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PRESS RELEASE

Minister of Agriculture Appoints Citrus Working Group

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Hon. Jose Mai, Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise, has nominated a high-level Citrus Working Group tasked with preparing concrete recommendations to chart the way forward for the citrus industry in Belize.

The working group is to be chaired by Hugh O'Brien, former chief executive officer in the Ministry of Agriculture, and includes Dr. Eugene Cleland, representative for the Citrus Growers Association (CGA); Ernest Raymond, representative for Belize Citrus Mutual (BCM); Kent Herrera, representative for Citrus Products of Belize Limited (CPBL); Franklyn Magloire, representative, Development Finance Corporation (DFC); Jose Novelo, representative for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise; and a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Trade.

The specific terms of reference of the working group are as follows:

- i. To analyze the present situation with regards to the citrus industry in light of record low production, citrus greening and other diseases, financial constraints and other local and international challenges;
- ii. To present proposals for reform, including legislative and organizational changes, and analyzing all viable options for the citrus industry in general;
- iii. To prepare concrete recommendations to revive and diversify the citrus industry;
- iv. To conduct (i), (ii) and (iii) by reviewing existing studies and information, and consulting with key industry personnel.

Production of citrus in Belize has rapidly declined in recent years, reaching a low of 2.1 million boxes in the 2019-2020 crop while the current crop is not expected to reach even 2 million boxes. This is a dismal production when compared to the 7.8 million boxes produced in 2005, a time when citrus was in its glory days and considered the "King of the South."

The citrus industry is facing numerous challenges. Minister Mai believes that given the right environment and leadership, the industry can be both revived and diversified.

The Citrus Working Group is appointed initially for a period of eight weeks, during which time the group is expected to prepare and submit recommendations to Minister Mai, who will then submit these recommendations to Cabinet via a Cabinet Paper for their consideration.

Ends