

vision

A sustainable institution through which young men and women are empowered to improve their living standards



mission

To provide training programs that facilitate the development through life skills, agriculture, entrepreneurship, technical vocational skills and business development services



goals

To develop skills of men and women between the ages of 16 – 30 years, to be able to establish and operate viable farms or other agricultural and rural based enterprises, at a universally acceptable standard of living.

To encourage the formation and development of groups and other types of organizations amongst graduates of the GARD Center's training programs and to establish links with other existing local and regional organizations.



partners

local

- Antigua & Barbuda Defence Force
- Antigua & Barbuda Institute of Continuing Education (ABICE)
- Antigua Beekeepers Cooperative (ABC)
- Community First Cooperative Credit Union
- Directorate of Gender Affairs
- Environmental Awareness Group (EAG)
- Government of Antigua and Barbuda
- Mill Reef Fund
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Sandals Foundation

regional

- Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI)
- Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC)
- Caribbean Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Livelihoods CoESL)
- CIBC FirstCaribbean International Bank
- Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA)

international

- British High Commission, Port of Spain
- Canadian Government
- European Union, Barbados & Eastern Caribbean
- Global Environment Facility (GEF)
- Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA)
- International Youth Foundation (IYF)
- Organization of American States (OAS)
- Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA)
- Technical Centre for Agricultural & Rural Cooperation (CTA)
- The Methodist Church in Britain
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

background

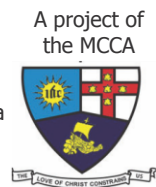
The Gilbert Agricultural & Rural Development Center (GARD Center) is a non-governmental organization registered under the Companies Act of 1995. The Center evolved from a two year pilot project in 1989 sponsored by the Canadian Government (Canada Training Awards Project), the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA), and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda. Due to the success of the pilot project and the determination of the MCCA in making a social investment in the youth of this region, the GARD Center has now developed into a full time training facility.

From its inception the Center has been able to make tremendous strides as a result of strategic partnerships, alliances, volunteers and a committed staff complement. This has enabled the Center to reach new horizons in its programs and services for our clientele.

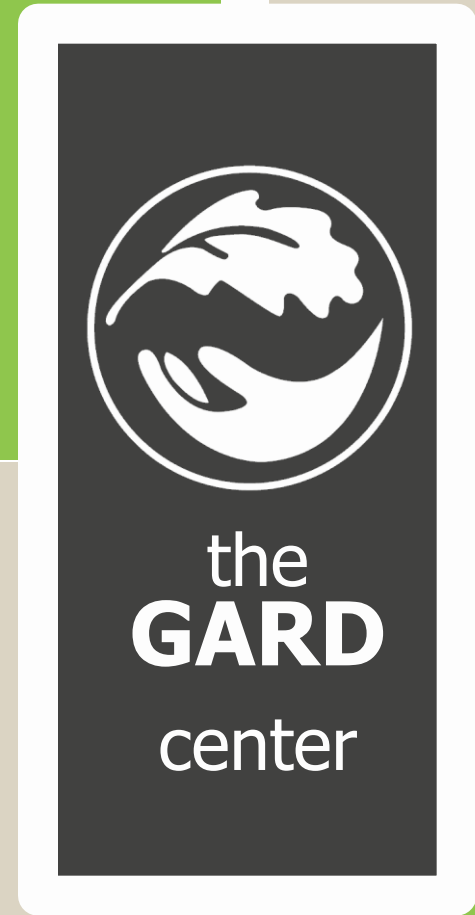
The GARD Center's focus is in three major areas: Youth, Entrepreneurship, and Agriculture.

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A project of
the MCCA



youth services

Youth have been the primary and most significant target group since the birth of the GARD Center. It was founded on the original mandate of encouraging young people into agriculture and breaking the old bias that agriculture was demeaning. Over the past few years the Center has expanded its focus to vulnerable youth, or youth who have fallen “through the cracks” as drop outs, single mothers, gang members or disillusioned young men and women. GARD Center has formed strategic partnerships with government, national, and international agencies to help fill a significant gap in support programs and activities for youth at risk. The Center provides vocational and entrepreneurial training coupled with programs in business mentoring, credit, internships, and job placements. All of the Center’s programs have cross-cutting courses to empower youth in life skills, information technology, literacy, and numeracy. The GARD Center is committed to giving our nation’s vulnerable youth a second chance by helping them to make positive and long lasting changes in their lives.



entrepreneurship



The GARD Center from its inception has featured entrepreneurship with special focus on agriculture as a business. The Center has expanded its training programs into other types of entrepreneurship, i.e. handicraft, building construction, information technology, and tourism while advocating for an enabling environment that promotes a competitive edge.

Courses range from Agricultural Enterprise Development to Business Management for Handicraft Artisans, Entrepreneurship for Beginners, and Youth Entrepreneurship. The Center is a partner of the Caribbean Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Livelihoods (CoESL).

A range of services is provided for the Center’s entrepreneurs:

- Computer labs which provide internet access and printing facilities
- Documentation and Resource unit: houses over 1000 publications on selected topics that have been requested by the Center’s stakeholders.
- Question and Answer Service: provides answers to questions that the Center’s clientele have concerning areas such as; sourcing of equipment, publications, technical information, project funding, etc.
- Business Mentor Program: experienced persons have volunteered to provide guidance, and encouragement new entrepreneurs during the first three years of their business launch.
- The Center now has a Business Development Unit which is situated in St. John’s and offers numerous services to its clientele.
- Revolving Loan Fund: A loan fund is available to new and experienced entrepreneurs who have a sound business proposal. The fund is managed by the Community First Cooperative Credit Union. All of the Center’s clientele are encouraged to join a credit union and begin saving a portion of their income.

agriculture

With the average age of Caribbean agricultural producers being 55 years and older, and the image of farming being one of drudgery and high risk, the plight to encourage young men and women into this very important sector began in late 1989. The challenge was taken on to firstly demonstrate that agriculture is a worthy occupation and secondly that it is a business and not a “way of life” which requires adequate technical knowledge in planning, marketing, and financial management to be successful. The Young Farmers Training Pilot Project was established in Antigua and Barbuda, with the partnerships of CIDA/CTAP, the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, later to become the GARD Center.

The Center over the years has developed strategic partnerships with the Ministry of Agriculture and a NGO, the Environmental Awareness Group, collaborating on a number of projects and activities in agro-forestry, tree planting, watershed protection, conservation and plant biodiversity. In addition to agricultural enterprise training courses, GARD Center has offered training in solar drying, poultry production, tanning, beekeeping, agro-ecological practices, composting, backyard gardening, plant propagation, herbal production, and others. The Center is very proud of its young producers who are demonstrating that farming and its related enterprises can be lucrative business ventures and are equipping themselves to become certified in Good Agricultural Practices and knowledgeable about the dynamics and value of understanding the various food chains.



historical notes

The estate on which the Gilbert Agro-Heritage Nature Center is located was originally the home of planter, Nathaniel Gilbert. After his conversion to Methodism in 1759, he preached to his peers and later his slaves on the steps of his estate house, thus marking the birth of Methodism in Antigua.

The property is now owned by the Methodist Church and administered by the Conference through the Trust Corporation of the MCCA.

The GARD Center operates as one of the Ecumenical programs of the MCCA and is the only institution in the Leeward Islands that provides agricultural and rural based enterprise training for young men and women leaving school.

staff

The GARD Center’s staff consists of an Executive Director, Accountant, Job Placement Business Mentor Coordinator, Principal, Business Development Officer, BDU Clerk, Administration/Information Officer, and Nature Center Operations Manager. Tutors are hired on a part-time basis to train participants and are drawn from the business sector, government ministries, regional and international organizations, and the farming community. Additionally, a number of individual volunteers also provide their expertise.

facilities

- Conference, Classroom, and Computer Lab Facilities
- Documentation & Resource Unit
- Gilbert Agro-heritage Nature Center

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. – Isaiah 35:3