



Farmer's Forum Report

Belize

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I. INTRODUCTION

Two forums were held in Belize, one in Corozal Town at the Corozal I.T.V.E.T. Conference Centre and the other at the University of Belize, Central Farm, San Ignacio Town on October 9th and 10th 2012 respectively.

II. REPRESENTATION

The meeting was attended by farmers, two staff members of the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology (CIMH) as well as representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Meteorological Service.

(See full list of attendees at **Annex 1**).

III. WELCOME

Participants were welcomed by a representative from the Meteorological and Agricultural personnel. The forum was conducted by Mr. Adrian Trotman (project coordinator) in assistance with Mrs. Shontelle Stoute (Technical Assistant).

Mr. Dennis Gonguez (Chief Meteorological Officer of Belize), in his welcome stated that the previous forums were very successful as farmers, extension officers and meteorological service personnel were brought together. He emphasized that such a forum would not be the last in Belize as they would seek to continue collaboration with the afore-mentioned parties.

IV. PRESENTATIONS

Mr. Andrew Harrison (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries) in his presentation stated that rainfed farming is a risky business where a good rainy season gives rise to a good crop production and hence enhanced food security and a healthy economy and the converse holds.

Before engaging meteorological personnel, agricultural personnel and farmers in conversation; presentations were made on seasonal forecasting, climate variability and climate change. A presentation was also made by Ms. Catherine Cumberbatch (Belize Met Service) on the information provided by that service.

Mr. Trotman in his presentation on seasonal forecasting made it clear that information is readily available for forecasting rainfall up to six months in advance. A three-month precipitation outlook map

is available and updated monthly. This map gives the probability of receiving below normal, above normal or normal rainfall across the Caribbean region and can be obtained online from www.cimh.edu.bb.

In a presentation on Climate and Agriculture, Mr. Stoute showed results for two stations in Belize with respect to trends and crop yields. A significant increase in minimum temperature is being observed by the end of the century as well as very warm days and nights. There is no evidence of decreasing rainfall observed as suggested by global climate models.

V. OPEN DISCUSSION – CIMH

During dialogue between meteorological and agricultural extension officers and farmers, several questions were discussed. Below are the responses to those questions.

Corozal Discussion

1. Have the regional or national CAMI bulletins been available to you? How useful was it?
 - No
2. What would you like to see in the bulletins?
 - Bulletins on the met service website
 - Printed bulletins to be picked up by farm group leaders
 - Reminder on the weather news about the bulletins
 - Weather alerts via text
 - Provision of GPS reading by extension officers
 - Evapo-transpiration training passed on to farmers
 - The type of crops that can be planted during each three month period
 - Advice on best time to fertilize, replant etc.
 - Daily rainfall predictions
 - Specific area forecasts
 - Sunshine hours
3. The cell phone is now an important communicational tool, how do you propose to go about having alerts by cell phone for times of bad weather?
 - Alerts in both English and Spanish
4. How about a cell app that provided alerts?
 - Most farmers lack the usage of a “smart” phone
5. Would you like to have a farmers’ forum with your Met Service at the beginning of the dry and wet/hurricane season?
 - Yes
 - i. At the start of the growing season for different crops e.g. corn and bean
 - ii. Mid May and December or January/June

- iii. For feedback and to find ways to upgrade
 - iv. All farmers must be invited
- 6. How about a radio/tv programs?
 - Yes in both English and Spanish as well as across several media houses
- 7. Anything else you think should be raised?
 - Training of extension officers about climate
 - Language barrier issues:
 - i. Bulletins should be in both English and Spanish

Central Farm Discussion

1. Have the regional or national CAMI bulletins been available to you? How useful was it?
 - No by most participants
2. What would you like to see in the bulletins?
 - Monthly reviews; what happened in the past month and why it happened
 - News feed on training etc.
 - Alerts in pests and diseases
 - Technologies used in other countries
 - Seasonal changes alerts
 - Graphs/pictures
 - Drought information for farmers
 - Irrigation information
 - Greenhouse information
 - Bulletins per district or productive areas
3. The cell phone is now an important communicational tool, how do you propose to go about having alerts by cell phone for times of bad weather?
 - Good idea but information may be too complicated for farmers to comprehend. The language barrier would also impact this mode of communication.
4. How about a cell app that provided alerts?
 - Most farmers do not have the usage of “smart” phones. However, for those who do, apps that provide forecasts about local thunderstorms and “freak” storms, floods, hurricanes.
 - There should be an option to select your language preference
5. Would you like to have a farmers’ forum with your Met Service at the beginning of the dry and wet/hurricane season?
 - Yes
 - i. At the beginning of the dry/wet season
 - ii. Before the planting season so that farmers are aware of the future predictions

iii. Those that should be invited: farmers, agricultural officers, meteorological officers, students.

6. How about a radio/tv programs?

- Talk shows
- Have tips and description of met terms at the end of TV programs and radio broadcasts
- More persons have greater access to radio than television

7. Anything else you think should be raised?

- A facebook page about weather should be created and should also include a blog.