

Researchers from the United States and Mexico Support Haiti's Efforts to Develop its Fruit Industry



Scientists carry out field assessment of the needs to improve mango fruit production and post harvest to support exporters in Haiti

May 20th, 2013, Washington, DC. The project “*Revitalizing a Cherished Crop: Mango Chain Development in Haiti*”, in execution by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) Offices in the USA and Haiti with technical support from the Mexican National Forestry, Agriculture and Livestock Research Institute (INIFAP) and the USDA Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS). The project aims to train Haitian professionals on the best practices for production and postharvest handling of mangoes, the country’s primary export.

Developing the mango chain is one of the priorities of the Haitian government. Exports of the country’s unique *Francisque* variety brings more than US\$10 million annually to Haiti and has generated sustainable, long-term employment in rural and urban areas.

The first workshop took place from May 13 to 16, in Port-au-Prince, and was facilitated by the Mexican researchers Drs. Jorge Osuna and Víctor Palacio from INIFAP. Fifty two Haitian professionals attended the four day seminar to discuss the best practices for production, new methodologies to estimate optimal harvest times, and many other topics relevant to the business. Among the attendants were fifteen undergraduate students in their final year, who will become technical advisors to the producers. They discussed the importance of implementing good agricultural practices (GAPs) to ensure food safety to lower the risk of contaminating produce with dangerous pathogens.

The prevailing notion among both limited resource and beginning farmers is that food safety is an issue primarily for large operations and that it requires cost prohibitive infrastructural changes and burdensome record keeping and maintenance. “*This is far from the truth because GAPs can be adapted to any farm situation*” indicated Osuna, a food safety expert. “*By following GAPs on the farm year-round – from field preparation through harvest and marketing - the risk of contaminating produce can be greatly reduced*” he added.

The experts visited a mango plantation and a packing facility in Thomonde in the Department of Central and Aquinas/Camp Perrin in the South.

As part of the training program, Haitian professionals will participate in a field mission to mango producing areas in Nayarit, Mexico, to learn first hand about the best production techniques. They will also visit several fruit exporting facilities where they will attest the best practices to ensure that mangoes are free from fruit flies, a requirement by the US. Mango exports generate more than 15 million U.S. dollars to Mexico annually, and the business model could also be implemented in Haiti.

A second mission to the USDA-ARS Tropical Agriculture Research Station in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, will be carried out to teach the Haitians about production technologies for other tropical fruits of economic importance that could be adapted to the conditions in Haiti.

The technical assistance needs are important and complicated because in Haiti most of the mangoes come from people's backyards with only a few trees. *"This is why we are tapping on IICA's expertise on diversification schemes that have paid off in Central America to assist Haiti with fruit chain development"* explained Priscila Henríquez, IICA's innovation specialist who coordinates the project. *"Diversification with fruit tree crops provide business opportunities to small farmers, including women, while at the same time contribute to the vital cover to degraded lands like those in Haiti"* added Henríquez.

Alfredo Mena, IICA's Representative in Haiti, presented the proposal for the Fruit Chain Development Program to senior officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development (MARNDR). *"This program will contribute to disseminate innovations in the fruit chain that will benefit 28,000 Haitian families"*, indicated Mena.

The project *Revitalizing a Cherished Crop: Mango Chain Development in Haiti* is supported by the Fund for Technical Cooperation of IICA. This project is enabling Haiti to benefit from the experiences of fruit growing in Mexico, the US, as well as the diversification schemes implemented in other countries.

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