



# Spore

Early warning systems <i>Forewarned is forearmed</i>	1
Leafy vegetables <i>A treasure to be plucked</i>	3
Geographical indications <i>Helping to protect the future for farmers</i>	4
IN BRIEF	6
LINKS	10
PUBLICATIONS	11
BETWEEN US	14
VIEWPOINT <i>Moving on CTA: passes the torch</i>	16

Website: [spore.cta.int](http://spore.cta.int)



### In this issue

*Renewed interest is being shown in some of the many leafy plants that are eaten*

*as vegetables in a number of ACP countries... The trend is a striking example of a return to traditional values: to agricultural or food products developed over long periods of time in clearly defined regions. Some of these have become so well known and sought after that it has become necessary to protect them with geographical indications, so that local producers do not lose out. The idea of fending off the risk of plunder is one that is beginning to take hold in countries of the South. Early warning systems, which also attempt to reduce risks, have been in place for a longer time. But when it comes to predicting natural disasters, and limiting the consequences, the most reliable information often comes from the ground and the grass roots.*



Photo: G. Diarc © FAO/2477

## Early warning systems

# Forewarned is forearmed

**In agriculture, as in life, prevention is better than cure. Studies show that for every dollar spent on disaster preparedness, between US\$100 and US\$1000 are needed after the event. ACP nations are learning to anticipate risk, rather than sit back and wait for the worst to happen.**

In the Kouthiaba region of Senegal, herders are using global positioning systems linked to satellites to track the movements of livestock. Some have cell phones to alert them to problems of pasture quality or over-crowding. They may not know it, but these cyber shepherds are part of a growing trend in agriculture. With the advent of increasingly sophisticated information technology, more and more emphasis is being placed on the idea that prevention is better than cure. As the December 2004 tsunami disaster illustrated so tragically, early warning systems can save both lives and money. It is estimated that thousands of those killed would have survived if there had been an early warning system in the Indian Ocean, as there is in the Pacific.

For agriculture, a bewildering array of networks exists, aimed at heading off crises before they hit. The Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) monitors food production, stocks, trade and export prices around the globe, and looks at other tell-tale signs of problems on the horizon, such as unusual sales of livestock or consumption of wild foods. Linked to this service, the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases issues alerts of imminent livestock epidemics. Another arm of the EMPRES network, much in the news in recent months is the Desert Locust Information Service, which offers information about

## More visible European research

■ The European Consortium for Agricultural Research in the Tropics (ECART), founded 12 years ago, has become the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG). Bringing together six research institutes (British, Dutch, French, Italian and Portuguese) and 4000 experts throughout the world, ECART aims to strengthen its economic visibility in order to provide better coverage of all areas of agricultural research and development and offer countries in the South more sources of expertise and research markets.

## Dispute over decaf coffee beans

■ The discovery of naturally decaffeinated coffee plants has sparked a dispute over who owns them. Although the plants were discovered in Brazil, they had been grown from seeds collected in Ethiopia during UN-sponsored research. Ethiopian officials are demanding an explanation, though Brazilian scientists claim they had been given permission to collect the seeds. The row highlights the difficulties in establishing ownership of genetic resources. These coffee beans were collected before the existence of international regulations covering the international movement of biological materials with commercial potential. The two parties now hope to find a solution where both would benefit from the find. Resolving the wrangle could help solve the problem of compensating developing nations for native plants discovered by researchers from rich countries.

Source: SciDev

## A new cash crop for Tonga

■ Tonga is turning to the oyster mushroom as a new cash crop, and already the results appear to be promising. The first oyster mushroom plants were introduced to Tonga from China in May 2004, and planted in the government's experimental farm in Vaini. Two Chinese farmers travelled to Tonga to teach local farmers how to plant and care for them. The tropical conditions on the island have proved ideal, and the first harvests have exceeded expectations. While in China, it takes 11 days from planting to harvesting, in Tonga the mushrooms are ready for picking after just 4 to 5 days. Agriculture officials on the island say the fragrant fungus has exciting potential as an export crop for small-scale farmers in Tonga.

## Serving up spirulina

■ An edible blue-green micro-algae called spirulina grows naturally in the waters of Lake Chad in Africa. People in the Kanem region of Chad eat it daily after flattening it into biscuits and drying it in the sun. Easily cultivated, spirulina is exceptionally rich in nutrients. The dried algae is



Photos: © abc Burkina



made up of 55 to 70% protein — about twice as much as soy bean and three times more than beef — and contains eight amino acids that the human body cannot make by itself. Spirulina also contains magnesium, phosphorous and calcium. Dietary programmes designed for children suffering from malnutrition have produced beneficial results after a treatment of 3 g of spirulina per day for 1.5 months.

Spirulina was the subject of a number of studies during the 1970s, but was subsequently relegated to niche markets in industrialised countries. It has now returned to the international spotlight, with a good deal of research under way into its immunological properties —

*Easy to cultivate, spirulina has many beneficial properties*

including potential benefits against AIDS and cancer. An international symposium on spirulina in May 2004 brought together scientists,

NGOs, humanitarian associations and producers. There has been much interest in the algae as a weapon against malnutrition and in simple technologies that would allow it to be produced locally in Africa. Over the past 15 years, Antenna Technologies, an international NGO network which was present at the symposium, has promoted the cultivation of spirulina (*Spirulina maxima*) in large 20 cm deep earthenware tanks. These are enriched with natural animal fertiliser and stirred manually every 2 hours.

Antenna Technologies  
29, rue de Neuchâtel  
1201 Genève  
Switzerland  
Fax: +41 22 731 97 86  
E-mail:  
antenna.geneve@worldcom.ch  
Website: www.antenna.ch/malnutrition/startsipi.htm

## Better networking for Caribbean farmers and fishers

■ A new force for farmers' organisations in the Caribbean has been launched with the birth of the Caribbean Farmers' Association and NGO Network (CaFANN). The creation of the network is the result of an initiative that began in 2002, at a workshop sponsored by CTA and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI). CaFANN's launch was finalised at another workshop in October 2004, when delegates from 14 Caribbean countries representing 20 farmers associations and rural development organisations met in Antigua and Barbuda to formulate strategies for networking and collaboration in the region.

Producers' groups have made it clear that they want to see a more regional focus for their organisations, a new approach in the Caribbean's agriculture sector and one which marks a new era of civil society participation at a regional level. Interestingly, it was

the farmers themselves who took the initiative on this occasion — in the past, most of the impetus has come from research organisations. As well as pushing for appropriate policies at national and regional level, CaFANN will be working on capacity building, training and improving production, distribution, marketing and trade for producers.

As if on cue, Caribbean fisherfolk were voicing a similar request for more regional representation at a workshop of Caribbean regional fisherfolk organisations, held in Belize in October 2004. The event was organised to generate dialogue and an exchange of ideas among regional fisherfolk and strengthen future networking among national fisherfolk organisations in the region. The workshop, which was attended by fishers from Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago, was funded by CTA

and executed by the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), together with the Fisheries Department, Ministry of Fisheries, Cooperatives, Commerce and Industry, Belize.

It is hoped that the event will be the first of a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening regional fisherfolk organisations, as well as developing the links between funding agencies like CTA and regional and national executing and implementing organisations to improve the management of fisheries in the region.



Photos: © IPWV/CRSP