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NEWS RELEASE

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FAO launches Regional Projects to boost Food Production and Trade in the Caribbean

FAO in collaboration with the Governments of Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines will meet to launch a cluster of regional projects that aim to boost local production and export of agricultural produce.

February 2, 2022 - Bridgetown, Barbados – Over the past years, countries of the Caribbean, like many others worldwide, have experienced high rises in food prices and agricultural inputs. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia war have further exacerbated these costs and those related to imported goods. In addition, many Caribbean countries have relied heavily on imported goods over the years whilst also suffering from a decline in the export of prime agricultural crops, such as bananas and sugar cane, that traditionally and significantly contributed to their economies.

These factors have led to an increasing need to transform the region's agriculture food systems and find ways of boosting the export of other indigenous crops to increase foreign exchange earnings and rebuild economies. To support this effort, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean, in collaboration with the Governments of the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, are launching a regional cluster of projects on Promoting Windward Islands Food Production and Trade Corridor through National and Regional Value Chain Development.

On Friday, February 3, 2023, the Ministers of Agriculture from these countries, along with other government representatives, will join the FAO for an hour-long virtual launch, presentation and discussion on the regional projects. Other regional partners to be in attendance include the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission, the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

The discussions will focus on plans under the project to build resilient and competitive value chains that can promote exports and reduce the importation of goods. The regional projects aim to replace agri-food imports that have had a toll on Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) economies by increasing the capacity for countries in the region to produce and export quality agricultural produce. The steps being undertaken under the project are foreseen to contribute to the CARICOM food-importation bill reduction by 25 per cent by 2025 initiative and other global and regional targets such as those under the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Dr Renata Clarke, FAO's Sub-regional Coordinator for the Caribbean, remarked that "there was a dire need in the region to build cohesion among governments and partners in our efforts to improve local agricultural production, enhance intra- and inter-regional trade and build more resilient agri-food systems that also promote the consumption of local produce by locals. The regional launch aims to catalyse this transformation." She added that by making linkages with other regional initiatives geared towards reducing CARICOM's import bill and increasing agricultural exports, the region could accelerate its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and be better positioned to withstand the impacts of the current global food crisis.

The projects have just begun implementation by assessing the value chains with the greatest potential for success on the global market. Dasheen has so far been identified as a crop of good potential and FAO will continue its work with the countries to understand the challenges and opportunities for growing a dasheen industry that can consistently produce high quality dasheen in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner. The FAO Caribbean's Value Chain Methodology, which has had success in other Caribbean countries over the years, is to be applied during implementation of the projects and will also be a blueprint for building other industries in the region.

It is expected that the projects being launched will also improve livelihood opportunities and increase the potential for value-added production, whilst also promoting better production, a better environment, better nutrition and a better life for the countries' people.

The projects fall within FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme and are expected to run over the next two years.

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