



PR#210-24

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Minister of Agriculture Discusses Screwworm, Cattle Trade, and Market Access for Green Coconuts with Mexico's New Agriculture Minister**

*Belmopan, December 9, 2024.*

Hon. Jose Abelardo Mai, Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise, met with Dr. Julio Berdegué Sacristán, Mexico's newly appointed Secretary (Minister) of Agriculture, to discuss agriculture and trade issues of mutual interest on December 8, in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico.

During the meeting, Minister Mai emphasized to Dr. Berdegué the importance of facilitating the movement of agricultural products from Belize to Mexico. Currently, Belize exports only \$8 - \$10 million worth of goods to Mexico, while importing over \$300 million worth. Mexico agreed to respond to Belize's request to export green coconuts with husks to Mexico and to expedite the risk assessment process. Belize indicated that it expects to export as many as five million green coconuts annually, primarily to Quintana Roo, Mexico, in the coming years.

Minister Mai informed Dr. Berdegué that, to date, Belize has been successful in keeping the New World Screwworm out of the country. In addition to a highly efficient traceability system for cattle, which uses tags and movement permits, Belize has implemented various measures as part of the national action plan. These include intense education and public awareness, on-farm surveillance, inspection certificates, and 24-hour quarantine at informal border points. Mexico commended Belize for its success and agreed to continue the close cooperation between the two countries to control the spread of the New World Screwworm.

The highlight of the meeting was Dr. Berdegué's issuance of a clear statement on Mexico's interest in purchasing cattle from Belize. Specifically, Dr. Berdegué stated, "Mexico is interested in importing from Belize every single head of cattle that is legally exported from Belize to Mexico and that complies with the technical protocols to ensure the sanitization standards. Everything that you can send us, we will receive it very gladly." In addition, Dr. Berdegué noted Mexico's interest in reducing the cost and technical barriers to the formal cattle trade to increase imports from Belize.

Accompanying Minister Mai to Mexico City were Hugh O'Brien, his Chief Advisor; Jaime Briceño, Belize's Trade Ambassador to Mexico; and Abram Garcia from the coconut private sector in Belize.

The Belizean delegation departed Belize on Sunday, December 8, and will return on Tuesday, December 10, 2024.

## **Ends**

For more information, please contact:

Luis Pook

822-2241