

Proceedings of the Caribbean Food Crops Society. 41(2): 392. 2005

INNOVATIONS IN FARMER LEARNING: INTRODUCTION OF FARMER PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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ABSTRACT: Farmers in Trinidad, and indeed the Caribbean as a whole, use or depend on excessive pesticides and other inputs in the production of vegetables and high-value crops. This has serious implications for economic cost and toxic residues on the crop. Based on experiences in Asia and Africa, a pilot project introduced the use of Farmer Participatory (FP) Approaches for Ecological Crop Management (ECM) in six Caribbean countries including Trinidad & Tobago during 2002/03. Funded by the European Union, the project was implemented by CAB International and the Ministry of Agriculture in each of the participating countries. The first step was the training of Master Trainers, undertaken in Trinidad from August to December 2002, during which 11 regional participants underwent 16 weeks of hands-on training in FP approaches and ECM. A similar Training of Trainers (ToT) followed in each of the six countries during 2003, aimed at developing the necessary human resource (frontline extension and research staff) for farmer training. Both courses set up pilot Farmer Field Schools (FFS) in which the participants put their learning into practice. The pilot FFS in Trinidad was conducted in the Caura Valley, an area of intensive vegetable production. The FFS provided the participants (both farmers and extension/research officers) with the skills, knowledge and confidence to make ecologically sound and cost effective decisions on crop health. This paper outlines the achievements of the training and underscores the need for mainstreaming FP approaches into agricultural research and extension in Trinidad & Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean.