CITRUS GREENING PROJECT REAPS BIG RETURNS: Efforts to be sustained locally.

Just over two years after the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) joined forces with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, RADA and the Citrus Protection Agency to reduce the negative impact of citrus greening on the Jamaican industry, farmers are reporting significant successes as shown by improvements in citrus production and quality of citrus groves.

Speaking at the Closing Workshop for the project in Manchester on Thursday, January 30, 2013, FAO's representative in Jamaica Dr. Jerome Thomas, pointed to the improvements that small farmers on the programme had been experiencing since adopting the principles taught under the project. He was also quick to point out the need for sustainable support to ensure continued successes.

"Persons who have followed the recommended treatment have seen significant improvements in their crop production...The management of this disease helps us to demonstrate to farmers that if they follow the recommended practices, the local citrus industry can become competitive internationally". Dr. Thomas said.

Under the project, the FAO allocated close to 44 million Jamaican dollars of its technical resources to support the national response to citrus greening. The initiative was rolled out in sections of St. Catherine and Clarendon, areas with high concentrations of small scale citrus farmers.

Already several farmers have been seeing improvements in the health of their plants, increased fruit yields and larger sized produce. This they credit to their application of the citrus greening management practices that have been introduced under the project.

The pilot project adopted a multi-pronged approach to tackling the effects of the disease. This included biological control via the release of parasitic wasps that feed on the vector, the Asian Citrus Psyllid. In excess of 5,000 such wasps were released by the Government's Plant Protection unit. A wide variety of improved crop management practices were also utilized by the farmers who worked together in clusters.

To provide disease-free planting material in the longer term, two pilot scale enclosed nursery facilities were also built under the project. With a capacity of up to 7,000 plants per year, the units demonstrate the best practices required to produce clean planting material for the future of the industry.

There are also plans in place to sustain the positive gains through a phased expansion of the project principles to citrus areas in other parishes such as: St. Mary, Trelawny, St. James, Hanover, Manchester and St. Elizabeth.

With continued Citrus Greening Management, Jamaica stands to gain from a 25% increase in citrus production.

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