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CARIBBEAN

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**ISSUES ARISING FROM A PANEL DISCUSSION ON
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL
PRESERVATION: ARE THESE COMPATIBLE WITH
MARKET-LED AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES?**

Rapporteur: Ms D. Francis

LAND REFORM

It was suggested that "appropriate land reform and zoning" policies in the Caribbean are critical elements to achieving compatibility between concepts of sustainable agriculture and market-led agriculture as zoning fits easily into a sustainable ecological system.

It was recognized that "land speculation" impacts negatively land use practices, setting the stage for conflict in land use, was justified for use in low cost housing versus agriculture.

It was further recognized that the IMF-proposed land reform and favorable funding to small farmers encouraged all Caribbean governments to enter land redistribution schemes, i.e. IRDP, and in the entire process important issues such as size of farms and cost of investment of small farms were allotted positions of lesser importance in the scheme of things. The impact of such land redistribution schemes is on sustainable agriculture.

It was suggested that Caribbean economics, at times have practiced zoning and land reform with inconsistent results. This point led to suggestions of attaching price tags to land and its worth by products. Categories noted included ecological price attached to all activities; satisfaction price on commodities; comfort price (i.e., ease of access); health price (nonchemical produce); and food security price.

By implication, would these price attachments mean that only the rich can afford to pay these extra charges? Following the above would conflict with the objective of agriculture, i.e., to provide food for all.

It was recommended for Caribbean countries to:

- (a) clearly define what sustainable agriculture means to them;
- (b) identify and translate definitions into programme appropriate to Caribbean development;
- (c) develop a workable, effective land zoning and use and land pricing policy;
- (d) embody the concept of zoning and land bank concept in national planning.

It was also recommended that Caribbean minds not get sidetracked or bogged down by various new terminologies and captions defining situations known and constant in Caribbean agriculture, i.e., Appropriate Technology,

Sustainable Agriculture, and Global issues, etc. The real issue is to concentrate on research and the application of research and research results on a timely basis.

It was recognized that agriculture operated in cycles, with the most current cycle largely determined by the large multinational corporations who dictate consumer patterns and trends. The real challenge is for Caribbean countries to determine what they (Caribbean countries) want from their agricultural sector. Cited example of agricultural cycles and the role the MNCs played in the cyclical movement included: Caribbean agriculture initially seen as backward; chemical fertilizer and pesticide use in agriculture seen as a method for modernization of the backward sector; organic agriculture now seen as environmentally friendly.

The question arose as to what is the meaning of "modernization of agriculture" and how is it translated to Caribbean sustainable agriculture. It was suggested that the "sustainability" problem in terms of agricultural development arose when there is a situation of conflict between determination of private benefit costs and social costs. The point was made that the majority of the world's population are consumers, and very few are producers, and if producers do not have property rights to a resource it may be difficult to convince them to conserve a resource.

Additional issues raised included the compatibility between the market-led approach and our indigenous production systems recognizing the unorthodox and ad hoc nature of Caribbean production and the issue of balance between agricultural research and agricultural extension, i.e., is there enough research generated for extension to extend.

FINAL STATEMENTS BY PANELISTS

Hannah Clarendon: Caribbean needs; to take up challenge of being Trend Settlers, no longer being directed from outside, i.e., MNCs; determine for ourselves where we want to be in agriculture. That the Caribbean should develop a method of sustainable agriculture compatible for our development and environment and extend/sell this idea to the rest of the world.

Felix Gregoire: The issue of conflict can be read or imagined and may, in effect, be complementary. The emphasis in achieving certain goals may create only apparent conflict. By utilizing a holistic development pattern, if properly done, the conflict issues can be resolved.

Antonio Pinchinat: The real question is "where do we go from here." The way ahead is to keep promoting dialogue and exchange of views with all active participants, from farmers, economists to policy makers and to develop new philosophies and approaches to research and technology transfer.