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## PRESS RELEASE

### **MED Invests in Expansion of a Biological Control Program for Farmers in Belize**

*Belmopan, April 30, 2024.*

On April 26, the Ministry of Economic Development (MED), through its Resilient Rural Belize (RRB) Program, signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise (MAFSE) and the International Regional Organization for Health in Agriculture (OIRSA) to expand the Bio Factory for the production of natural enemies for pest control in Belize's agricultural sector.

OIRSA and RRB recognize the need to adopt new agricultural technologies for a more effective approach. Consequently, various initiatives have been undertaken with positive outcomes for small farmers in the agriculture sector, such as this program, which will expand to new farmers and farmer groups in Belize.

As Belize's climate continues to warm, the frequency and severity of its effects grow, significantly impacting farmers and farm communities. This includes the increase and re-emergence of pests and disease outbreaks, threatening the country's agriculture systems and causing scarcity in food supply. The expansion of the biological control program brings hope. It will assist farmers in mitigating the effects of climate damage and making their operations more resilient and sustainable in the long term while promoting the sustainable use of pesticides in the fields.

The expansion program also aims to increase the production of beneficial insects in the bio factory, such as the *Chrysoperla Carnea* and the Parasitoid *Trichogramma Pretiosum*, for farmers to utilize them in the field for pest control, and for the development of pilot projects with farmer groups from various areas of the country to reduce the use of restricted insecticides in fields. These beneficial insects have been proven to effectively control whiteflies, spider mites, scale insects, leaf hoppers, thrips, aphids, mealybugs, borer pests and other soft-bodied insects.

RRB and OIRSA will work hand in hand with cooperatives and farmer groups from the Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize and Cayo districts to promote this initiative. They will also partner with the Pesticides Control Board, the Cooperatives Department and MAFSE to facilitate educational workshops and pilot projects, demonstrating the effectiveness of the approach to be taken and encouraging farmers to use it as an alternative to their current farming practices.

Strengthening collaboration to expand this program to all cooperatives working with RRB will enable them to make good use of this innovative technology and approach, thus enhancing the agricultural sector in a safe and intelligent manner. The Ministry of Economic Development, through the RRB program, will invest approximately BZ\$250,000 in this endeavour.

Present at the signing were Hon. Luis Balona, Minister of State for the Ministry of Agriculture Food Security and Enterprise; Dr. Osmond Martinez, Chief Executive Officer for the Ministry of Economic Development; Mr. Raul Rodas Suazo, Executive Director, International Regional Organization for Health in Agriculture; Mr. Fermin Blanco, Country Representative, OIRSA; and Dr. Geraldo Flowers, Programme Manager, RRB.

## **Ends**

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