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PRESS RELEASE

Belize Takes Over CIRSA Presidency at Regional Agricultural Meeting

Belmopan. April 3, 2025.

The 72nd Ordinary Meeting of the Regional International Agricultural Health Committee (CIRSA) began today at the Sunset Caribe Conference Hall in San Pedro, Belize. This two-day event, from April 3-4, brings together Agriculture Ministers and Secretaries from across the region to discuss key issues related to agricultural health and food security.

The meeting opened with welcoming remarks from Francisco Javier Calderón Elizalde, General Director of Administration and Information Technology of Servicio Nacional de Sanidad, Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria (SENASICA), followed by the official transfer of the CIRSA presidency to Belize. Hon. José Abelardo Mai, Minister of Agriculture, Food Security & Enterprise, and the newly appointed CIRSA President, emphasized the country's commitment to working closely with regional partners to improve agricultural health and food security. An award was presented to recognize the outgoing president's leadership and to show appreciation for their contributions.

Hon. Mai highlighted the importance of regional collaboration in addressing agricultural challenges in his opening remarks, stating, "Teamwork is the key to the success of any development effort, and the agricultural sector is no exception. Through regional cooperation and the integration of our knowledge and experiences, we can find innovative and effective solutions to improve productivity, sustainability, and the resilience of our agricultural economies."

Hon. Mai also underscored the ongoing efforts to combat the Screwworm Infestation in Livestock, describing it as one of the most destructive pests affecting the region's livestock industry. He acknowledged the initiatives that have assisted in mitigating its impact, which involved collaborative efforts between regional countries and international organizations, including OIRSA, USDA, and IICA.

Additionally, Hon. Mai highlighted Belize's pioneering agricultural research efforts, particularly in the banana industry. With the support of OIRSA and Taiwan ICDF, Belize has made significant progress in agricultural research, such as evaluating the Formosana banana variety, which is resistant to Fusarium Tropical Race 4. He also emphasized Belize's commitment to sustainable pest control through biological methods. The Belmopan insectary produced 367,235 specimens of *Anagyrus kamali* to combat the

pink mealybug and other beneficial insects that reduce dependence on chemical pesticides and promote biodiversity.

The first day of the meeting featured several key presentations and discussions, including the 2024 CIRSA Presidency Report, a report from the OIRSA Executive Directorate, and the 2024 Administrative and Financial Report of OIRSA. Additionally, a presentation was given on the Regional Strategy for Screwworm Infestation in Livestock.

Later in the day, discussions focused on the external audit report for OIRSA's headquarters, national representations, and employee protection system for 2023, along with audits of regional projects and local agreements. The selection process for external audit firms for 2024 and the selection of a company to implement a new Administrative-Financial Management System (ERP) for OIRSA were also addressed. The meeting will also include the selection of the new Director of Administration and Finance for OIRSA.

The second day of the meeting will conclude with the reading and signing of the official meeting minutes, finalizing the discussions and decisions made during this important regional gathering.

Ends

For more information, please contact:

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