



PROPEL

QUARTERLY

news from the field

IN THIS ISSUE

- **Lead Story** 1
- **Field Reports** 2
- **Expert Profile** 4
- **Agriculture: Plantains** 5
- **Events in Your Area** 6
- **PROPEL People: Our Team** 7
- **What's New** 8

LEAD STORY

CHF Caribbean begins programming across the region

CHF Caribbean has officially been registered as a non-profit company and opened its Caribbean regional office in Welches, Christ Church along the south coast of Barbados.

Our staff has been busy putting together a team of professionals from across the region, including an Agronomist, Agricultural Coordinators, Capacity Building and Training Specialists, a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, a Gender and Youth Advisor as well as accounting and administrative staff. A Marketing Specialist and several other specialists will soon be added to the team of professionals on the project. In addition, CHF Caribbean is in the process of registering its satellite office in Jamaica and bringing its operations in Guyana under the same “CHF Caribbean” umbrella.

Over the course of the last year, PROPEL initiated programming in five countries (Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana, St Vincent & the Grenadines and Grenada), with an emphasis on identifying high value market (HVM) opportunities, reflecting the project’s market-led orientation. In this fiscal year, the project will extend its programming to St. Lucia, Dominica and Trinidad & Tobago. We’ve already engaged approximately 20 HVM buyers e.g. supermarkets and hotels, across the region,



CHF Caribbean Inc., PROPEL Head Office Barbados

determining their priorities and food quality standards and using that as a basis for supporting Caribbean producers. Through these engagements, participating producers and buyers have already agreed on quality specifications and priority fresh produce to focus on.

Continued on page 2...

Continued from front page...

In Grenada, standards agreed to for fresh produce have been captured on posters developed with PROPEL's support and distributed to buyers and producers. Participating buyers and growers are now using these voluntary standards in their transactions. PROPEL intends to explore further use of such posters in other countries.

PROPEL has also been providing technical support to Caribbean producers in various areas, including production and marketing of specific crops, treatment of crops for pests and diseases, post-harvest handling and use of greenhouses, through Farmer Field Schools and direct on-farm support. The intent is to maximize producers' returns while maintaining quality and safety specifications required by high-value markets. Purchasing staff from selected buyers have also been trained on scheduling and tracking quantities from producers, resulting in a more planned and structured approach to purchasing. In addition PROPEL has worked with partner Producer Groups (PGs) providing training on soil testing, supporting procurement of inputs such as fertilizers and upgrading basic infrastructure

The Caribbean Farmers Network (CaFAN) has facilitated several buyer-seller forums across the region in the past year.

These forums, which were funded by PROPEL, have laid a foundation for new or strengthened relationships between diverse private sector buyers and over 200 producers from the region.

Targets have been agreed to and attainment of them facilitated in selected buyer-producer relationships. In Grenada, for example, PROPEL has worked directly with seven high-value markets that expressed an interest in enhancing procurement of fresh produce from local suppliers. In St. Vincent, with PROPEL's support, the Eastern Caribbean Trading and Development Organization (ECTAD) has significantly increased the volume of dasheen as well as ginger, plantain, pumpkin and sweet potato, supplied by farmers to meet the demands of four importers in the UK.

In Barbados, the project team has focused to date substantially on the Super Centre chain which identified its priorities for enhanced local procurement and preferred farmers to work with. In Jamaica, PROPEL staff consulted directly with nine high-value markets in the latter part of 2013 to investigate options for increasing purchase of local fresh produce. While in Guyana, PROPEL staff has met with a range of actors to assess market prospects, including local supermarkets, consolidators, exporters, representatives of airlines and the mining sector. ◊

FIELD REPORTS

PROPEL Opens An Office In Mandeville, Jamaica

The office for CHF Caribbean (Jamaica) has recently been opened in Mandeville, Manchester. Mandeville is a rural town in the farming midlands, about two hours from Kingston. The office is being managed by Mr. Alvin Murray who is supported by Mr. Henry Givans, a Jamaican Agronomist.

The PROPEL team in Jamaica has been hard at work training extension officers from the Rural Agriculture Development Authority (RADA) as well as select farmers on production and handling of potatoes. Training on production of root ginger is to follow. Demonstration plots have been created beside the new CHF office and other sites to assist with field schools.



CHF Caribbean Inc., PROPEL Jamaica Office



PROPEL training with RADA Extension Officers.

A new Irish Potato Seed program has also been initiated with over 700 bags of "super elite" seeds distributed to participating farmers who are involved in trials. The seed program is intended to provide high quality, disease-free planting material to farmers who have had problems sourcing quality seeds on the international market. PROPEL's commitment to Irish potatoes in Jamaica is a response to demands in the domestic markets and the Government of Jamaica's commitment to be self-sufficient in Irish potatoes by 2015.

Buyers and Producers, A Meeting of Two Minds

With support from PROPEL, CaFAN hosted two Buyer Grower Forums in Jamaica and St. Lucia last May and June respectively, with over 40 participants attending each event including growers, large buyers, service providers, financial institutions and members of the media.

Exchanges at the two forums led to a list of priority crops identified by buyers and growers. The meetings were facilitated by Dunstan Demille, Purchasing Manager of Consolidated Foods Limited in St. Lucia seen in this YouTube video making a presentation at the St. Lucia Forum. ◊



Caribbean Farmers Network (CAFAN) Buyer-Grower Forum

Watch video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uL3iOKncU0U>

Grenada, the Poster Child for Quality Standards

Grenada was phased in among the first group of countries to receive PROPEL's support in 2013. PROPEL's focus was on creating opportunities for fresh produce farmers to meet the demands of domestic high-value markets. The project targeted a range of local fresh produce identified as priorities by seven key buyers in Grenada.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Forestry, Fisheries & Environment as well as local producers and buyers have worked closely to develop systems to improve production and marketing activities. Quality specification posters have also been developed, highlighting standards for fresh produce to be sold to the high value markets. Initial support provided by PROPEL led to a sizeable increase of fresh produce being sold to targeted markets. PROPEL will continue to work with stakeholders in Grenada to build on these early successes.

Quality Specifications for Grenada Fresh Produce

<p>Banana</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal skin blemish / blotching, and injuries Fully mature & firm Free from crown rot or rotting of the blossom end <p>Poor Quality</p>	<p>Lettuce</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free of soil/insects/dogs Mature, whole leaves Free from "water spots" Firm leaves with good edges and no insect bites Leaves attached to base. <p>Poor Quality</p>	<p>Carrot</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Straight and firm Without splits or blemishes Clean/free of soil/debris Free of sun burn/green crowns Free from rot Free from chemical residue <p>Poor Quality</p>	
<p>Tomato</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free from cracks Fully matured and firm Free from insect damage Free from blossom end rot or anthracnose (dark spots) Free from chemical residues <p>Poor Quality</p>	<p>Sweet Potato</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean/free of soil Mature, firm whole tubers Skin firm and even in colour Free from rot, insect or physical / harvest damage <p>Poor Quality</p>	<p>Cabbage</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compact head Free of dirt/debris Skin firm and soft spots, especially at stem base Free of pest damage Leaf edges firm / intact <p>Poor Quality</p>	<p>Pepper</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean with fruit stem attached Mature (depending on market) but firm Skin smooth with no discoloration or soft spots <p>Poor Quality</p>
<p>Cantaloupe</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full and firm Almost spherical, even skin colour & relatively heavy No injuries, skin damage or sun burn Stem neatly removed - no basal damage <p>Poor Quality</p>	<p>String Beans</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pods fully matured, firm and bright green in colour No spotting of skin Free from pests / fungal disease or damage <p>Poor Quality</p>	<p>Pawpaw / Papaya</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mature and firm with skin even in colour Minimal skin blemish No dark, soft or depressed spots Free of damage / "scars" <p>Poor Quality</p>	<p>Water Melon</p> <p>Acceptable Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mature and firm Slightly lightening in colour Free of splits, scars, soft spots or only marks Rind / white part should be thin when cut <p>Poor Quality</p>

REAL VALUE SUPERMARKET **IGR**

Promotion of Regional Opportunities for Produce through Enterprises and Linkages (PROPEL)

50th Anniversary **CHF** Caribbean Farmers Network

CHF CARIBBEAN INC.

CHF programmes are undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD).

Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada / Affaires étrangères, Commerce et Développement Canada

Meet Julius Polius, Our Agronomist At Large

Farmers to Benefit from Regional Agronomist's Expertise.

Julius Polius, regionally known agronomist and former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, St. Lucia, has recently joined the PROPEL team in the capacity of Agronomist. Bringing over forty years of practical, technical and policy experience in the agricultural sector, Polius will support the project in its drive to ensure that participating farmers benefit from sound agronomic advice.

By helping farmers to improve their technical knowledge and practices, they will be better able to meet the demands of buyers in high-value markets, by improving the quality and consistency of their fresh produce.

Speaking on his hopes for the project Polius noted that he intends to bring his large body of experience; strong technical understanding of scientifically based farming concepts; and good understanding of the region's agricultural environment and issues of production to assist farmers in the eight participating countries.

Indeed Polius is well-equipped to play a key role in providing this assistance to the region's producers, as he has dedicated his professional life to the Caribbean agricultural sector. Having started off early in his career as a laboratory apprentice, Polius soon became involved in field trials, thus cementing his commitment to the marriage of theory and practice in agriculture. After studying Agronomy as an undergraduate at the University of the West Indies, he later went on to pursue graduate studies in Soil Science at McGill University in Canada.

Charting his professional course, he has acted as a senior research officer; a soil scientist at the Caribbean Research

and Development Institute (CARDI); an agricultural specialist at the government level; and has done short stints at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Nigeria, as well as the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) in Alabama. A farmer in his own right, Polius' last professional assignment before joining the PROPEL team was to serve as the Permanent Secretary in the Government of St. Lucia's Ministry of Agriculture.

With this wealth of professional experience, Polius is a valuable asset to the PROPEL team. Informed by his broad knowledge base, he also cautions about some of the unique challenges facing the region's agricultural sector.

Conceding that the sector is in need of major investment, he identifies the need for improvements to be made to the systems governing the production and flow of fresh produce in the region.



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“If PROPEL can move successfully towards strengthening the operating environment in which fresh produce is traded, a definite win would be in helping to create a better flow from the producer to the market.”

The impact of Polius' presence on the PROPEL team is already being felt. In October of 2013, Polius led a Farmer Field School (FFS) session in Barbados, during which some 35 local farmers were able to receive hands-on training and advice on issues that many of them face on their farms.

Barbadian farmers also benefitted from visits from Polius aimed at offering practical solutions to their challenges. Coming out of these visits, Polius identified the following as some of the major issues facing Barbadian farmers: pest and disease management, knowledge of production technology, fertilizer usage, and the limited range of fungicides. In addition to his work in Barbados, Polius has also been involved in provision of technical assistance to Guyanese farmers supported by PROPEL, including plantain farmers dealing with black sikatoga disease.

CHF Caribbean Inc. welcomes Julius Polius to its team, and is confident that his addition will help the project to better serve the needs of regional producers as we bridge the gap between the farm and the market. ◊



Plantain facts

AGRICULTURE

Guyana Is Going Bananas About Plantains

An average plantain has about 220 calories, is low in fat and a good source of potassium and dietary fiber.

Plantains fruit all year round, which makes the crop a reliable all-season staple food, particularly in developing countries with inadequate food storage, preservation and transportation technologies.

A plantain plant will flower only once, and all the flowers grow at the end of its shoot in a large bunch consisting of multiple hands with individual fingers (the fruits). Only the first few hands will become fruits.

Plantains can be used for cooking at any stage of ripeness, and ripe plantain can be eaten raw. As the plantain ripens, it becomes sweeter and its color changes from green to yellow to black.

Plantain has historically been an important cash crop for small and medium scale farmers in the rural coastal and riverine communities of Guyana.

Its economic importance lies in the fact that it is a preferred staple food in Guyana, occupying the third position among staple foods consumed by the Guyanese population, following rice and wheat flour. In addition, plantain used to be an important export crop, earning significant foreign exchange for the country. More recently, its demand has been increasing in the value-added production of snack foods, being a good alternative to imported Irish potatoes for this purpose.

Annual production of plantains in Guyana stood at 23,300 tonnes in the year 2000. However, plantain production declined following the rapid spread of a strange disease which caused the leaves of banana and plantain suckers to dry out, ultimately resulting in the death of the plants. It was not until 2009 that this disease was confirmed as the dreaded Black Sigatoka disease (BSD) that had spread rapidly across the Caribbean and Central America.

Plantain production fell to approximately 3,000 tonnes in 2009. Exports of the crop ceased in 2010 as importers rejected the poor quality of the produce, amid fears of further spread of the disease. During the period 2010-2012, farmers and the local agricultural institutions tasked with research, development and extension services, grappled with the problem. Several strategies were attempted, including combinations of cultural, physical and chemical methods of control, with mixed results.

While finding a decisive approach to eradication of the disease in Guyana has been a challenge, the strategy that holds most promise requires dedication and commitment of resources, the cost of which the rural poor are finding difficult to absorb. Both production and quality of the fresh produce remains low, although demand in specific segments of the market is increasing. Hence, there is an urgent need to control the spread and effects of the disease, so that supply and the quality of the product reaching consumers can be quickly improved.

At the end of 2012, only 1,390 acres remained active under the crop, with most of the harvest potentially below saleable quality. However, in 2013, these levels of production showed signs of improvement, due in large part to the initiatives implemented by the Government of Guyana (GoG); with agencies such as the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), the New Guyana Marketing Corporation (NGMC) and PROPEL. These initiatives have been geared towards controlling the disease, while simultaneously increasing yields.

In order to respond to the threat to the industry, and to satisfy the high demand for local plantains, the GoG adopted a strategy and action plan recommended by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) which will provide resources aimed at the revival of the industry. The aim is to see a return to pre-2008 export levels within 2-3 years. PROPEL is actively supporting the implementation of this action plan.



Continued from page 5...

NAREI, in collaboration with PROPEL, will embark on a program of macro-propagation designed to make healthy sucker plants available for cultivation in areas where there is a shortage of planting materials. Central to this initiative is the implementation of, and adherence to comprehensive plant nutrition and fertilizing programs currently supported by PROPEL. Additionally, efforts are ongoing to support farmers in having their soils tested, as well as adhering to the correct application of fertilizers so as to ensure optimum crop development. Farmers are being supported to participate in practical farm demonstrations and other field-based training programs.

PROPEL is playing a key role in the revitalization of Guyana's plantain industry. In January 2014, the project brought together a number of key stakeholders for consultations in Georgetown and New Amsterdam, Guyana. The consultations were aimed at expanding knowledge of the challenges affecting the industry. Among those invited to participate were representatives of NAREI, NGMC, as well as plantain farmers, agro-processors, middlemen/wholesalers and exporters.

Emerging from these consultations, PROPEL in collaboration with NAREI has selected a group of plantain farmers who are currently cultivating the crop, as well as those with an interest in re-establishing plantain production, to carry out field-based, action-oriented research in the management of the BSD.

PROPEL support for BSD research, and management comes in the form of fertilizers and chemicals, soil management and a clean seedling program. PROPEL will also support NAREI to develop and disseminate a manual on production and post-harvest handling of plantains. In addition, NAREI is set to embark on a program of macro-propagation, aimed at increasing the availability of viable plantlets.

PROPEL will collaborate with NAREI on a series of Farm Schools aimed at enhancing farmers' practical knowledge and skill base through farm demonstrations and other field-based training. So far, 67 research and demonstration plots have been established. Farmers are utilizing different biological based control methods, improved adherence to nutrition and sanitary practices to determine the optimal solution to the BSD problem.

Drawing heavily on a collaborative process with key industry players, and the input of targeted technical assistance, PROPEL is well placed to play a significant role in revival of the plantain industry in Guyana, with the expectation that production will increase by 15-20% over the next year. More significantly however is that PROPEL in collaboration with the GOG will contribute to protecting the entire plantain crop in Guyana, significantly improving the quality available to the market and increasing yields across the country. ♦



Events in Your Area

April – May, 2014

Trinidad

BMA – BIMEX

June 6 - 9, 2014

Barbados

Trade Americas:

Opportunities in the C'bean Region

June 8 - 12, 2014

Dominic Republic

TTMA Trade & Investment Convention

July 2, 2014

Trinidad and Tobago

Our Team



Christine Ouellette
Vice President, Programs
Canadian Hunger
Foundation

Over the last 25 years, Christine has held leadership posts in Canada and overseas, strengthening organizations' ability to design, implement,

monitor and evaluate their policies, programs and projects.

Her work has focused on initiatives that reflect the needs, interests and aspirations of women and vulnerable groups in the world's poorest countries, and she has operated in humanitarian, conflict and post-conflict contexts. She specializes in sustainable and equitable development; poverty reduction; gender equality; women's empowerment; governance; multi-stakeholder processes and community development.

Christine brings to CHF her experience working with a range of international organizations in diverse capacities and country settings, including the UN (UN Population Fund, UN Women, and the Gender Standby Capacity project), the Canadian International Development Agency, CARE Canada, Cowater International, and MATCH International Centre. ◇



Romesh Kishun
Country Coordinator Guyana
PROPEL Project

An international development professional with over eight years of experience implementing projects funded by Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), The International Finance Corporation (IFC), The

World Bank (WB), Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, the CDB and more.

Romesh has worked in various senior capacities on CHF teams in Guyana and the Caribbean. He has a sound understanding of CHF's developmental approach along with extensive experience in agriculture and rural development programming having worked on the Building Community Capacity Project (BCCP) and the Small Farmers Livelihood Program (SFLP) before heading up the PROPEL Project in Guyana. Prior to his work in development, Romesh had ten years work experience in the private sector as a Banker, Hospital Administrator and Lecturer. He has strong competencies in administration, human resources, private sector growth and development strategies. ◇



Joe Bolger
Project Director
PROPEL Project

An international development project manager and consultant with over twenty five years experience with a range of organizations, including CHF, CIDA/DFATD, AusAID, Asian Development Bank (ADB), United

Nations Development Program (UNDP), European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM, Maastricht), and CUSO to name a few.

Over the course of his international development career, Joe has had the opportunity to work in Asia, the South Pacific, Africa and the Caribbean, including long-term postings in Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Barbados. The latter three have involved managing CIDA/DFATD-funded bilateral projects focusing on agriculture, governance, human rights and civil society strengthening. Joe has also provided consulting services (short-term and long-term) in the following areas: capacity development, monitoring and evaluation, lessons learned, strategy development, policy analysis and development, project/program development and aid effectiveness.

Joe has a graduate degree in international development from the University of Ottawa and an MA from the Institute of Canadian Studies (ICS) at Carleton University. ◇



Munish Persaud
Deputy Director
Advisor on Agriculture and
Capacity Building
PROPEL Project

Over the last 20 years, Munish has been managing the implementation of projects aimed at helping organizations,

communities and households to innovate in order to address problems affecting agriculture and rural development. He has worked extensively in Guyana and the Caribbean, East, Africa and in Canada. His approach to innovation in agriculture and rural development programming is based on addressing conceptual blocks through praxis. Munish has been involved in projects funded by the International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD), Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

He has been involved in transformative solutions to credit for small farmers; large scale market led seed access programmes; coupling of health and food security initiatives, and peace building and food security initiatives. Munish is a professional teacher and holds a BSc in Public Management from the University of Guyana and an MSc in Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development from Imperial College Wye in collaboration with the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London. ◇



WHAT'S NEXT

PROPEL Forward Planning

To enhance PROPEL's programming, a number of CHF specialists and advisors will visit the region in the first quarter of this fiscal year. They will include:

- Sohel Khan, CHF Environment Specialist
- Paula Richardson, CHF Measurement & Evaluation Specialist
- Julia Bracken, CHF Gender and Youth Advisor
- Mike Jones, CHF Communications Manager, and
- Mary Lynch, Private Sector Engagement Advisor

WHERE TO FIND US:

Caribbean Head Office

CHF Caribbean Inc.
"Westray", Welches
Ch. Barbados
Tel: 246 428 9796
Email: info@chfcaribbean.com

Jamaica Office

CHF Caribbean
4A New Green Road
Mandeville, Manchester
Tel: 876 632 6889
Email: info@chfcaribbean.com

Guyana Office

CHF Caribbean
26 Lamaha & Irving Streets
Queenstown Georgetown
Tel: 592 227 7839
Email: info@chfcaribbean.com

CHF HQ Canada

Canadian Hunger Foundation
323 Chapel St., Ottawa
Ontario K1N 7Z2
Tel: 613 237 0180
E-mai: info@chf.ca
Web: www.chf.ca

WRITE TO US:

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please write to us at:
info@chfcaribbean.com

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