



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*



**CARIBBEAN
FOOD
CROPS SOCIETY**

22

**Twenty Second
Annual Meeting 1986**

St. Lucia

Vol. XXII

WELCOME ADDRESS

Rt. Hon. John Compton, P.C.

Prime Minister of St. Lucia

Mr. Chairman: It was Napoleon who observed that "an army marches on its stomach". This General realized early in his brilliant career, that however successful may be an army in the field, the man must be sustained because though many battles may be won, the war may be lost without adequate food support.

As we in the Caribbean engage in the struggle for economic development, we must draw upon this advice and so plan that our food supplies are secure. Although we may attract industries and construct hotels, the foreign exchange that these endeavours earn us may slip through our hands unless we so organize our plans that we can provide the major part of our food supplies and our efforts at development will be a mere mirage, beautiful but without substance, and will disappear with the first winds of adversity.

I need not remind you that the Caribbean spends more than \$1 billion in food imports, much of which can be grown locally. The disappointing thing about this is that we know how to correct this imbalance, yet little is done about it except moaning and lamentation.

To correct this situation, and to reduce the drain on our foreign exchange require more than recognition and lamentation. It requires a number of components which must be brought together simultaneously and on a regional basis. Let me in all humility indicate some of these.

FIRST, there must be crop identification, because although the region is blessed with mild climate and fertile soils and we can grow almost anything, the question is should we try uneconomically to grow everything, or should we not identify the crops we can grow economically and concentrate our efforts in this direction.

SECOND, having identified these crops, then production must be rationalized between our various countries or group of countries. Some countries grow some crops better than others and therefore there should be specialization in production.

THIRD, there should be research into new, high yielding and disease-resistant varieties so that the land can be persuaded to produce to increase its yield. Such research should be available to the farmers through effective extension work as much valuable work remains in laboratories and libraries and does not reach the farmers. We cannot afford the luxury of pure research or research for research sake. Research must have an objective: increasing production and productivity.

FOURTH, the most important question is marketing. Although scientists whose salaries are secure may do pure research and although extension officers who have no anxiety at the end of the month may ignore the results of such research, the farmer cannot be expected to invest his scarce

resources of land, labour and capital in production of a crop unless he is shown the other end of the bridge, that is, a secure and profitable market for his production.

FIFTH, we must recognize the revolution in purchasing that has been brought about by the advent of the supermarket, and we must adapt our methods of packaging and presentation to meet these changes. It must be realized that most of the purchases of foodstuffs are done, not in the street, or "bend down" markets, exotic though these may be to the tourists, but in the clean and attractive surroundings of the supermarkets and unless our products are packaged in such a way that they can be attractively displayed in such an environment, the housewife cannot be blamed if she turns to other goods.

SIXTH, there must be reliability of supplies both in quality and consistency. This is particularly important when dealing with hotels with their demanding clientele without any loyalty or obligation to the local product.

SEVENTH, there is the question of food preparation and presentation. For reasons deep in our social history, our middle classes traditionally look outside to furnish their tables and the fare of the working class was monotonous and mundane. There was consequently no incentive to develop local recipes which employ local foodstuffs and our tastes are determined elsewhere. This task of changing our tastes is now made considerably more difficult by high-pressure visual advertising, particularly through television and colour magazines and the advent of the fast food chains using mainly imported foods.

EIGHT, the high cost regional transport and the small size of the domestic markets make it an imperative that the external markets should be explored. Our people who migrated to Britain, the United States and Canada, have introduced into these countries, tastes for Caribbean products and created a market for our fruits and vegetables which we must explore. Specially for these markets, there must be product identification on grading and packaging for the supermarkets as we produce too little of too many varieties, when the market demands standardization, high volume, regularity of supplies, high quality and attractive grading and packaging for the supermarkets.

NINTH, we must add value to our products whether for domestic consumption or export and more into agro processing. This demands volume standardization of product and quality and the concomitant of discipline which is not at this time present in our society but which is essential if we are to succeed.

TENTH, I believe it is more important that we act on a regional basis. Our domestic markets are too small, our needs too diverse and our land resources too limited for us individually to succeed in any effort of agricultural production. The Caribbean Food Crops Society must be Caribbean in more than its name. It must be Caribbean in research, Caribbean in crop identification, Caribbean in production and Caribbean in marketing.

We cannot succeed in marketing in the Caribbean if we all try to produce the same things at the same time, thus seeking merely to take in each other's laundry and when there is an over supply we resort to licensing to protect our tiny markets and be ridiculed by the calypsonian in such songs as "Ban B.G. Plantain". Nor we can effectively gain access to the external markets unless we identify the crops we can sell, then produce and market them together. The success of the Windward Islands Banana Industry is a shining example of regional cooperation and one which can be emulated with profit.

Similarly, if we seek to move into agro processing it will make economic sense for the central location of the processing plant and this can be given treatment of a Caricom enterprise and its product freely circulated within the region.

That this meeting is taking place and so many persons of eminence in your respective fields are here is an indication that both the problems and the prospects for Caribbean food productions have been recognized and as I welcome you to Jamaica let me hope that your efforts will contribute to progress in this most important area of regional development.

I thank you.