

**Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry,
Fisheries, Rural Transformation,
Industry and Labour**

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WEB INSERT: New vegetable gardens for six primary schools in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in support of the National School Feeding Programme

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in partnership with the Ministries of Agriculture and Education and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) initiated a programme to support the establishment and operation of vegetable gardens at six primary schools across the island in May 2022. The participating primary schools with a total of 900 students are New Grounds Primary School, Argyle Primary School, Fair Hall Primary School, Cane End Government, Spring Village Methodist School, and the Paget Farm Government School.

The initiative is being implemented as part of the broader and innovative vision of the *Resilient School Feeding Programme* sub-project of the Mexico-CARICOM-FAO, “Cooperation for Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience in the Caribbean”. The main objective is to support the National School Feeding Programme of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and in particular, to support the establishment or rehabilitation of school gardens as a teaching tool for food and nutrition education.

As part of the programme of activities, cohorts of 20-60 students, from grades three to four, and the assigned teachers from each school, will receive training on how to establish and care for vegetable gardens, beginning with land preparation and including all other steps, from planting, through harvesting and consumption. It is envisioned that through this initiative, students will receive training on the theoretical and practical aspects of crop production and agriculture generally, and this will pique their interest in the agricultural sciences, and to consider agriculture as a possible career option. This is especially important as across the Caribbean there is an aging population of farmers, therefore a new and younger generation will be needed. Similarly, the initiative provides an opportunity for students to experiment with vegetables harvested from the gardens in the meals offered in the School Feeding Programme, under the guidance of the 18 cooks who were trained and certified on methods to incorporate healthy foods into school lunches. The training took place in March with support from FAO.

Several vegetables including corn, beans, cabbage, sweet peppers, tomatoes and lettuce are expected to be grown and harvested across the six school gardens, and will be added to the

local products purchased from local farmers for the preparation of meals under the School Feeding Programme.

Speaking on the initiative, Laura Anthony Browne, FAO's National Project Coordinator for the Resilient School Feeding Programme sub-project expressed satisfaction with the commencement of the programme. According to Mrs. Browne, "Even as this programme was conceptualized and advanced as an important part of the SFP, it is such a pleasure to see the excitement of the children as they participate in the transplanting of seedlings and the caring of their crops. The enthusiasm of the participating teachers is also remarkable and provides the basis for the success of the initiatives".

The school garden initiative is one of several activities of the sub-project executed in collaboration with the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Education and IICA. Other activities include training of farmers and fisherfolk who can support the school feeding programme, improvement of menu cycle, recipes and school nutrition standards, the development of procurement guidelines for the supply of local produce to schools, a nutritional assessment of students and conditioning works at the participating schools. All activities fall within the Mexico-CARICOM-FAO Initiative – Cooperation for climate change adaptation and Resilience in the Caribbean – which is funded by the Government of Mexico.

This activity is expected to conclude at the end of October 2022 and become subsumed within the regular school curriculum. It will be essential for the support being provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and the vision of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to promote school gardens throughout the country as a teaching tool for food and nutrition education, while seizing opportunities in the agricultural sector.
