



## DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

### PRESS RELEASE

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#### EU provides funding to SIRDI for new Headquarters

The Sugar Industry Research and Development Institute (SIRDI) will in a few months have a new state of the art facility as its headquarters. The construction of the new building has been made possible through grant funding from the European Union and ground for the site was officially broken today at a ceremony in Buena Vista Village in Corozal District.

The building which will serve as the administrative and research headquarters for SIRDI will complement several other initiatives under the three year project which is being implemented with the support of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). The project titled: "**The Institutional Strengthening of Sugar Industry Research Development Institute**" has received funding of BZ\$6 million to facilitate improvements in the physical infrastructure, technology and human resource capabilities of SIRDI and will directly benefit hundreds of farmers in the Orange Walk and Corozal Districts.

The project which was initiated in May 2012 has already procured key equipment and machinery which will help to improve nurseries, land preparation and planting techniques. Among the equipment is a 120 HP New Holland Tractor which includes boom sprayer, sub-soiler and harrow. SIRDI has through the project also acquired a weather station for the gathering of data for planning field activities; desktop and laptop computers and printers for office use; cameras and GPS units for field use as well as equipment for hosting and delivery of farmer field school sessions. Four pick-up trucks have also been purchased to facilitate the mobility of technical staff.

All this will be supported with the expertise from a number of international consultants with highly specialized skills to provide technical support for the research and extension programs at SIRDI and training to technical staff as part of the commitment for capacity building. Already, six (6) SIRDI technical staff have benefitted from a study tour to sugar cane production and processing facilities in Nicaragua and Colombia.

The project will also allow farmers to access low interest loans at the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) facilities in Corozal and Orange Walk Districts at a competitive interest rate of eight percent.

Head of the European Union to Belize, Ambassador Paola Amadei addressing farmers and other stakeholders gathered for the ceremony pointed out that "***Although there no longer exists any preferential treatment for sugar exported from Belize to the EU, the EU is cognizant of the fact that more needed to be done to ensure the quality of output of the industry in order to improve the competitiveness of your product as well as ensure value and by extension boost the economic stability of the sector and the wider Belizean economy .***"

She encouraged farmers to make good use of the research and new technology that will be offered through the new facility.

Construction of the new building is scheduled for completion in April 2014.