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**CARIBBEAN
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A NETWORK FOR THE NINETIES :SETTING UP THE CARIBBEAN FARMING SYSTEMS NETWORK

BARTON A. CLARKE & Alice P. CLARKE
CARDI, P.O. Box 971, Castries, ST Lucia

ABSTRACT

The Caribbean Farming Systems Research and Extension (FSR/E) Network was initiated at a workshop in St. Lucia in November 1988. The two day workshop was attended by FSR/E practitioners from National and Regional Organisations throughout the English, French and Spanish speaking Caribbean. The participants agreed unanimously on the need for an FSR/E network in the region, with the following objectives :

- encouraging information exchange between professionnels involved in FSR,
- stimulating interest in FSR/E methodology, and
- strengthening the FSR/E infrastructure in the region.

The immediate goals of the network are the publication of a bibliography of FSR work, and a directory of FSR practitioners, and the production of a quarterly newsletter. In addition, the network would serve as a clearing house for identifying training needs, and facilitating consultations in FSR within the region.

RESUME

UN RESEAU POUR LES ANNEES 90 : ETABLIR UN RESEAU CARAIBE SUR LES SYSTEMES D'EXPLOITATION.

Le réseau caraïbe sur la Recherche-Développement et la Vulgarisation (FSR/E) a été lancé lors d'un atelier qui s'est tenu à Sainte Lucie en Novembre 1988.

Cet atelier de deux jours a été suivi par des praticiens de la FSR/E d'organisations nationales et régionales de la Caraïbe anglophone, francophone et hispanophone.

A l'unanimité, les participants ont approuvé le besoin d'un réseau FSR/E avec les objectifs suivants :

- encourager l'échange d'information entre les professionnels de la FSR/E,
- stimuler l'intérêt pour la méthodologie de la FSR/E,
- renforcer l'infrastructure de la FSR/E dans la région.

Les buts immédiats du réseau sont la publication d'une bibliographie sur la Recherche-Développement (FSR), un répertoire des spécialistes de la FSR et la production d'une circulaire trimestrielle.

De plus, le réseau servirait de lieu d'identification des besoins de formation et faciliterait les consultations de FSR dans la région.

INTRODUCTION

Various holistic farming systems approaches have been used in agricultural development in the Caribbean region during the last decade. These approaches have been used to develop and employ methodologies for research extension, and for development directed at improving the social and economic well-being of small and medium-sized farm households in the region.

At the Sixth Annual Farming Systems Research and Extension (FSR/E) symposium, held at Kansas State University during 1986, FSR/E practitioners from the Caribbean participated in a panel discussion on «Caribbean Experiences in Farming Systems Research». It was decided that there was an urgent need to form an FSR/E network. Since then a group of latin American practitioners recommended establishment of a Latin American and Caribbean Farming Systems Research and Extension Network at the 1987 FSR/E Symposium in Arkansas. This paper presents the background and genesis of the Caribbean FSR/E Network. The results of the initial workshop and Development Institute (CARDI) with support from the International Development Research Center (IDRC) to discuss the formation of the network are also presented.

THE NEED FOR FSR

Prior to the 1970's research in the Caribbean was «traditional» or «conventional» in nature ; the emphasis was on export crops such as sugarcane and bananas and the approach was discipline oriented with scientists concentrated on the area of specialisation e.g. crop protection,

agronomy, plant breeding. The prime beneficiaries of this research were the large producers who operated within a monocrop system, where resources were easily available and markets were guaranteed. The success of this type of research is evident in the dominant role these crops have played in our economies, and in the difficulties we face in trying to replace them. One reason diversification is difficult is the lack of a foundation of research in the region into crops such as passion fruit or cotton for example.

But the face of agricultural production within the region is changing. The erosion of markets for traditional crops and the rising cost of production has led to the fragmentation of large estates. The future of our agriculture lies with small producers, who must produce a range of crops both for export and for local consumption.

It is not a coincidence that the development of FSR methodology has paralleled the growing recognition of the role of the small farmer in our economy, for FSR is ideally suited to benefit the small farmer.

One advantage of the FSR approach to research is that it makes allowances for large and small producers involved in monocrop, multiple cropping, livestock production, integrated crop production systems or integrated croplivestock production systems and produces results tailored to particular farming systems. Thus the transfer of information from the researcher to the farmer, via the extension officer, is assured a greater degree of success.

The farming systems research methodology in no way replaces or eliminates traditional conventional research.

WHAT IS FARMING SYSTEMS RESEARCH ? (FSR)

FSR is an approach to agricultural research that views the farm as a systems encompassing certain physical, biological and socioeconomic factors. The research focuses on the interdependences between the components of the system under the control of the farm household and those components not under the household's control. The objectives of the researcher are to increase the productivity of the farming systems by generating more appropriate technologies for farmers and, where possible, to improve policies and support services for farm production. Results are measured in terms of the goals of the farmer, and the interests of society.

The Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) introduced the FSR methodology into the English speaking Caribbean region in 1978 in the CARDI/USAID Small Farm Multiple Cropping Systems Research Project (CARDI 1983). Since then the methodology has been

continuously refined under the aegis of the CARDI Farming Systems Research and Development Project (FSR/D) in an effort to make it more relevant to the region.

The detailed FSR/D methodology contains 11 sets of activities (George and Hart 1985). A key activity is that of «Design of Alternatives». The first 7 activities are structured to allow the Design of Alternatives. The last three activities involve the testing and transfer of the technological improvements that are produced during the design activities. The 11 activity are listed below

1. Area and Target Farmer Selections
2. Initial Reconnaissance
3. Specific Problem - Focussed Surveys
4. Field Station Research
5. On Farm Production Systems Analysis
6. Farm Studies
7. Island Studies
8. Design of Alternative
9. On-Farm Testing of Alternatives
10. On-Farm Validation
11. Applicability Testing

CARIBBEAN FSR/E NETWORK - THE BEGINNING

At the Sixth Annual Farming Systems Research and Extension (FSR/E) Symposium, held at Kansas State University from October 5-8 1986, a group of FSR/E practitioners from the Caribbean presented a panel on «Caribbean Experiences in Farming Systems Research». The purpose of the panel was to describe and synthesize the various FSR/E methodologies that have developed in different parts of the Caribbean Island chain (figure 1). A comparison of the Hispanic, Francophone and Anglophone traditions in FSR/E in the Caribbean revealed that while the entire Caribbean has experienced very similar socio-economic and historical developments, agricultural research and development in each of the linguistic spheres of influence has evolved along different paths. It was unanimously agreed by the panelist and other participants at the session that there was an urgent need for a Caribbean FSR/E network. The geographical location of the islands and the difficulties encountered in telecommunication has resulted in the Caribbean FSR/E practitioners being unaware of what their counterparts are doing. There has therefore been very limited exchange of experiences, and information.

WHY A NETWORK ?

A Caribbean Network on Farming Systems Research and Extension will help to integrate FSR practitioners in the region. The growing popularity of FSR/E and the rising expectations about its results necessitates the need to foster the exchange of information and personnel between the different FSR/E programmes in the region. Furthermore, the social history, smallness of economies, the need for diversification and the dependence on a limited number of cash crops of the different islands in the Caribbean almost makes it mandatory for Caribbean agricultural research to be coordinated and complimentary. Given the limited resources available, to each of the national regional FSR programmes, it is advisable for these to be integrated so that there is a common pool of knowledge and experiences that all of the Caribbean national can draw on.

PRINCIPLES OF THE FSR NETWORK

The Caribbean FSR/E Network endorses the 10 principles of collaborative research networks enunciated by CARDI in their Strategic plan (CARDI 1988). these principles are :

- (1) The networks are developed around subjects that the member states perceive as important.
- (2) The research effort focuses on a well defined common theme or strategy
- (3) actual or potential sources of improved technology or ideas must exist to stimulate efforts.
- (4) careful coordination is necessary to achieve smooth functioning networks.
- (5) steering committees composed of participating scientists provide technical leadership and policy direction.
- (6) regular meetings of participant scientists are held to identify goals, review results to date, prioritize technical problems and identify and allocate new topics.
- (7) information exchange systems consisting of regular newsletters and reproduction of other reports of interest to network members are set up.
- (8) results and methodologies, including plant/animal materials, are freely exchange among scientists.
- (9) education and training are emphasized, including regular workshops and periodic monitoring tours of scientists to discuss methodologies and exchange results.
- (10) financial support in country implementation of planned research must be available, provided by a combination of the respective national agriculture research systems and donor support.

CARIBBEAN FSR NETWORK WORKSHOP

CARDI's strategy calls for taking a leadership role in collaborative research networks which involve joint intercountry planning, implementing and monitoring of research on problems of mutual concern. Network activities will include information exchange, technical collaboration, and training. While network of this type are still in their infancy in the Caribbean, they are considered to be one of the most effective strategies for dealing with the situation facing the region.

CARDI therefore invited FSR/E practitioners from national and regional organisations in the Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean to attend a workshop to discuss establishment of the Caribbean FSR/E Network. Funds for the Workshop were provided by IDRC and the Workshop was held in St. Lucia, November 24-25 1988. The objectives of the workshop were :

- (1) To obtain an appreciation on what is happening in FSR/E in the region
- (2) Ascertain whether there is a need for an FSR/E network.
- (3) If such a network is desirable, to determine the objectives of the network.
- (4) Define the terms of reference of the network, the scope, participants, etc.
- (5) To define the aspects of FSR/E on which the network would focus
- (6) Determine the relationship between the proposed network and the wider network proposed by the Latin American FSR/E practitioners.

After sharing experiences and the presentation on CARDI's strategic position on networks, participants unanimously agreed on the need for a farming systems network in the Caribbean, which would not be confined to researchers in farming systems but also include practitioners using extension, development and farm systems commercialisation approaches.

The objectives of the network would be

- (i) to facilitate information exchange,
- (ii) to stimulate interest in FSR/E/D,
- (iii) to provide an opportunity for sharing common problems, methodologies, and technology
- (iv) to provide a mechanism for communication e.g. Newsletter

As a first step to fulfilling the goals of the network, professionals working in the area of farming systems research an extension in the region are invited to write to :

Barton Clarke
c/o CARDI
P.O. Box 971
Castries
St. Lucia

Please include the following information :

Professional qualifications, areas of special interest, and a brief outline of current work.

Your name will be entered in the directory of FSR/E practitioners, and you will be placed on the CFSN mailing list.

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