27th February were most significant for the Faculty as scores of primary and secondary school students visited the site. However, the focus was on students from forms four to six who showed keen interest in the agricultural, environmental, geographical, and food/nutritional science programmes offered at the FFA.

Agricultural science teachers, guidance counsellors and teachers associated with school environmental clubs were appreciative of the information received with respect to the array of career paths available after pursuing studies at the FFA.

The overall visit was a success and a number of communication links were created, including the Barbados Diabetes Association whose focus is directed to alternative flour production; Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) Barbados Office, where IICA Representative, Mrs Ena Harvey was presented with FFA brochures to display at the Barbados office. FFA brochures were given to all teachers and guidance counsellors who visited the booth and promotional material was also left to be distributed to guidance counsellors in schools throughout the island. As a result of using the booth, the FFA was also given free airtime to advertise its programmes on a new television channel.

Faculty of Food and Agriculture thanked for its continued support to Nevis Open Day

The Faculty of Food and Agriculture was represented by Mr Terry Sampson and Mrs Michele Singh at the Nevis Open Day which took place from 26th and 27th March 2015.

The Premier of Nevis, the Honourable Mr Vance Amory expressed his pleasure at the Faculty’s regular attendance and support of the Open Day since its inception, and thanked the University for its contribution to the island’s agricultural development.

Many of the visitors to the Faculty’s booth sought information on irrigation practices and measures to overcome severe weather impact on food production. Requests for the teaching of the Diploma in Agriculture to be conducted through distance learning were discussed. In addition, short course training in green house management and low volume irrigation methods were identified as areas of priority. Other areas of interest included training in effective sanitation practices to prevent pathogen build-up in the green house and hydroponic systems.

Mrs Singh conducted a demonstration on making flavoured feta cheeses with a Caribbean twist, which was well received as indicated by the enthusiastic audience attendance and participation.
The Israel Experience

“What was evident was that no individual party of the linkage worked in isolation. Each arm was familiar with the work of the other. The link among the stakeholders was recognized as critical to overall agricultural development. Israel’s success in agriculture serves as a testimony to the benefits of Research-Extension-Farmer linkages.”

This according to Mrs Tessa Barry, graduate student in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, who attended a training course in Israel, from January 26th to February 12th 2015. According to Mrs Barry, she saw how research, extension and farmers collaborated in identifying research problems, adapted the recommended solutions to local conditions and provided feedback about these solutions.

Mrs Barry added that, “The long-term success of any linkage requires equal contribution from all stakeholders; all parties must recognize their objectives within the broader goals. This suggests that researchers must not be performing their duties in isolation, while exhibiting reluctance to work with the extension service, whose main function is to facilitate a two-way information exchange between research organizations and farmers. In many instances, the success of agriculture can be attributed to the ability of researchers, extension workers and farmers to maintain a long-term relationship. The sharing of knowledge advances all who are involved. Given the myriad of problems existing in the region’s agricultural sector, it is imperative that stakeholders invest in strengthening Research-Extension-Farmer linkages to achieve what must be a common goal to all, the development of the farmer.”

The course was sponsored by MASHAV/CINADCO (Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation) with assistance from the Faculty of Food and Agriculture.

Thought for Food Global Summit

The 2014 Thought for Food (TFF) Global Challenge culminated with a Summit in February 2015 in Lisbon, Portugal. The challenge encouraged the world’s best and brightest university students to form teams and develop breakthrough projects that address the global challenge of feeding nine billion people by 2050.

Graduate students of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, Mr Alpha Sennon, Mr Luke Smith and Mr Keron Bascombe were sponsored by the Thought for Food Organization to attend the summit since they served as ambassadors for the competition and summit. Their major role was to build teams within Caribbean universities which would come up with innovative ideas of how to feed 9 billion people by 2050.

From left: Keron Bascombe, Christene Gould (co-founder of TFF), Alpha Sennon and Luke Smith
Many persons can talk at length on the environment and its sustainability, but only a few will ever take action. The FFA is preparing a cohort of professionals to take decisive action to ensure sustainable practices are the norm, rather than the exception. With this in mind, Dr Wayne Ganpat, lecturer in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, took his class of graduate students on a study tour of the Cunupia river, following its course into the Gulf of Paria, to look at the sustainability of the practices of fisherfolk and the work of a group of concerned citizens. The visit was facilitated by Mr Omardath Maharaj from iTHINK Global Consulting Services and consultant to the Felicity/ Charlieville Fishing Association (FCFA).

Students were expected to conduct assessments and plan a sustainable rural development project for the area. According to Mr Maharaj, a past student from the course, “this education exchange allowed graduate students pursuing the course in Sustainable Rural Development to experience a fishing community and the daily routine of fisherfolk who depend on the Gulf of Paria fishery. The arrangement would also allow for fisherfolk to benefit from UWI classroom presentations and research conducted by the students who have either policy or anecdotal proposals on how their livelihoods may be enriched or diversified.” According to Dr Ganpat, “we have to give those who feel they have no option but to scrape the Gulf, an alternative means of earning a living. The challenge for all of us, academics and activists, is to work to help those who are unable to help themselves out of the treadmill of unsustainable practices.”

“The Taste of the Caribbean” is highlighted as part of the “Development of Caribbean Cuisine” course which is offered as part of the Human Ecology degree.
Habitat for Humanity Food Production Workshop

Students of the Agricultural Society (Hamza Ali, Shaquille Watkins and Marinus Jules) partnered with members of the Harmony Hall community, including the community leader; staff of the FFA (Dr Lynda Wickham, Ms Sally Ann Henry); Mr Lionel Ramroop, home gardening specialist, from the Ministry of Food Production; The UWI student volunteers (Mrs Patricia Jagessar Clement, Mr Deepak Ramroop) and Ms Elizabeth Callan, grant writer at the Habitat for Humanity and other representatives from Habitat for Humanity to conduct a training/planting session which took place on Saturday 29th November, 2014, at Harmony Hall, Gasparillo.

Dr Wickham welcomed those present and gave the introductory segment on the right growing environment, including soil type and additives, crop growth requirements and the significance of competition from weeds. Mr Lionel Ramroop followed with a demonstration of the construction of and establishment of plants in a grow box. He also demonstrated the establishment of sweet potato slips in a ridge and furrow system.

Students of the Agricultural Society assisted community members in the establishment of a vegetable bed and container planting. The session also included reference to the nutritional advantages of certain vegetables and the health and economic benefits of home gardening.

At the end of the session, residents were given seeds, seedlings, manure and new knowledge hoping to apply it to their own home gardens and someday reap the awards. Persons from Habitat for Humanity expressed their gratitude to the FFA for providing the seed, seedlings, manure and for coming out and sharing their knowledge with the residents of Harmony Hall.

Follow-up sessions are planned by the Agricultural Society students for the new semester including a demonstration of the composting of organic domestic waste.

The Agricultural Society to assist the Wild Fowl Trust

The Agricultural society was asked by the board members of the Point-a-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust to help rehabilitate the area, help decide what trees are best suited for their unoccupied areas and how best to use the unused space. Members went to the Wild Fowl Trust on two occasions to collect data and take soil samples for testing. The final segment of this project involves gathering volunteers to go to the trust and be part of the planting activities.

UWI Agricultural Society members at Wild Fowl Trust
Students get opportunity to study at International Universities

Here’s your chance to spend a semester studying abroad at the University of Wisconsin-Madison! The UWI has had an undergraduate/graduate exchange programme with the UW-Madison for over 20 years and over 190 students have participated. Students take the courses at Madison but receive credit for those matching courses at UWI. Now organised through the Office of Institutional Advancement and Internationalisation, students could find out more about exchange programmes at Wisconsin and other universities that have memoranda of understanding with FFA eg McGill University, Canada and University of Florida, Gainesville.

Following-up from meetings held earlier with Dean Bekele and staff members of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Ms Kelli Cameron, Director of International Programmes at the University of Wisconsin, Madison (right) visited the Faculty from March 2nd to 5th 2015, to meet with students and staff with the hope of revitalizing this exciting exchange programme.

Human Nutrition and Dietetics student wins big at Indigenous Innovative Fiery Foods Festival

At the first Indigenous Innovative Fiery Foods Festival competition held by CARIRI and the Centre for Enterprise Development in April 2015, Human Nutrition and Dietetics student Kerry Ann Deo came away with the following prizes for the dishes she prepared, that required the use of local peppers and other hot spices as the main ingredients. The Faculty congratulates Kerry Ann on her big win!

**Most Innovative Dish:**
1st place: Spicy chocolate avocado mousse with pepper topping  
2nd Place (Tie): Spicy Chicken Kiev

**Most Innovative Plating:**
1st Place: Spicy chocolate avocado mousse with pepper topping

**Hottest/Best Tasting Food:**
1st Place: Spicy chocolate avocado mousse with pepper topping

**Best Use of Indigenous Ingredients:**
1st Place: Spicy chocolate avocado mousse with pepper topping

**Overall Winner:**
1st Place: Spicy chocolate avocado mousse with pepper topping

Submitted by: Ms Nequesha Dalrymple, Instructor, Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension
Promoting the Faculty

In accordance with the Faculty’s policy to popularise the Faculty and its programmes, undergraduate and graduate students led an initiative to promote the programmes offered by the Faculty of Food and Agriculture during the period February to April 2015. The first phase of promotions was spearheaded by Ms Marisa Dowrich. Students participated in 11 career fairs across the country during the months of February and March and targeted at least five secondary schools each day. Mr De Shorn Bramble was the key organiser in mobilizing faculty students to participate in these events. The students, who were all passionate about the programmes being offered by the faculty, were able to transfer their enthusiasm in their interaction with the secondary school students. They distributed brochures specially prepared for this exercise as well as prizes for interaction.

In the second phase, the goal was to get brochures and other materials to all the other schools that did not attend the fairs. To this end, Mr Hamza Ali and Mr Ryan Seemungal visited 26 schools across Trinidad over a 3-day period and delivered an attractive and specially packaged set of brochures to each principal. They indicated that principals were very pleased to receive the materials and to share them with students. More than 2,000 students were able to receive the information on the Faculty’s programmes. Plans are to increase the number of school visits the following year.

Other students who assisted with this promotional activity included Tracy James, Shaquille Watkins, Gem Thomas, Shabana Smith, Safiyah Hosein, Ryan Proverbs, Luke Smith, Kris Grogan, Chantal Brunton and Ananda Ramlochan.

Ms Tharā Gabriel, Dean’s Office, coordinated the activities for this project.

Traditional Food Ways

Food writer, food stylist, and food photographer Ms Cynthia Nelson, was invited by the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, to share with students, who are studying nutrition and dietetics, and nutritional sciences, her thoughts on the importance of traditional food ways. To this end, Ms Nelson presented a stimulating seminar on The Foodie Moment: Challenges and Possibilities on 26th March 2015. Ms Nelson is the author of Tastes Like Home, My Caribbean Cookbook.

Obituary

Harjit Singh Rekhi, former Professor at the Department of Food Production, passed away on Monday December 15, 2014.

Professor Rekhi contributed to the teaching of several courses in the department: Introduction to Genetics, Agricultural Biotechnology, and Principles of Plant and Animal Breeding. The Faculty offers condolences to Professor Rekhi’s family.
Celebrating the Faculty’s Alumni

Dear readers, in our “Celebrating the Faculty’s Alumni” feature, in this issue we are proud to feature Faculty alumna, Dr Jann Joseph.

A holder of a BSc degree in Agriculture (Faculty of Agriculture, The UWI) and Master of Science in Plant Science (Faculty of Science, The UWI), Jann Joseph continued her education in the field of curriculum and instruction (science education) at the University of Wisconsin, where she obtained a doctorate.

Dr Joseph started her role as the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Indiana University South Bend (IUSB) on July 1, 2014. Prior to joining IUSB she served as Dean of the College of Education at Eastern Michigan University (EMU). For the last 28 years she has been committed to teaching, educator preparation, and effective leadership in higher education. She is responsible for providing dynamic leadership, serving as the university’s spokesperson for academic and student affairs, and collaboratively facilitating the strategic direction of the university. Her insights and contributions support the mission of the university. Dr Joseph seeks opportunities to improve programmes while adhering to strong fiscal models and a clear strategic plan. During her tenure at EMU the college obtained more than $2.2M of external funds through state appropriations, private foundation grants, state grants and private donors’ funds for scholarships and college-wide initiatives. She continues to be a strong advocate for students in Indiana. In Michigan she served as the chair of the Michigan Deans of Education Council, a body representing the fifteen public universities that prepare teachers in Michigan.

Dr Joseph worked with her fellow deans to develop and share policies and positions impacting teacher preparation and K-12 education in Michigan. She also served on the executive board of the Michigan Association of Teacher Education (MACTE) the state body affiliated to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and was also EMU’s key representative to AACTE.

Dr Joseph’s commitment to academic excellence is the hallmark of her service as a professor and leader, and she taught many courses in her disciplines of biology and science education. Before joining IUSB and EMU she was a full professor and Associate Dean at Grand Valley State University (GVSU). She was the founding coordinator of the Integrated Science program at GVSU where she led a team of faculty to develop the curriculum and obtain state approval for a unique major that seamlessly blends scientific content with pedagogy.

Dr Joseph has authored several peer-reviewed publications and has made numerous presentations at regional, national, and international conferences.

Commercializing Breadfruit for Food and Nutrition Security is the theme of an international breadfruit conference to be held in Trinidad from the 5th to 10th July 2015. The main host is the Faculty of Food and Agriculture, The University of the West Indies.

For more information please check http://sta.uwi.edu/conferences/15/breadfruit or email: breadfruit.conference@sta.uwi.edu.
Food Safety Studies in the Department of Food Production

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has dedicated its World Health Day 2015 (7th April, 2015) to ‘Food Safety’. The Department of Food Production offers courses in food safety both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In addition, research projects on food safety are conducted by students and staff.

One such study investigated the burden and impact of acute gastroenteritis (AGE) and food borne pathogens in Trinidad and Tobago. It was estimated that 135,820 AGE cases occurred in 2009 (84% underreporting), and for every 1 AGE case reported, an additional unreported 6.17 cases occurred in the community.

Huge Health and Economic Burden

Foodborne diseases impede socio-economic development by straining health care systems, and harming national economies, tourism and trade. The study also found that the estimated annual economic cost of AGE ranged from US$27,331 to US$19,736,344. Acute gastroenteritis thus poses a huge health and economic burden on Trinidad and Tobago.

Consumers expect protection from hazards occurring along the entire food chain, from the primary producer to the consumers, hence the farm to table continuum. The lack of consumer awareness and understanding of safe home practices is widely believed to be a major contributing factor in many cases of home food-related illness. Hence, the consumer could be regarded as a ‘risk manager’, with the responsibility for self-protection in the home.

Submitted by Professor Neela Badrie, Department of Food Production

Visiting lecturer speaks on Agrogeology

Agrogeology – Geology in the Service of Agriculture was the title of the presentation given by visiting Professor Emeritus Peter van Straaten from the Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph, Canada during a visit to the Department of Food Production, Faculty of Food and Agriculture on Thursday 26th February, 2015.

In his presentation, Professor van Straaten described agrogeology as having two main aspects: (i) the influence of parent material on soil development and soil properties and (ii) beneficial application of rocks and minerals to enhance productivity of soils (Rocks for Crops). He emphasized that soil fertility depletion is one of the fundamental constraints to increased agricultural productivity in many tropical countries, where long periods of continuous cultivation without nutrient replenishment resulted in the depletion of inherent soil fertility and subsequent decline in productivity.

He also stated that fertilizers are expensive and the annual soil depletion rate in sub-Saharan Africa of 22 kg (N), 2.5 kg (P) and 15 kg (K) per hectare of cultivated land per year, is equivalent to US $4 billion in fertilizer costs. His research describes how local phosphate and potash rocks can be used to alleviate these costs and sustain agricultural productivity.

Submitted by: Dr Ravindra Ramnarine and Prof Neela Badrie, Department of Food Production

The Faculty’s Alumni Continue to Serve in Leadership Positions

The Faculty congratulates Dr Lystra Fletcher-Paul and Mr Barton Clarke, both alumni, who have been appointed as Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization, Trinidad and Tobago Office and Executive Director of the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute, respectively.

Mr Barton Clarke

Principal Clement Sankat greets Dr Lystra Fletcher-Paul during a courtesy call