



PR#342-22

PRESS RELEASE

Students Benefit from Healthy School Meals in Belize

Belmopan, November 22, 2022.

Through the collaboration of the Governments of Belize and Mexico and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 488 primary school students are receiving a free, healthy meal daily as school feeding programs get underway in Belize.

Over the last year, the 'Resilient School Feeding' sub-project of the Mexico-CARICOM-FAO initiative "Cooperation for Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience in the Caribbean," or Resilient Caribbean Initiative in short, has been partnering with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology to develop a sustainable and wholesome school feeding program through infrastructure upgrades, capacity building and student nutrition assessments. As a part of the initiative, six schools in Belize received infrastructure upgrades to existing kitchens or conversion of spaces into kitchens and outfitting with new appliances such as refrigerators, freezers, stoves, and utensils like pans, pots, serving tools and baking materials. In addition, the Ministry of Education is providing ongoing funding for the purchasing of the provisions for the feeding program. Schools benefiting from these upgrades include Biscayne Government School, Chan Chen Government School, Guinea Grass RC, Lucky Strike Government School, Santa Martha Government School and San Joaquin RC.

Further support has also been provided to school cooks through the facilitation of a series of training sessions on food safety and the preparation of healthy meals that are also familiar to the students in each community.

Seleni Grajales, Principal of Santa Martha Government School, welcomed the initiative, stating that *"Proper nutrition is important for a child's growth and essential to learning at school. The school feeding program offers our children a proper diet, which promotes their physical and intellectual development. The program also assists parents and the community by ensuring that the children have a healthy development."*

Future school feeding activities will be informed by the results of a nutrition assessment, which was conducted through the project in October 2022, across the six beneficiary schools. The nutrition status and eating habits of students were reviewed including aspects like body mass index.

Cathleen Juan, National Project Coordinator, explained *"This assessment collected data about students' weight and height; which can be used to determine the percentages of underweight, normal weight, overweight, and obese children. Also, information was gathered from students about what types of food they eat in a day, both in school and at home. This data will be used to make recommendations for how school meals can be best tailored*

to meet the nutritional needs of primary school children, and to support healthy school environment policies."

The Resilient Caribbean Initiative, funded by the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID) and the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE), is being implemented by FAO in 14 CARICOM countries, with school feeding being a focus for The Bahamas, Belize, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname. The sub-project aims to strengthen the capacities of institutions and stakeholders to link the purchase of products from small farmers while promoting a national framework for school feeding that facilitates access to healthy diets produced locally.

The project follows the sustainable school feeding approach of the FAO-Brazil Technical Cooperation and other FAO frameworks such as the Home-Grown School Feeding Framework. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology is in the process of developing a national healthy start feeding policy which will encompass the experience of this sub-project, to ensure that all students can benefit from a healthy meal daily.

Ends

For more information, please contact:

Firhaana Bulbulia

Communications Consultant

Project: GCP/SLC/MEX/018 CARICOM-FAO-Mexico Initiative "Cooperation for Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience in the Caribbean"

firhaana.bulbulia@fao.org

Cathleen Juan

National Project Coordinator, Belize

Cathleen.juan@fao.org