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ADDRESS BY H.C. MILLER

CARIBBEAN FOOD CROPS SOCIETY'S BANQUET XVIII ANNUAL MEETING, BARBADOS

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Barbados, distinguished colleagues:

Our Society was nineteen years old last May but it seems just a short time ago that Dr. Arnold Krochmal, then Horticulturist at the Federal Experiment Station, Kingshill, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, Francisco Aponte Aponte, Horticultural Specialist, Agricultural Extension Service, University of Puerto Rico, and I met in Puerto Rico to plan a strategy for the establishment of the Caribbean Food Crops Society.

This was on March 7, 1963 and following that meeting, invitations were despatched to a number of distinguished professional agriculturists serving in the countries of the Caribbean Region to attend a meeting at the Secretariat of the Caribbean Organization in Puerto Rico on May 3, 1963, with a view to the establishment of the Caribbean Food Crops Society.

At that meeting letters of encouragement and support were read from several Caribbean governments and the Secretary/General of the Caribbean Organization, Mr. Clovis Beauregard, expressed keen interest in the objectives of the Society and promised firm support to its proposed activities.

At that meeting we approved proposals presented on the Constitution and by-laws of the Society and its registration in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

For the first year of its operation Dr. Richard Bond, Director of the Federal Experiment Station, St. Croix, was elected President; Mr. Francisco Aponte, of the University of Puerto Rico, was named as Vice-President; Dr. Arnold Krochmal was appointed Treasurer; and I was honoured with the responsibility of serving as Secretary. One of our Directors for 1963 was Mr. A. deK. Frampton, then Chief Agricultural Officer of the Government of Barbados. I was at that time serving as a Development Officer of the Caribbean Organization--an Institution which was established by the Governments of the West Indies Federation, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, France and its Departments of Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guyana, Surinam, Guyana and the Netherland Antilles to promote regional Caribbean cooperation. Unfortunately, it fell victim to the divisive forces operating in the Caribbean during the sixties, and was abandoned in 1965.

The Secretary General of the Caribbean Organization in 1963 was quick to recognize that the activities of the proposed society and those of the Organization could be mutually supportive and readily agreed that I operate the Secretariat from my office in the organization and with such facilities as the Organization could afford.

This support, which included facilities for French-Spanish-English translation combined with the exuberant enthusiasm and initiative of Arnold Krochmal encouraged us to embark upon a series of projects which were in keeping with the objectives of the Organization. These included:

(a) A project of technical assistance wherein we secured the services of Dr. Julio Bird, Phytopathologist of the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Puerto Rico, to investigate, identify and prescribe treatment for a new disease of papayas observed in St. Croix and also in Antigua.

(b) Study of the needs of certain countries of the Region as regards protective quarantine restrictions and of the facilities needed for fuller exchange of plant material throughout the area.

(c) Bringing to the notice of governments of countries of the Region the desirability of establishing (with the help of F.A.O.) a Caribbean Regional Plant Protection organization. Final outcome of these representations was the establishment of a Caribbean Plant Protection Commission in the Dominican Republic which is now fully operative.

(d) Supply of planting material of improved varieties of papaws, mangoes and avocado pears from St. Croix to other islands in the Caribbean.

(e) Securing the services of Dr. W. F. Finner, Deputy Director, Marketing Division of the USDA to head a panel discussion on marketing at the first annual general meeting.

(f) A number of advisory visits to several of the smaller countries of the Region by qualified specialists.

(g) Organizing a training course in chemical pest control for Caribbean personnel at the College of Agriculture of the University of the West Indies in Trinidad. Members of the Society--Dr. Patrick Haynes and Dr. L. Kasasian--assumed full responsibility for organizing and conducting these courses, which were considered a most useful and timely contribution to Caribbean food crops production.

Unfortunately, the services of Dr. Krochmal were lost to the Society during 1965 as a result of his transfer from the Region and in March of that year the Secretariat of the Caribbean Organization was finally closed.

However, in George Samuels and George Jackson of Puerto Rico, we found a Treasurer and Secretary respectively, who worked closely together, and through their combined efforts and the staunch fidelity of a number of our members, the Society has continued to pursue its objective of advancing Caribbean food production and distribution and to grow in strength.

Annual meetings have been regularly held with the exception of 1979 and again in 1980 when an offer of hosting was withdrawn too late for a new venue to be arranged. Newsletters issued from the Secretariat succeeded in keeping interest alive and alerting members to developments of interest in the Region.

In 1981 we lost the services of Dr. George Jackson, upon his retirement from the federal service, and Freddy Leal and our friends in Venezuela and Barbados, Percy Jeffers, Ron Baynes and Vernon Sargeant in particular, have been called upon to render special assistance and service. This they have done efficiently and willingly to their great honour and to the full satisfaction of the Society as a whole. Our gratitude is due also to Carlos Cruz, who willingly and efficiently carried on the responsibilities of Secretary of the Society. Today we miss George Samuels who, for the first time since birth of the Society, has been absent from an annual meeting. From the inception of our Society the Government and governmental institutions of Barbados have been outstanding in their support.

At our first annual meeting in St. Croix in 1963 the Hon. Errol Barrow, then Premier of Barbados, graced our Proceedings with his presence as guest speaker. In his address he extended a warm and appreciative welcome to the Society, indicated some of the important contributions it could offer in the Region, promised strong support to our endeavours and invited the Society to hold its second annual meeting in Barbados. The Society was happy to accept this generous invitation and the Chief Agricultural Officer of Barbados, Mr. A. deK. Frampton was elected President for 1963-64.

Mr. President: this meeting represents the Third Annual Meeting which this country and Government have been good enough to host, and once again we have enjoyed that warm hospitatility and quiet competence in conduct of our affairs, for which this Island is justly famous.

The record of the Caribbean Food Crops Society has been a remarkable one--operating without the facilities of an established permanent Secretariat and relying on voluntary services and the contributions of members and friends for its operation and funding it is remarkable that our Society has shown such persistent vigour and growth. Our success speaks volumes for the recognition, within the Region, of the need for an organization such as ours, for the appreciation which our Proceedings have generated, and for our own faith in the future.

As we move towards attainment of our twenty-first year of operation our thoughts must inevitably be focussed on the future and the strategies which should be pursued to enable the Society to maximize its contribution to improving the well-being of the people of the Region.

Our annual exchanges of experience and information, valuable as these are, will not be sufficient to ensure our future growth and viability. There has been a tendency to multiply societies and organizations such as ours--in Agricultural Economics--in Veterinary Sciences--in Plant Protection. I have recently heard of attempts to establish a body to advise governments in the Region in terms of research priorities for agriculture, training

needs, etc. Many of our countries are of limited size and command the services of a limited number of professionals to whom the meeting of all such groupings are bound to be of more than passing interest. We need all the existing groupings and indeed we need facilities for association on a regional basis of even more professional agricultural interest groups than presently exist. But how can we? And in particular how can the smaller territories of the Region, find the time and resources to support them all? Might there not develop a tendency for these groups to become involved in a wasteful, unprofessional competition for members and for public attention and support? Such a development could expose us to manipulation by special interest groups or other evils which could result in the ultimate destruction of a professional society such as ours.

The comprehensive scope of the activities upon which the Society embarked in its first two or three years of existence were made possible by the tremendous initiative of Arnold Krochmal, the amount of time and effort he was allowed and to a significant extent by the support afforded by the Caribbean Organization. It would be unwise for us to expect another Krochmal and similar facilities to come to the aid of our Society. We have enjoyed an unusual combination of persons and facilities for which we cannot realistically expect continuous repetition.

It is clear to me, however, that what we need to do is to make an arrangement with a powerful, important regional organization, whose purposes and functions embrace our own, whereby we can assure ourselves of a permanent Secretariat geared to promote and expand the development and activities of the Society and its individual affiliates.

It seems to me that the Organization of American States, of which all the territories served by our Society are members or prospective members, could and would respond favourably to a request from our Society for such assistance. Certainly it is well within the constitutional powers and responsibilities of that body to sponsor and assist such regional groupings as the CFCS represents and I believe that we should try to secure its full support.

As far as our own Constitution is concerned, one of the listed functions of our Society is "cooperation with organizations dedicated to the fostering of cooperation between countries of the Region."

Accordingly I would request our Board of Directors to give serious thought to these proposals.

Affiliates

We were all very pleased that at our last general meeting held in Caracas in 1961 the call was once again repeated for the establishment of CFCS affiliates in each unit territory represented in our membership. This call has been made from time to time in our history but I regret follow-up efforts have, for the most part, been spasmodic and discontinuous.

I feel sure that a permanent Secretariat, with full-time staff, could do much to promote the establishment and persistence of these affiliates; to provide necessary coordination of their activities; to assist in the development of programmes upon which the Society may wish to embark, and to focus attention, as the Society may direct, on special problems hindering agricultural development in the Region.

We all, I believe, welcome the promise of the Caribbean Basin Initiative and in particular the access, under favourable circumstances, which it is offering us, to the markets of the U.S.

However, we cannot fail to recognize that it is only through a significant increase in our productivity and in particular in the productivity of our farming sector that the well-being of our several countries can be improved and preserved.

At this time in several of our countries farmers are suffering grave frustrations and unless solutions to their problems can be urgently found their support for a campaign of increased production and productivity will be difficult to win.

We have at this meeting discussed several of these - praedial larceny, lack of credit and crop insurance but two sources of frustration seem to me to dominate the current picture. These are:

1. Low and undependable returns from investments in the traditional crops--sugarcane and bananas especially--and terms of trade which seem to be getting more numerous and unfavourable to developing countries year after year.

2. While farmers appreciate the need to diversify production into other areas of productivity, they find themselves confronted with the complete lack of any well structured, properly articulated production and marketing system, involving market based plans of production, without up-to-date market intelligence; without facilities for collection grading and bulk wholesaling of produce; without reliable transportation services; and without sound food distribution procedures and facilities. Apart from the traditional export crops, marketing conditions are chaotic and unregulated, resulting in high post-harvest losses, and a situation wherein some areas are suffering from gluts of production while others suffer acute shortages of the same items.

Our national policies must be geared to maximize the consumption of what we can and do produce efficiently - subsidized products from other countries must not be allowed to discourage their local production.

We must observe the spirit as well as the letter of our Caricom regulations affecting trade amongst ourselves. We must be vigilant that self centred importers are not allowed to flood our markets with competitive food supplies while the products of our farms languish on the supermarket

shelves, or rot in the field. Special interest groups must not be allowed to keep food prices unreasonably high so that they can become rich at the expense of producers in other countries of the Region and of their own consumers.

But how are we to accomplish or more properly to secure the accomplishment of these desirable ends.

In my view those of us who are in a position to recognize the causes of frustration and lack of cooperation in the farming sector must do all we can to alert public opinion to the dangers of the current situation and the need for change--our Organizing Committee for this meeting in Barbados has set us off on a good start by providing us with the opportunity to review the situation. We must not stop here and wait until 1983 to discuss the matter again in Puerto Rico. I believe an effective method of attention on this problem can be adopted by the establishment of strong local affiliates in our several territories and use of these as fora to spread the word and influence the public and private sector attitudes on this important subject.

In order to enhance our efforts in this and other projects we need the assistance of a permanent central Secretariat working to strengthen regional cooperation and to promote the active involvement of affiliates in the individual countries.

It was most heartening to observe that in his well considered thoughtful welcoming address the Hon. Minister of Agriculture in Barbados indicated full recognition of these needs and it certainly appears that in this country the key issues are well and truly appreciated.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our Organizing Committee for focussing attention on this important aspect of agriculture at this meeting.

I am sure that in the fight against farmer frustration Barbados will be high in the batting order--as we say in Jamaica--"She little but she Tallawa."

I thank you once again for the warm welcome extended to me and for the patient attention you have accorded my remarks.

I trust you will find some merit in them and that you will explore and exploit every opportunity to enhance the usefulness and improve the stature of our Caribbean Food Crops Society.

I look forward to seeing you all in Puerto Rico in 1983.