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A PROGRAMME FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Case of Dominica

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INTRODUCTION

In Dominica, despite the fact that our chief source of income is derived from agriculture, little has been achieved over the years in building a viable economy or a prosperous farming community. The basic drawbacks, interwoven with its physical environment must be fully recognised if agriculture is to move progressively forward in a competitive world of rising costs and depressed market prices for raw materials and produce from the land. The following problems, though varied in character, are linked with agricultural prosperity and rural development.

FOLLY OF ONE CROP ECONOMY

For the past twenty-one years agricultural activity has been channelled towards a one crop economy based on bananas. Many pundits inside as well as outside the State have time and again warned of the folly of a system of agriculture based on a one crop economy. To date little has been done to forestall the economic disaster that would inevitably follow either the freezing or over-supplying of the banana market. The bad weather conditions which affected the main market, the U.K. for this crop from the month of December last year can be given as an example. From reliable information, the severity of the weather hampered distribution and this prevented the consumer in the United Kingdom from using available weekly supplies. This resulted in an unremunerative farm price of 1.6¢ per lb. during this period.

A PROGRAMME OF ZONING

It is necessary for the leaders in Government and the public to take a long hard look at the problems and to seek suitable solutions before it is too late. The following suggestions are offered for possible consideration:

Zoning: This points to the necessity for Government to implement a vigorous agricultural policy in which primary consideration is given to the question of zoning the State's agricultural potential based on the suitability of soil, climate, customs of the people and other socio-economic variables.

Zoning Areas:

(1) Eastern District - Stretching from Bagatelle, Petit Savanne, Delices to La Plaine. The possibility of establishing a bay oil industry should be fully explored and this could be the main commercial activity of that area.

(2) Central Midland District - From Shawford to the Imperial Road Area. The Layou Valley to Salisbury could possibly concentrate on a crop combination of citrus and bananas. This would permit growing of bananas between the rows of citrus.

(3) Coastal District - This region is ideal for limes but marginal for bananas. Farmers should, therefore, concentrate on limes or other crops with good economic possibilities and capable of withstanding weather conditions in a partially arid coastline.

(4) Northern District - Coconut is becoming the primary agricultural crop in this area. However, the farm unit size is too small to allow economies of scale in coconut production to be realised. It has become apparent that the upper Northern sector, stretching from Calibishie to Marigot, offers the ideal climate for the production of selected food crops. This could be further developed to ensure enough food for the expanding population.

Pulses and Vegetables

It is felt that within the various zones listed above there are already suitable areas where vegetables are being grown, such as at Luadat, Giraudel and Bellevue Chopin in the South, and parts of Wesley and Vielle Case in the North. What is needed is better market distribution, research in the control of pests and diseases and frequent analysis of the soil at intervals to decide on how best to replace the missing elements essential for the success of this type of farm production.

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

This is to a large extent an essential factor for successful agriculture. There is need for a change in the methods of agricultural production of the farming community especially in small scale farming.