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The Problems of Introducing New Market Crops in a Small Agricultural Economy Dominated by a Major Export Cash Crop

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The workshop felt that the problems of introducing new market crops could best be discussed under specific headings. Problem areas were identified as follows:

1. *Markets*

(a) Domestic

The smallness of individual markets was identified as the main problem together with the dietary habits and low income of consumers. It was felt that there was a need for an educational programme to influence consumer acceptance.

(b) Regional

The Agricultural Marketing Protocol offers market guarantees for a wide range of crops, but the possibility of duplication of regional production exists. This might lead to the more developed territories producing these crops which indicates a need for a Regional Production Plan.

The regional market was further restricted by inadequacy and high cost of sea and air transport.

(c) International

It was felt that there was a good short-term prospect for exotic fruit and horticultural products, but these were restricted by storage difficulties and lack of international market data on demand and prices.

There was a general problem in a small country of all resources being allocated for the production of crops for export markets at the expense of production for the domestic market.

2. *Research*

It was felt that research should be oriented to the farm and should seek to identify which crops could be produced commercially. Considerable research on agronomic factors affecting production has already been carried out in the area and reports were available. These should be used as a starting point to avoid duplication of effort.

It was agreed that Governments should finance the production of new crops on experimental farms. The work of the extension service, while a necessary supplement to such farms, would not be adequate by itself. Demonstration plots which are also required, should not be confined to one area. They should be sufficiently spread to cover different crops and different conditions. The objective of the demonstration farm should be to convince farmers of the feasibility of growing the crop on a commercial basis. Research should carefully concentrate on suitable varieties, storage possibilities, diseases and disease protection, crop rotation and ecology.

Some organisation should undertake to establish which crops are now through the research stage and are now at the demonstration stage. The University should be involved in research at all stages.

3. *Land Capability Surveys*

A certain amount of work of this type was already being done by the University at St. Augustine, Trinidad. It was felt that land-use teams should be established and work should be concentrated on environmental studies.

There is an added need to identify soil types which would aid production of suitable crops.

4. *Infra-structure*

In an economy dominated by one export crop the infra-structure is usually geared to the production of this crop and might not be suitable for the introduction of new crops. Infra-structure such as feeder roads and irrigation facilities should accordingly be modified if possible or established for the production of these crops.

5. *Economic Profitability*

The farmer experienced in growing an export crop is not acquainted with the costs and returns of new crops. Government should operate pilot farms to test the profitability of new crops under different conditions. The extension worker must be convinced of the profitability of the new crops and the farmer will take to these crops only if it is demonstrated that the net returns are significantly greater than those of the export crop.

6. *Attitude and Motivation*

Where the agricultural sector is dominated by one major export crop, planning and thinking are necessarily geared to that crop. One way of changing this attitude is to identify key or progressive farmers who are strategically located and inculcate them with new methods so that the spread effect to neighbouring farms could be extensive and effective.

7. *Communication and Extension*

Communication of techniques and market data to farmers was identified as a major problem. It was agreed that the mass media were not effective as a channel of communication. The workshop recommended that greater use by made of farmers' discussion groups and field days. Villages rather than farming areas, should be used as centres for the dissemination of information, since villages are already the focal points of community activity for farmers. Particularly in the introduction of new crops, it would be useful to organise intensive courses of about one week's duration covering all aspects of the production and marketing of the particular crop. The Department of Agricultural Extension of the U.W.I. should look at specific areas in the region and establish a close dialogue with the several extension services.

8. *Government Measures*

Government support needs to encompass a wide area of activity, but could be concentrated to the best advantage on marketing and credit facilities, extension services and demonstration plots. Attention should also be given to the processing of agricultural commodities and, hand in hand with the introduction and development of new crops, pilot processing of different crops should be undertaken.