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**CARIBBEAN  
FOOD  
CROPS SOCIETY**

**22**

**Twenty Second  
Annual Meeting 1986**

**St. Lucia**

**Vol. XXII**

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Hon. Ira d'Auvergne

Minister of Agriculture  
St. Lucia

Mr. Chairman, Hon. Prime Minister, Keynote speaker, other members of the head table, members of the diplomatic corps, ladies and gentlemen:

I am extremely happy for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you this morning on the occasion of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Caribbean Food Crops Society here in St. Lucia. On this occasion, I am wearing two hats so to speak, that is, being Minister of Agriculture and also the outgoing President of the Society.

Let me first of all, as Minister for Agriculture, echo the sentiments expressed by my Prime Minister, the Rt. Honourable John Compton, once again welcoming you to St. Lucia. I wish in particular to welcome those of you who are visiting us for the first time. I hope you will leave here with fond memories of the hospitality of the people of this beautiful land, and that this will not be the last time you will grace us with your presence.

I am particularly pleased that this annual meeting is taking place in St. Lucia at this time. The theme chosen for the meeting, i.e., non-traditional crops is a topic that is highly relevant, given the emphasis being placed by St. Lucia and other Caribbean states on diversification of the agricultural sector of their economies. This emphasis on diversification is not something accidental. It is derived from a conscious effort at addressing the numerous constraints which face our economies which are indeed heavily dependent on agriculture.

Mr. Chairman, it is well known by all of us that the general world economic crisis has dealt a very severe blow to agriculture. This has been particularly evident in the case of countries which rely heavily on a narrow range of agricultural exports.

Because of the export-propelled nature of these economies, instability in the export markets have a strong effect on the domestic situation. Sharp declines in world prices generally, reduced demand for our export staples by our traditional trading partners, increased protectionism, and the continued movement in the terms of trade against the developing countries, have combined to adversely affect the expansion of the region's traditional exports. These constraints, Mr. Chairman, from all appearances, will not disappear in the short term, and therefore, imaginative strategies are required if the countries of the region are to find themselves once again in a position of economic prosperity.

Obviously, Mr. Chairman, while we must strive to improve the efficiency of our traditional export crops in an effort to improve their competitiveness on international markets, it is clear that we cannot continue to promote the monoculture approach, i.e., dependence on a single or at best a very limited range of crops. One of the ways of addressing the problem is by

making a determined effort to widen the base of the crops which we produce, and in which we have export potential.

It is as result of this realization that Caribbean Governments have been pursuing a policy of diversification through the encouragement of the production of a wide range of crops. As part of the Regional Food and Nutrition Strategy (RFNS), a number of sub-sectors are selected for special attention. These include the fruit and vegetable sub-sector, oils and fats, livestock, cereals and grain legumes, spices and essential oils and floriculture. A number of projects have been identified for implementation in these sectors with varying degrees of success.

In the light of the existing production structure within the agricultural sector of St. Lucia in which the banana and coconut industries are well entrenched (notwithstanding the present difficulties being experienced with the latter), any initiative at broadening the production base must necessarily give emphasis to those crops which are considered to be non-traditional.

The production of those crops has in the past been undertaken in a relatively ad hoc manner. Recently, however, farmers have come to realize that these crops indeed can be of economic value to them.

During 1985, there was a significant increase in the export of non-traditional crops. An examination of these statistics will show that these range of crops include, among others, breadfruit, plantain, mangoes, avocados, soursop, hot pepper, plums and golden apples. The initial work aimed at bringing these products on the market have been undertaken by private St. Lucian entrepreneurs and the markets include Canada, the United Kingdom, other countries of western Europe such as Holland, St. Croix, and some regional countries.

The Ministry of Agriculture has been playing an active role in promoting those new products through the Small Farmers Agricultural Development Project, which is co-financed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Government of St. Lucia.

Trial shipments of new crops are being continuously undertaken as part of the process of Market Research Promotion. The volumes of export could have been considerably increased if the required amount of cargo space were available on the airline carriers.

This effort to promote non-traditional exports must however, be carried out in a manner that would ensure the maximum possible returns to all sections of the society. Particular emphasis must therefore be placed on the small farmers who comprise the vast majority of our agricultural producers in order to ensure that they are fully involved in the production process.

My Ministry has recently received the report of a Task Force appointed to draw up a National Agricultural Marketing Strategy for St. Lucia. The report makes far-reaching recommendations for adjustments in the structure of Agricultural Production and Marketing including the organizational structure in which production and marketing should take place. These

recommendations, if adopted, will form the basis for the development of the non-traditional export sector in agriculture. We are presently engaged in detailed consideration of the alternatives offered in the report before recommending a course of action for consideration by the Cabinet of Ministers.

In placing emphasis on the production and marketing of non-traditional export crops, we must be careful that the necessary attention is also given to domestic food production. Over the years, we have tended to neglect this aspect of our agriculture in the quest for additional foreign exchange. With a regional food import bill in excess of \$2 billion, there are obvious savings to be made by pursuing a programme of import substitution, i.e., replacing imports with domestic food supplies. This is critical, particularly in these days when food security has become a matter of international concern.

The Caribbean Food Crops Society, therefore, holds its 24th Annual Meeting against the background of a considerable amount of activities in the agricultural sector. The selection of the theme, "Non-traditional Export Crops", was an attempt to channel the course of this meeting in a direction where the presentations will be relevant to the existing thrust of regional agriculture.

Over the next five days a packed programme is planned which will address virtually every aspect of these crops and it is hoped that as agricultural scientists, a fresh perspective will be brought into the discussions which should guide further progress.

A number of papers will be presented covering such areas as Marketing of Non-traditional Export Crops, Root Crop Production, Vegetable Production, Fruit Production and Forages. As President of the Society for the past 12 months, I do hope that the proceedings of this conference will form a lasting contribution to regional agriculture.

A great deal of preparation has gone into this conference. The Local Organizing Committee has worked assiduously to make it a reality. A number of organizations, too numerous to mention, have contributed in one way or other. On behalf of the Society, I wish to extend our sincere gratitude to all of you.