

PRESS RELEASE

PR#003-2024



Towards Sustainable Development of Fisheries for the People of the Caribbean!

Field trials on the horizon for Sargassum-derived fertilizer



The Sargassum-derived plant growth enhancer will be tested on crops such as tomatoes, watermelons, and sweet potatoes. (Photos: M. Haughton, CRFM)

Belize City, Friday, 12 April 2024 (CRFM)—A multi-country mission to monitor progress with the regional [Sargassum Products for Climate Resilience Project](#), funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, has recently concluded. Representatives from the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and the New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research Limited (PFR) met with key partners in Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica in February and March 2024, to review progress and plan future activities. Based on the successful outcome of recent scientific studies and greenhouse trials for a Sargassum-derived liquid fertilizer, the partners will commence field trials within the next few weeks. These efforts, which will be advanced in collaboration with the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) and regional private sector partners, signal promising progress towards valorization of Sargassum and strengthening the Caribbean’s food security and climate resilience.

“Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of fertilizers has skyrocketed, and farmers across the region need more affordable, high-quality fertilizers to improve their yields, especially in the stressful environment brought about by warmer temperatures and drought conditions. Anything that we can do to improve the supply and reduce costs and dependence on imports will be impactful,” Milton Haughton, Executive Director, CRFM Secretariat, stated.

“The project is working with multiple reputable research organizations to ensure a strong evidenced-based approach to the product development process. We understand the complex nature of the Sargassum issue and concerns in the agricultural sector and are prioritizing human, environmental and plant health in our research and development,” Sophie Jones-Williams, PFR’s Program Manager - International Development, said.

“We are excited about the positive results achieved thus far towards developing a safe and effective liquid fertilizer for the agriculture sector, and the potential for scaling out for wider impact across the Caribbean. Efforts

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to optimize the fertilizer production process, based on the greenhouse trials, are underway. The CRFM and PFR are working in collaboration with researchers at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus in Barbados, as well as CARDI and the private sector, to ensure that the project taps into the best expertise available in the region. Sargassum is a versatile, natural, renewable marine living resource that, if harvested and used safely and sustainably, could birth new economic opportunities for fishers and coastal communities, as well as entrepreneurs across the region, contributing to the realization of the vision of blue economic growth,” Haughton added.

The project's two main guiding principles are the circular economy approach, which ensures total utilization of the Sargassum, including conversion of the residue or waste into other products; and the precautionary principle, which ensures that adequate caution is taken when there is uncertainty and a risk of harm.

This is in keeping with the overall aim of the Sargassum Products for Climate Resilience Project, to mitigate the environmental and economic impacts of Sargassum influxes in affected Caribbean countries through the creation of inclusive value chains for Sargassum seaweed. Since the inception of the project in 2020, the CRFM and PFR have been working diligently to develop safe harvesting and handling techniques. They have been rigorously testing to ensure safety from hazardous heavy metals throughout the process of product development, all along the value chain—from harvesting through to pilot scale production, as well as greenhouse trials that utilized the prototype product to grow vegetables. This effort builds upon the CRFM’s prior work, since 2015, to address the persistent problem of recurring Sargassum inundations which have been plaguing the region for the past 13 years.

The region has been seeing high levels of Sargassum inundations almost every year since 2011, and this regional project focuses on developing processes by which the Sargassum can be transformed from a bane to blessing for the Caribbean economy, using science, technology, and evidence-based decision-making to produce safe and viable commercial products. Although the Caribbean Sea continued to be largely free of Sargassum since the beginning of 2024, the eastern Caribbean Sea is starting to receive large quantities of Sargassum from the central Atlantic, and this trend is likely to continue with increasing inundation of the coastal waters and beaches of several CRFM countries during the coming months.

The final phase of the PFR-CRFM Sargassum Products for Climate Resilience Project will focus on outreach and supply chain development, which would entail the dissemination of a workable model to Caribbean industry stakeholders.

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ABOUT THE CRFM:

The [Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism](#) (CRFM) was officially inaugurated on 27 March 2003 in Belize City, Belize, where it is headquartered, following the signing of the Agreement Establishing the CRFM on 4 February 2002. It is an inter-governmental organization whose mission is to promote and facilitate the responsible utilization of the region's fisheries and other aquatic resources for the economic and social benefits of the current and future population of the region.

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