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PRESS RELEASE

A United Front Against Sugarcane Wilt: MET and Taiwan Technical Mission Drive Field Assessments in the North

Belmopan, November 25, 2025.

Dr. Hon. Osmond Martinez, Minister of State in the Ministry of Economic Transformation, and CEO Carlos Pol, along with the Sugar Industry Research and Development Institute (SIRDI), headed by Mr. Marcos Osorio, hosted a two-day high-level mission to the northern sugar belt on November 19–20. This mission aimed at bringing together the Taiwan Technical Mission, led by Chief Mr. Hsien-Tsang Su (Andrew Su), IICA Belize, and the University of Belize to assess the growing challenge of sugarcane wilt (*Fusarium* spp.) across farms in Orange Walk and Corozal.

The delegation met directly with farmers, visited affected fields, and reviewed cultivation practices, equipment use, and overall field conditions. Representatives from SIRDI, the Sugar Industry Control Board, IICA, the University of Belize, and the Taiwan Technical Mission participated in the assessments.

The assessment identified four major contributing factors to widespread wilt:

- Climate impacts such as drought, heat stress, and excess rainfall
- Low soil nutrients and organic matter
- Insufficient field management
- Unclean planting material and absence of tissue culture propagation

The Taiwanese experts recommended rapid adoption of tissue culture and seed cane disinfection, improved soil and root protection, and increased use of biological controls. They also introduced a Satellite Image Monitoring and

Warning System for Fusarium Wilt, demonstrating how satellite data can help detect outbreaks early and guide rapid interventions.

The University of Belize highlighted ongoing research on beneficial soil microbes with the potential to suppress Fusarium wilt, supporting a more sustainable, science-based approach to disease management.

The mission reaffirms the shared commitment of all partners to fortify Belize's sugar industry by uniting local knowledge with international scientific expertise. Together, these efforts aim to strengthen field resilience, safeguard farmer livelihoods, and advance a more sustainable and productive future for the northern sugar belt.

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