



St Vincent, Trinidad sign trade agreement

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GIS: *—The OECS Agri-Export Initiative Aims to Help Lower the Region’s Food Import Bill.*

A new EC\$20,000 a week trade agreement has been signed to export produce from St Vincent and the Grenadines to Trinidad and Tobago as part of the growing OECS Agri-Export Initiative.

St Vincent and the Grenadines’ Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Saboto Caesar has been working with the OECS Commission, counterparts, manufacturers, traders and the Bureau of Standards to help drive down the food import bill in the Eastern Caribbean through the initiative which has opened up new trading routes and promotes food production self-sufficiency.

Since the start of the pioneering initiative, St Vincent and the Grenadines has shipped 3325 fifty-pound boxes of dasheen to the United States. Dominica, on its first shipment, successfully exported a 20-foot container comprising 425 fifty-pound boxes of dasheen. St Vincent and the Grenadines is now greatly increasing production with 2,000 acres of coffee being planted with another 1,000,000 soursop plants, dasheen, squash and other vegetables being cultivated.

Hon Saboto Caesar noted the OECS Agri-Export Strategy Initiative as a central pillar of the agricultural ministry’s 2017 agenda.

“The OECS Commission has done an excellent job in establishing the framework for this important export strategy and I call all stakeholders in the public and private sector in OECS member states to activate their national systems in order to make this dream a further reality.

“St Vincent and the Grenadines as an agricultural platform now comprises 13 cooperatives which are successfully driving local agricultural production. I am pleased to report that the Rassarco and Export Cooperative in the small rural village of Greggs concluded the sale and purchase agreement with Bunny Imports and Exports in Trinidad and Tobago. Under this agreement, Rassarco has been contracted to supply EC\$20,000 worth of agriculture produce weekly to Trinidad and Tobago with the possibility of adding other OECS member states to the export list before the end of 2017,” said Minister Caesar.

President of the Rassarco and Export Cooperative, Alvin Buffer-Collin commended the work of the OECS Commission for building capacity among small exporters to help make the new initiative a reality which also provides employment opportunities to young people.

Agriculture ministers of OECS member states will convene in St Vincent and the Grenadines on July 25, for further talks on strengthening the regional agricultural agenda with food security and the agriculture export initiative being key points of discussion.