

CAHFSA coordinates the CARICOM Committee of Chief Veterinary Officers Meeting and VIIth CaribVET Steering Committee Meeting in St. Eustatius to Strengthen Regional Resilience through Partnership and Coordination

St. Eustatius, 23 & 24 March 2026

The Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) coordinated the 7th CaribVET General Assembly and the 26th Meeting of the CARICOM Committee of Chief Veterinary Officers (CCCVO), from Monday 23 March 2026 to Friday 27 March 2026, at the Golden Rock Dive and Nature Resort.

Hosted by St. Eustatius and jointly organized by CaribVET and CAHFSA, the week-long event brings together regional and international stakeholders under this year's theme: ***“Regional Resilience through Partnership, Preparedness and Coordination.”***

As part of its ongoing commitment to strengthening animal health systems and regional collaboration, CAHFSA is engaging in key discussions and activities throughout the week.

Opening Ceremony Highlights

The opening ceremony featured remarks from key regional leaders, each reinforcing the importance of unity and coordinated action in addressing Animal Health and Public health challenges.

Welcome remarks were delivered by Dr. Sharon Veira (President of CaribVET and CVO of St. Eustatius), who emphasized the importance of regional solidarity. The ceremony also included a symbolic presentation of a commemorative plaque from St. Eustatius to the Chief Veterinary Officers of the Caribbean.

Remarks were also delivered by:

- Dr. Hendrik Jan, Acting Chief Veterinary Officer of the Netherlands
- Dr. Gavin Peters, CEO of the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA)
- Mr. Shaun Baugh, Programme Manager Agriculture and Agro-Industrial development CARICOM Secretariat Headquarters; Georgetown-Guyana
- Commissioner Nikima Hickinson, Acting Island Secretary of St. Eustatius

Speakers consistently highlighted the importance of partnership, preparedness, and coordination. In his remarks, Dr. Gavin Peters emphasized collaboration as a cornerstone

of resilience, concluding: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Official Opening

The feature address was delivered by Commissioner Reuben Merkman, St. Eustatius’s Commissioner for Agriculture and Health, who highlighted the importance of sustained investment in animal health systems and regional cooperation.

The event was then officially declared open by the Honourable Lady Alida Francis, Governor of St. Eustatius.

A Week of Strategic Engagement and Capacity Building

The week’s programme commenced with the VIIth CaribVET General Assembly, held on 23-24 March 2026, where 105 delegates engaged in strategic discussions, knowledge exchange, and planning to enhance regional coordination with participation from several institutions and universities to include the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), National Center for Animal and Plant Health (CENSA), World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Georges University (SGU), University of Minnesota (UMN) and University of Florida (UFL).

Round Table Discussion

During the VIIth CaribVET Meeting, CAHFSA led a round table discussion under the theme “From dialogue to action: What strategies can regional institutions use to catalyse collaboration for joint projects; how can partnerships be effectively translated into action?”

The session was moderated by Dr. Nneka Hull James, Animal Health Specialist at CAHFSA, and brought together representatives from regional institutions, universities, and CARICOM Member States. Discussions focused on identifying key challenges that affecting effective regional collaboration, while also highlighting practical approaches to strengthen coordination and implementation of joint initiatives.

Participants emphasized the need for improved coordination among agencies and more proactive communication from Member States regarding their technical assistance needs. Strengthening these areas would enhance synergy across regional projects, ensuring that efforts of mutual interest are well aligned. It was further underscored that initiatives should be designed to complement, rather than duplicate existing work, thereby maximizing impact and resource efficiency across the region.

Key recommendations from the VIIth CaribVET meeting

Among the key outcomes of the VIIth CaribVET Meeting were several important recommendations aimed at strengthening regional collaboration and enhancing the management of zoonotic diseases. The most notable recommendations include:

- Leptospirosis is the most significant priority zoonoses of concern, followed by High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza, Rabies, and Salmonella. This is a need to increase regional research in these areas.
- Veterinary Services should maintain oversight and technical involvement in aquatic animal health related matters under the fisheries departments. Governments should avoid completely separation of these functions to ensure adequate attention to food safety, animal health, and sanitary standards within the fisheries sector.