**Press Release - 10th Annual Caribbean Plant Health Directors Forum**

Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, July 11, 2017 – Plant Health Directors from more than 20 countries and territories along with several partner organizations are gathered at the Melia Caribe Tropical Hotel in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic for the 10th annual Caribbean Plant Health Directors (CPHD) Forum meeting. During the July 11 to 13 meeting, the plant health officials will have intense discussions aimed at bolstering the ability of member countries to identify, exclude, and respond to pests and diseases that threaten regional agriculture and natural resources and to resolve issues that might impede the trade of Caribbean agricultural products regionally and internationally.

The Caribbean is known for its vital and diverse agriculture and natural resources and protecting them from potentially devastating invasive pests and diseases is critical to the health and prosperity of the region.

An official opening ceremony was held to signal the start of the meeting at which the feature address was delivered by Mr. Leandro Mercedes, Vice Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture of the Dominican Republic (DR). Mr. Mercedes lauded the efforts of the CPHD Forum and reiterated the importance of transparency in plant health issues as well as the sharing of information at forums such as these. He also noted that the DR is leading by example in the region by implementing international standards of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) to guide plant health activities and encouraged other countries to do likewise. He was also happy to declare that the DR was successful in eradicating the Mediterranean fruit fly.

The CPHD Forum during its opening session elected two new executive members in the persons of Mr. Francisco Gutierrez of Belize as Co-Chair and Miss. Wilhelmina Kissoonsingh of the Turks and Caicos Islands as Technical Secretary. They replaced Mr. Ryan Anslem of Dominica and Mr. Eric Evelyn of Nevis who did not stand for re-election. Gutierrez and Kissoonsingh will serve a two year term alongside Forum Chair Mr. Brian Crichlow of the Cayman Islands.

The partner organizations that are collaborating to host the meeting include the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services International Services (USDA APHIS IS) Greater Caribbean Safeguarding Initiative (GCSI), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture (IICA), the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), The University of the West Indies (UWI) and the Center for Agriculture Biosciences International (CABI).

CPHD Forum continue to strive to unify plant health safeguarding strategies in the region through the exchange of technical information, the transfer of technologies and methods, and the harmonization of plant protection and agricultural trade management approaches. The efforts of this forum will strengthen plant protection and have a direct impact on the region’s food security and economic prosperity for the Greater Caribbean Region. The CPHD Forum is the advisory body to COTED Agriculture on plant health issues.