



## PRESS RELEASE

### **EU Assists the Caribbean to Tackle Issues of Antimicrobial Resistance and Food Safety**

**January 20, 2015:** Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has been universally accepted as a growing threat to public health. Indeed, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), this increasing resistance has threatened our ability to treat some very common infections such as tuberculosis and pneumonia and is responsible for increased death and disability around the world. AMR is also contributing to rising healthcare costs from longer hospital stays, threatening health security, and damaging trade and economic stability. Further, these resistant microorganisms are often transmitted globally through humans (e.g. staph infections) and through the food supply (e.g. e-coli and salmonella).

While individuals may be familiar with the issue of antibiotic resistance – which refers specifically to the resistance to antibiotics that occurs in common bacteria that cause infections, AMR is broader and also encompasses resistance to drugs to treat infections caused by other microbes as well, such as parasites, viruses and fungi. While AMR does not elicit worldwide fear the way the deadly Ebola virus can, it is an insidious problem which according to WHO is: *"...putting at risk the ability to treat common infections in the community and hospitals. Without urgent, coordinated action, the world is heading towards a post-antibiotic era, in which common infections and minor injuries, which have been treatable for decades, can once again kill."*

It is against this background, with EU support, that the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO), the Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) collaborated on events to increase understanding and surveillance of AMR and as well to improve its containment. Support for these events was provided by the 10<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund, Sanitary and Phytosanitary project for the Caribbean Forum of ACP States.

The first event was a three-day training workshop entitled: *Strengthening Integrated Surveillance of Foodborne Diseases and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in the Caribbean*. The workshop attracted laboratory personnel and epidemiologists from Caribbean countries who play an important role in the production and export of livestock and food, as well as technical officers from the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA), and the University of the West Indies.

To strengthen regional surveillance and containment and increase cooperation and information sharing, participants were trained in integrated surveillance for antibiotic resistance between Ministries of Health and Agriculture. Participants also received practical laboratory training on the diagnosis of antibacterial resistance. They were also encouraged to develop national integrated surveillance systems for antibiotic resistance to allow them to identify and trace outbreaks back to the source, generate incidence and prevalence information, and to design effective public health actions.

A national one-day sensitization seminar was also held for stakeholders, including the Ministries of Health and Food Production, veterinary officers across Trinidad and Tobago and private sector stakeholders such as livestock and agriculture associations. The session was designed to improve these stakeholders' understanding of AMR as well their understanding of ways to detect and assist in containing foodborne illnesses.

Speaking on behalf of the EU, Kathrin Renner underscored the EU's commitment to supporting agricultural development in the Caribbean, but noted the challenge: "What good is a revitalized agricultural sector if we cannot trust the food we eat, or if we can no longer protect ourselves from common foodborne illnesses? So our goal is not only to increase the amount of food we produce in the Caribbean, but also to ensure the safety of our food supply."

Ms. Renner emphasized that strengthening surveillance of foodborne diseases and AMR in the Caribbean would not only safeguard the region's food supply but also increase the region's potential for trade with EU markets, which she stated would be most welcome: "The EU takes pride in its open trade policy and is continually seeking ways to open up markets to key trading partners, which is what the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement signed in 2008 aims to achieve."

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