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PRESS RELEASE

Ministry of Agriculture Signs MOU Under the Fusarium TR4 Disease Project

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Today, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise, the International Regional Organization for Health in Agriculture (OIRSA), the Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA), the University of Belize, the Banana Growers Association, and the Republic of China (Taiwan) International Cooperation and Development Fund signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to combat the threat posed by Fusarium wilt Tropical Race 4 (Foc TR4) on banana and plantain crops and other diseases in Belize.

The MOU will focus on:

- **Development of Tissue Culture Technology:** The University of Belize's laboratory will receive assistance to develop tissue culture technology for propagating disease-resistant varieties of bananas and plantains. This technology will enable mass production of disease-resistant plantlets, helping to replace infected plants and minimize the spread of Foc TR4.
- **Expansion of Satellite Surveillance Program:** The Banana Growers Association will be supported in enhancing their Satellite Surveillance Program. This program will use satellite imagery to monitor banana plantations, allowing for early detection of any discolorations or changes that may indicate the presence of the disease. Early warning systems will be essential for prompt action to prevent or control the spread of Foc TR4.
- **State-of-the-Art Laboratory Equipment Donation:** BAHA will receive a donation of state-of-the-art laboratory equipment to strengthen their capacity for early disease diagnosis within the Musaceae family,

including bananas and plantains. This will enable field-level sample processing and swift and accurate disease identification, allowing timely intervention.

Apart from addressing Fusarium wilt TR4, an MOU for an addendum to the Belize Livestock Registry – Trazar-Agro was also signed, extending its life and adding more activities. The addendum includes the traceability of sheep and goats, honey, swine, and poultry, in addition to the existing activities. The traceability platform, under the ownership of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Enterprise and supported by OIRSA, facilitates monitoring the national herd, flock, or stock of products, aiding in decision-making, disease control, management, and trade facilitation with other countries.

Additionally, an MOU for non-intrusive quarantine inspection services at the Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport has been signed, with an addendum further strengthening the quarantine inspection process. This involves using X-ray machines at the arrival lounge to detect and prevent the introduction of pests and risky agricultural products like vegetables, meat, and meat products. The introduction of a maintenance fee for this service aims to ensure its financial sustainability and enhance BAHA's capability to detect unwanted goods that could pose risks to the agricultural sector.

The participation of the various organizations indicates a coordinated and well-supported effort to protect Belize's agricultural sector from potential disease incursions.

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For more information, please contact:
Luis Pook
Director of Communications
Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise
luis.pook@agriculture.gov.bz
822-2243