Eight board members of the Caribbean Council of Higher Education in Agriculture (Cache) held their annual meeting at the UVI Cooperative Extension Service, St. Croix campus during the month of March. Members of the group represented islands in the Caribbean such as Suriname, Guyana, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Kwame Garcia, Sr., CES’ State Director and Vice Chair of the Board, said that it was a wonderful opportunity for the members of Cache to have held their meeting on St. Croix because they were able to tour the research facilities of the University’s Agricultural Experiment Station, visit on-farm research projects such as the rice growing project that is presently being conducted on Oscar Henry’s farm at La Grange, Frederiksted, and see some of the community outreach educational activities that the Cooperative Extension Service provides to the residents of the Virgin Islands.

Cache’s membership comprises those Caribbean Institutions that confer degrees in Agriculture and Agri-Business, or provide tertiary education in agriculture.
From The Ground Up is a quarterly publication of the University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service. It is available to Virgin Islands residents upon request and is also available on the web at www.rps.uvi.edu/CES/index.html.

Kwame Garcia, Sr., CES State Director

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Message from the State Director

It is with great pride that I present to you our newest publication, From the Ground Up. This publication will feature some of the recent highlights of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and will reflect on how our employees are positively affecting the lives of the people in our community and in the wider Caribbean.

Traditionally, agriculture is farming the land, growing food “from the ground up.” We would like to instill in the minds of our clientele the essence of this concept, of developing from the base and expanding upward and outward, of working to improve and preserve our natural resources, and of growing and developing our lives, our families and our community in a sustainable manner. We have therefore selected the name of this publication, From the Ground Up, to reflect our mission of putting our collective knowledge to help the people of our community to grow.

This issue illustrates many aspects of our work. After 25 years of service with the extension service, one employee who taught our children and adults the art of clothing construction recently retired. But she continues to assist the growth process. Another extension staff member took time from his schedule to teach a local woodworker how to use a computer to enhance his wood carving techniques. Another article focuses on composting and on using a compost bin to help preserve the environment by recycling material which would normally be considered waste. This issue also shows how elementary school children were taught to build a vegetable garden, have fun watching the vegetables grow and enjoy harvesting the leafy fresh vegetables. Another story is about our Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Program and how CES works with various groups to strengthen communities by developing educational programs for at-risk children.

I am very grateful to the CES staff who worked diligently on this publication. It is an illustration of our staff’s desire to educate our community on a consistent and relevant manner. We invite our readers to give us advice on how we can improve on this publication. We also invite you to contact the Cooperative Extension Service if we can assist you in any way.

Sincerely,

Kwame Garcia, Sr.

The UVI-CES Administrative Team:
Kwame Garcia, Sr., State Director
Kofi Boateng, Associate Director
Lois Sanders, Assistant Director-4H/Family & Consumer Sciences
Stafford Crossman, Assistant Director-Agriculture & Natural Resources
Carlos Robles, Acting District Supervisor-St. Thomas/St. John
Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent, Dale Morton, in collaboration with the BVI Department of Human Resources, recently conducted a chemical safety training workshop in Tortola, BVI. The two-day workshop was held at the Public Service Training Center to sensitize employees who work with cleaning products about safety issues associated with the various cleaning agents they use daily.

According to Mrs. Sylvia George, BVI’s Health and Safety Coordinator, the need for the workshop arose after stakeholders discussed a number of safety issues and concerns being faced by workers in the public service. George said, "it became apparent that key employees were not given the type of basic training necessary in order to perform their duties safely and protect their health, which has caused the health of some key employees to be compromised, due to incorrect usage and long-term exposure to certain general household chemicals.”

The workshop highlighted the proper way to use everyday household cleaning agents to avoid risks and threats to the health, safety and welfare of employees who utilize them on a daily basis. The workshop also promoted the need to protect and promote workers’ safety and health and to enhance the workplace safety culture of the Virgin Islands.

The topics covered included: definition of a chemical; classifications of chemicals and cleaning agents used on a daily basis; health and safety risks associated with the use of chemicals; routes chemicals can use to enter the body; identifying safe ways to use cleaning agents/chemicals and the use of alternative cleaning agents.

At the conclusion of the workshop, Dale was successful in making participants more aware of how regular exposure to various cleaning agents can affect their health and safety along with giving them examples and tips to identify safer alternative cleaning agents.

(BVI News source)
Composting is one way of reducing the amount of yard waste that goes into the trash. After a couple of months of good management this precious “mixture” can be added to your garden to produce good quality food at home. As part of the First Lady, Mrs. Cecile DeJongh’s initiative to encourage schools and community groups to start garden projects, CES, in conjunction with the V.I. Department of Agriculture, conducted composting workshops and demonstrations for teachers and government employees in both districts. Carlos Robles, CES’ Acting District Supervisor and Errol Chichester, Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture, gave the theory and hands-on demonstrations on the building of a compost pile on the grounds of UVI, St. Croix campus. Participants were given step-by-step instructions on what goes into a compost pile and got a clear understanding of how micro-organisms breakdown the materials in the pile.

According to Robles, several conditions are important for proper composting to take place. These include carbon: nitrogen ratio, moisture, aeration, and temperature. Materials for composting in home gardens, he said, may include yard waste, plant residues, grass clippings, newspapers, animal manure and kitchen scraps that don’t include meat products. For more information on composting, contact Carlos Robles at 693-1083, or Stafford Crossman at 692-4071.
The Cooperative Extension Service, in partnership with the Virgin Islands Public Television System (WTJX), and the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture, has embarked on a garden program for home gardeners in the territory. Unveiling the program at a recently held press conference, the heads of these agencies outlined the process of this gardening program. Although the application process is open to all, only 42 residents will have the opportunity to be selected for the pilot program. These individuals will be provided with the materials to start their own box, container, tire or traditional gardens. The materials include potting soil, lumber, vegetable seedlings, drip irrigation system, and technical assistance in setting up the gardens.

To be part of the program, the applicants must agree to have their gardens video taped and aired on the Virgin Islands Public Television station (WTJX). Thirteen shows from concept to type of gardens, design/materials, teaching, selection of plants, planting and harvesting will be aired in the Fall of 2010.

“Home Grown” is an outreach and television program designed to address several critical issues, such as the extremely high cost and poor quality of imported fresh vegetables in the Virgin Islands, a desire to encourage healthy eating habits, and to help Virgin Islands’ residents save money.

According to CES’ State Director, Kwame Garcia, Sr., “Home Grown” can have a big impact on the residents’ quality of life. “Locally and nationally we have a problem with obesity; to turn this around, the solution must be to grow and eat more fresh vegetables, and exercise. And, this is what home gardens give you.”

As they develop this garden program, Garcia hopes to use the “Home Grown” program as a springboard to bring back master gardener classes and certifications. “We had it many years ago and we’d like to bring it back,” he said. “The ‘Home Grown’ initiative is a perfect beginning.” To learn more about the “Home Grown” garden project, call Clarice C. Clarke at 692-4060, or Tanya Singh at 690-6696.
Twenty-eight St. Croix residents are now logging on to the internet, setting up e-mail accounts and learning the basics in the adult computer training course. The course conducted by the University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service (CES), is designed to increase the participants’ knowledge and usage of computers. One of the goals is to give the participants the basic tools to enable them to take advantage of advances in technology. It is also designed to help them save time and money.

The eight-week-long class began with learning how to use Microsoft Windows. Participants learned how to use functions such as drag and drop, right click, left click, boot up, shut down, etc. After learning Microsoft Windows, they learned word processing using Microsoft Word. The class ended with E-mail/Internet as participants learned how to setup e-mail accounts, which can help them save money on stamps, and search for information using the World Wide Web. Participants also got an added treat as they learned how to shop online and to compare sites to save money.

Mary Richards, a UVI Physical Plant employee, said that she learned a lot from the class. “I didn’t know how to even turn on the computer,” she said. “And, today, I can turn it on, type, setup my e-mail account and search the internet.” Camaleater Roame said that she was very grateful for this program. “I knew nothing, now I have learned some computer skills and know more about the computer and how to use it.” Finally, Elah Moore stated enthusiastically that the computer training program offered by CES was excellent and she is looking forward to the next session. What made the class interesting and fun, said Moore, is that the instructors—Marthious Clavier and EvaMarie Gibbs-Stevens—were excellent teachers; they knew the material and delivered the information in a simple and comprehensive manner.

The main objective of this program is about equipping people with the new skills they will need to improve themselves, or to get jobs in this changing economy and, at the same time, making them computer literate, according to UVI standards.
Ryan Shaw and Brent Joseph of the Elena Christian Junior High School’s Science Club received honorary mention for their robots entered in the 2009 district science fair competition. These students, along with the other members of the Science Club, worked with Marthious Clavier on the Lego NXT Mindstorms robotic. This was made possible through a grant written by the Science Club advisor, Ms. Carelle Davis.

The NXT brick is referred to as the brain of the robot. It’s an intelligent, computer-controlled device that, when programmed, allows the robot to come alive and perform different operations. It has three motor ports, four sensor ports, and a USB port. The three motor ports connect the motors that give the robot the ability to move. The NXT has four sensors that allow it to interact with its environment. The Touch Sensor gives the robot a sense of touch, which detects when it is being pressed and when it is released. The Sound Sensor can measure sound pressure levels and the robot can respond, based on the level of sound it detects.

The Light Sensor is one of the two sensors that give the robot vision. It enables the robot to distinguish between light and dark. It can read the light level in a room and measure the light to dark colors on surfaces. The other vision sensor is the Ultrasonic sensor that enables the robot to detect objects. The USB port is used for downloading programs from the computer to the NXT. The NXT also has a speaker that allows the robot to speak.

The students first learned how to build the robot using Lego parts by following the directions in the Lego constructopedia. After the robot was constructed, the students learned how to program it to perform different tasks. The first task was to program it to follow a path around the classroom. Then using the touch sensors, they programmed it to drive around the classroom and if it bumped into an object, it backed away and changed its course. The next task was to program the robot to avoid objects without bumping into them. Utilizing the ultrasonic sensor, the robot was programmed to drive around the classroom and detect objects within 10 inches; it would back away, then turn and continue going forward. The last program the students created ordered the robot to follow a black line utilizing the light sensor.
Family & Consumer Sciences employee, Mrs. Rosalind Browne, retired after 27 years of service to the University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service. Mrs. Browne served as a nutrition educator and marketable skills instructor during her tenure at CES. During a well-deserved retirement luncheon, acknowledgement of her contributions and accomplishments were given by several of her co-workers and clientele.

If there is ever a woodworking tool for woodworkers, it is the CarveWright machine. This is an innovative, compact table-top wood carving machine that is quite impressive. This new “toy” belongs to Carol Spanner, one of St. Croix’s master woodworker and Vice President of the St. Croix Wood Artists Inc. To help him set-up and install the software, Mr. Spanner called on the Cooperative Extension Services’ computer specialist Marthious Clavier.

Clavier took Mr. Spanner through the various steps from creating designs on the computer to the final stage of loading the file for carving. The CarveWright software is said to be about as easy to use as a common “Paint” program and can create designs based on a library of shapes, or manually using the drawing tools. The beauty of this machine, however, is that text can be added from a litany of font styles, and can be set to follow a curved path. Spanner learned how to create and download designs onto a memory card and then insert it into the CarveWright machine.

What came out next was quite dramatic and exciting for both Spanner and his instructor—Clavier. The first sample of carving was then presented to CES’ State Director, Kwame Garcia, by Mr. Spanner.

According to Spanner, this new machine will provide him with the opportunity to fine-tune his carvings, allow him to produce consistent, reproducible pieces, do his own letter carvings, and finally, it will allow him to save money in the long run.

This 70-year-old wood artist, Carol Spanner, is now enrolled in CES’ Basic Computer short course and his instructor is none other than Marthious Clavier.
All around St. Thomas, with the guidance and assistance of CES’ Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Assistant, Albion “Chico” George, various school gardens have been producing cabbage, okra, tomato, eggplant, pepper, seasoning herbs (including thyme, parsley, chibble, celery, oregano), tea bushes (including mint, japana, and balsam). Although many other schools are requesting assistance with these garden programs, the elementary through junior high schools that were able to benefit this past year were the Addelita Cancryn Jr. High, Lockhart Elementary, Jane E. Tuitt Elementary, and Gladys Abraham Elementary along with the Lutheran Church Afterschool Program in Tutu and the Children Youth and Families At Risk Program afterschool program (CYFAR).

On a weekly basis, occasionally with the assistance of Family and Consumer Science Assistant Ms. Blanche Mills, Chico worked with the school children, teachers and other staff members educating them in both the nutritional aspect, as well as the actual growing of the crops. In some cases, he went even further introducing them to the entrepreneurial aspect of agriculture through participating in local fairs. As a result, the Gladys Abraham Elementary School’s gardening club won first prize in the Nursery competition in this year’s Virgin Islands Carnival Cultural Fair. The CES CYFAR afterschool program was also able to benefit as Chico assisted them weekly to make them aware of and accustomed to basic agriculture in the CES on-campus garden.

Chico hopes that, “knowing this is being done will encourage parents and others to visit the school gardens to see how well they are doing, keeping in mind that most of these children were starting from scratch. It was most memorable to see the excitement on their faces when they saw me coming into their school, knowing that they had grown the produce themselves and to see the joy on their faces when they were going in the garden.” Another cycle of the school gardening programs will begin in the upcoming school year.
According to 4-H Family & Consumer Sciences Assistant Director, Lois Sanders, program staff and the VI Housing Authority (collaborators) attended the national CYFAR Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, the week of May 18th. Many of the activities and workshops provided excellent information and professional development opportunities. The Program Showcase was again an excellent example of the variety of programs throughout the nation. As in previous years, Sanders said, the Virgin Islands was represented in the 2008 CYFAR Annual Report with pictures of some of our CYFAR youth. The CYFAR mission is to marshal resources of the Land-Grant and Cooperative Extension Systems so that, in collaboration with other organizations, they can develop and deliver educational programs that equip youth who are at risk for not meeting basic human needs with the skills they need to lead positive, productive, contributing lives.
The CES Family & Consumer Science St. Thomas campus Program Supervisor, Dr. Caryl Johnson, along with Extension Assistant, Ms. Blanche Mills, taught local parents, childcare caregivers, and supervisors about “Eating Healthy on a Tight Budget” during the 11th Annual Best Beginnings 2009 Early Childhood Conference held in the UVI Sports & Fitness Center, St. Thomas. “We discussed the food pyramid and making their food dollar go further,” said Dr. Johnson. We also talked about using the “Food Basket,” which is a price listing of common grocery items found in local supermarkets. It is designed to let residents know which stores have the best prices on food staples. Home gardening  is recommended as a way of saving money or stretching food dollars. The listing is printed in the Daily News at the end of every month. The Best Beginnings Early Childhood Conference is an annual event. The next “Eating Healthy on a Tight Budget” session has not been scheduled to date.

CES Livestock Agent Receives International Senepol Award

One hundred and thirty Senepol cattle breeders from around the world gathered recently in St. Croix, the birthplace of the breed, for the Senepol Cattle Breeders Association’s 32nd annual convention. Countries represented included the United States, Venezuela, Brazil, Panama, Paraguay, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, South Africa, Puerto Rico and, of course, the Virgin Islands. The convention and educational sessions were held at the Carambola Beach Resort. These sessions served to update the participants on what was happening with the breed in the areas of research and development as well as what successful breeders were doing to maximize their production. Attendees were also given the opportunity to see some of the island sights as they went on farm tours to the Lawaetz Museum, the Annaly Farms cattle herd, Estates Longford and Petronella, and the University of the Virgin Islands’ cattle herd.

An awards banquet was held in which one of the awards went to CES’s own livestock extension agent, Sue Lakos. Lakos received the Frits E. Lawaetz Award for her outstanding contribution to the development and classification of the Senepol breed since 1984. The banquet concluded with the final rounds of the cattle auction, where over 30 animals from the two large Senepol herds on island were auctioned off, with some going for over $5,000!
Visit us on the Web at http://rps.uvi.edu/CES/index.html

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