

No urgency among Caricom leaders on agriculture

- T&T crop production specialist

By **Stabroek staff** | BUSINESS | FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 2012

The sense of urgency being demonstrated by small farmers in the region on the matter of maximizing agricultural production to boost earnings and improve security in the Caribbean is not being matched by their governments, Specialist in Crop Production and Nursery Operations at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education in Trini-dad and Tobago Douglas Gregg said.

Gregg, who is in Guyana as part of a project for shadehouse farmers being run by Partners of the Americas told Stabroek Business in an interview on Tuesday that there appeared to be no long-term plan being developed to significantly boost agricultural production in the region. “If there is a sense of urgency being shown about agriculture in the region it is being demonstrated by the farmers who are obviously concerned about their survival,” he said.

Asked to comment on the practice of importing millions of dollars worth of foods from North America and Europe to meet tourist tastes, Gregg said that the foreign foods phenomenon in the region was also linked to the taste considerations of many Caribbean people.

“While there is an obvious need for change in our approach to agriculture it does not appear that the leadership in the region is prepared to blaze that trail,” he added.

International Director of the Canadian-based Carib-bean Self Reliance Inter-national (Carsi), Franklyn Harvey, said he believed the shadehouse project currently underway in Guyana could serve as a catalyst for changing attitudes to food production.

Analysts of the region’s approach to agricultural production have pointed to what they say has been the lukewarm response by regional governments to the so-called Jagdeo Initiative, a move by former Guyanese president Bharrat Jagdeo to have Caricom place more emphasis on reducing its food import bill by increasing agricultural output. While some countries in the region have announced relatively modest domestic initiatives designed to enhance their agriculture sectors the idea of a region-wide initiative embracing, among other things, the use of lands available in Guyana for the cultivation of mega farms, has not materialized.