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An assessment of the implementation and outcomes of recent farmer field schools to improve vegetable production in Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract

Following major initiatives by the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau International and Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Agriculture Lands and Marine Resources, 14 Farmer Field Schools (FFS) were conducted from August 2003 to January 2006 in seven extension districts in Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies. This paper assesses these schools according to the six key elements highlighted by Simpson and Owens (2002) regarding the FFS approach in Africa. The researcher attended school field days and interviewed 12 master trainers. The researcher surveyed a population of 24 participants and a sample of 16 non-participants. The researcher interviewed six volunteer participants and observed the efforts of the central planning process over the course of a year. The school has relevance and responds to local concerns (Key 1). The school used participatory mechanisms which generated new knowledge regarding location-specific crop husbandry practices (Key 2). Information flows and farmer-to-farmer participation were usefully productive (Key 3). There is a new initiative to build useful organizational relationships (Key 4). Relationships between scientists, extension workers, and farmers improved (Key 5). The FFS can be integrated into existing programs but would need more administrative support and funding (Key 6). In one community, the FFS participants were different from a sample of non-participants in several ways. There were similarities between the findings of this assessment and those of Simpson and Owens (2002). Recommendations included the continued use of the FFS among small producers in Trinidad and Tobago, and further assessment of quantitative benefits, including the rates of adoption and diffusion and cost effectiveness.

Keywords: Farmer Field School, Trinidad & Tobago, Program Effectiveness, Systems & Models