

(Castries, July 12, 2012,) The Prime Ministers and Ministers for Agriculture of the OECS shareholder Governments of WINFRESH met with the Board and Management of the company, at the Landings, Gros Islet, Saint Lucia on July 7, 2012.

The meeting was organised to examine the current situation with WINFRESH and the involvement of the company in the diversification of the agricultural sector and agricultural processing and marketing.

The meeting discussed, among other things, agriculture in the Member States, highlighting the sustainability of the banana industry, acceleration of the agricultural diversification, agro-processing and marketing and distribution of agricultural products.

The shareholder Governments underscored the importance of WINFRESH's direct role in supporting agriculture diversification and agro-processing initiatives in shareholding countries, and as far as practicable, in other OECS Member States. They agreed that WINFRESH's focus would be broadened away from commodity trading, to one that was more proactive in farm level production support as well as agro-products and markets development and expansion

WINFRESH emphasized that there was still a strong market for Windward Islands bananas but that the bananas had to meet the quality and volume requirements consistently.

The company expressed concerns that unless the problems that continue to prevent the banana industry from meeting those requirements were addressed urgently, the industry ran the risk of permanent displacement from the market.

The fundamental problems were – low productivity, poor and inconsistent quality, and erratic volumes, as well as the impact of diseases such as the Black Sigatoka infestation that had been experienced. All of these factors needed to be addressed vigorously. It was agreed that WINFRESH had a very vital part to play in this process.

In light of the direction now pointed for WINFRESH, it was agreed that the company would, in the next six weeks, submit to the governments its detailed business plans for its future development and operations, and that of its country based subsidiaries that are involved in agro-processing, outlining areas where government support might be needed either directly or in the mobilisation of resources from development partners and financial institutions.

The meeting agreed that the Ministries of Agriculture and WINFRESH would establish a framework that will allow them to work closely together to plan and implement programmes covering all aspects of agricultural development in the sub-region. **End**