

MEDIA RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vision on Mission a Beneficiary of Training in Agriculture - UWI and Purdue University Partner for Farmer-to-Farmer Program



From left: Korrie John (Vision on Mission Farm Manager); Giselle Chance (Vision on Mission CEO); Cora Carter (Purdue University Educator/Volunteer and Sheep Farmer); Darian Marcelle (Vision on Mission Director)

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Agricultural extension has answered the SOS call from many local agricultural stakeholders for training and development amidst the challenges of the Covid 19 Pandemic through virtual training in agriculture, an initiative driven by the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus Faculty of Food and Agriculture (UWI FFA) and Purdue University, USA. In April 2020, UWI FFA in partnership with Purdue University's International Programs in Agriculture (IPIA) and Purdue Cooperative Extension Service, embarked upon the USAID John Ogonowski and Doug Bereuter Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) program in Trinidad and Tobago. A United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded program, F2F provides technical assistance from U.S. volunteers to farmers, farm groups, agribusinesses, and other agriculture sector institutions in developing and transitional countries.

The T&T program will run for a period of three years as the University of West Indies – St. Augustine (UWI) and Purdue University employ a dual approach to build capacity for the public and private extension community and empower farmers by providing them with an array of technical expertise. This expertise will improve food and nutrition security through increased productivity, safety, and profitability while strengthening the extension service through capacity building.

Due to Covid 19 Pandemic restrictions on travel and face to face interactions, the program temporarily embarked upon a virtual training strategy but is slowly transitioning to in-person, hands-on training which prioritizes topics and issues addressing food and nutrition security.

About Vision On Mission

The current volunteer assignment is with Vision On Mission (VOM), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), which has been in existence since 1995. Vision On Mission is non-denominational with the responsibility for the reintegration and rehabilitation of prisoners, ex-offenders, deportees/returning nationals, delinquent youth and socially displaced persons. The NGO delivers solutions to the many problems encountered by its clients. One of the major challenges faced by clients being the fact that after they are released from prison, or deported from the metropolis, there is great difficulty in finding sustainable employment.

“The issue of employment or even creating self-employment isn't limited to concerns that a potential employer might have but, more so, the skill sets that an ex-offender would not possess to fit the needs required by a business owner. In response, Vision On Mission has developed an in-house programme to address this particular hurdle and a Personal Development and Skills Training Centre situated at the Wallerfield facility of Vision On Mission, to expose its clients to a wide range of entrepreneurial and business skills offered via workshops and seminars. In this realm, the emphasis has been placed on agriculture as it is felt that this is an underutilized sector, while it also contributes to their upkeep at the Centre,” Vision On Mission CEO, Giselle Chance.

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Farmer-to-Farmer Program in Trinidad and Tobago



Due to the fact that agriculture was identified as one of the main sectors to launch the Vision On Mission Personal Skills Training and Development initiative, the NGO was chosen as a host/beneficiary for the Farmer-to-Farmer Program Trinidad and Tobago.

At the current Farmer-to-Farmer assignment, being conducted at the Vision On Mission Wallerfield Centre, participants are learning how to set up a commercial sheep production unit with technical training provided by Cora J Carter, Purdue Extension Educator and sheep farmer.

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“This experience has been excellent, from the kindness and consideration of the UWI program staff to the work we are doing with the Vision on Mission farm group. The class is excited and interested in the topic of sheep production, with several stating that they have a desire to operate a sheep farm in the future as a result of their training. I’m so happy that I have been able to be a part of building such a valuable partnership and I look forward to continuing to support this program in months and years to come,” states Cora Carter.



“Quotes,” from participants:

“As a lover of agriculture, I was very excited and pleased to be assigned to the garden. I look forward daily to going to work, as it brings me great pleasure to see the produce flourish.” – D. Ramdass

“Prior to coming to VOM I was never exposed to agriculture. However, as part of the programme all clients are assigned work duties. Although apprehensive in the beginning, I have since changed my mindset, as working in the garden is something I look forward to doing daily, even on my days off. It is not only therapeutic; it is soothing to my mind and soul. It allows me to think, meditate, and reflect. I now love gardening and will continue to do so when I reintegrate.”

– R. Lestage



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Up until the end of the year 2022, there will be more Farmer-to-Farmer assignments with nine other local hosts, including National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO), Tobago Agricultural Society and new assignments with Network of Rural Women Producers Trinidad and Tobago and Unemployment Relief Programme - Tobago to name a few.

“The Purdue F2F program focuses on identifying the needs within Trinidad and Tobago’s extension system and agricultural industry and finding volunteers that are willing to travel on a two-to-four-week technical assignment to help address those needs,” Amanda Dickson, Program Director Farmer-to-Farmer Program, said.

“We have three missions here in the College of Agriculture: learning, discovery, and engagement,” said Kashchandra Raghothama, Professor of Horticulture at Purdue University. “This really hones in on the engagement component, and we are proud to play a crucial role in that.”

The Purdue team brings documented experience in executing complex international projects, including F2F programs across the globe.

Former Dean of the Faculty of Food and Agriculture and Country Director, Professor Wayne Ganpat sees the F2F Program as an excellent opportunity for the University of the West Indies to showcase its expertise in agricultural extension as well as the opportunity to make Trinidad and Tobago more food secure through extension interventions.

While Trinidad and Tobago Farmer-to-Farmer field coordinator, Dr. Lorraine Waldropt-Ferguson, concludes that the F2F Program is indeed an answered call for the T&T Agriculture Sector- “The Farmer-to-Farmer Training will answer the call for training and development by many agricultural stakeholders, farmers and others. This training will certainly be beneficial and timely for many agricultural groups and individual agents who are currently facing challenges due to the pandemic.”

“The End”

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