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OPENING ADDRESS

Hon. Mr. K. Munn

(*Minister of Agriculture, Jamaica, W.I.*)

Ladies and Gentlemen, first of all, I would like to say how happy I am to have the opportunity of greeting you here this morning in welcoming all the guests that are here from the Caribbean, from Africa, Latin America, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, to this opening session of the Ninth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference.

I understand that these Conferences were started largely to enable technicians, planners, farm organisations, politicians and others in agriculture in the Caribbean to examine topics which are of common interest to the development of the region. Indeed, the record shows that these Conferences have covered many subjects and participants have been drawn from a very wide range of disciplines and organisations.

The theme of this the Ninth Conference is most topical, namely, *The Relationship between Agriculture and Other Sectors with particular reference to the Competition for Resources in the Commonwealth Caribbean*. There is little doubt that at a time when all of us in the Caribbean are endeavouring to improve performance in agriculture, reduce earnings, increasing food import bill, save scarce foreign exchange earnings, increase our export earnings and particularly to increase the nutrition and incomes of our people, it is incumbent on us all to take a serious look at many of the aspects so clearly identified under the main topics which will be discussed in plenary sessions.

I am aware that the Conference of Agricultural Planners held in Montserrat in October 1973, a decision was taken to recommend to the various member Governments that immediate and prompt action be taken to stem the indiscriminate use of good agricultural land for other purposes. Jamaica is in total agreement with the principle and is taking strong measures to secure the proper use of all its agricultural lands. The Conference also spelt out in clear terms the need for updating techniques, technology, services, etc. within the region, to give effect to the development programmes which are necessary if agriculture is to achieve its potential.

Since the establishment of Carifta (now Caricom), emphasis has been on inter-regional trade in which the LDCs would be able to obtain a greater share of the *agricultural cake*. The Government of Jamaica is committed to the Caricom Agreement and pledge to work within the spirit of this Agreement.

The conditions facing each of our several countries are very similar and often we produce the same crops, though, of course, to varying degrees. But our similarities only begin with like produce; we have idle lands, idle hands, unskilled labour, low efficiency in organisation, and unstructured markets for crops produced both for local consumption and for export. There is scope for greater inter-regional co-operation through research; through shared purchasing of inputs such as fertilisers, chemicals and raw materials, through shared trained programmes. With co-operation in these areas, our resources will be increased. Instead of losing from diseconomies of scale, our voice will be strengthened in the perennial negotiations for just and equitable treatment in the markets of the developed world.

It is therefore, in this spirit that I am happy to have the Government and people of Jamaica host this Ninth Agricultural Economics Conference. I must congratulate those who have spent so much time and effort in organising the Conference. I do not know how many problems will be solved during your deliberations, but I feel sure that this time will be well spent if at least, there is consensus on some of the action that we in this region must take.

Finally, may I extend to you all an open invitation to see at first hand Jamaica's exciting attempts to abolish once and for all our dependency on food imports from North America and our traditional extra-regional sources. Operation GROW with its trinity of Food Farms, Project Land Lease and Aided Self-Help which was launched by our Prime Minister in July, 1973, have already demonstrated that we have the capability to do this.

The whole concept of our Food Farm Programme is built around Jamaica's realisation of the fact that the world is facing a food crisis which could grow to serious proportions unless individual nations bend every effort to produce the food they are best able to grow. We realise that the time could come - and this is something Dr. Boerma, Head of the FAO has been speaking about quite often - that even if we are able to meet the prices which would be charged for food in the years ahead there could be none to purchase since each country must first look after the needs of its citizens.

Please look at our projects. We would welcome your comments.

It now gives me great pleasure to declare the Conference formally opened and to wish you every success in your deliberations and to say to old friends, welcome again and to new friends, I am grateful to have you here and look forward to continued friendly relations.

Thank you very much Ladies and Gentlemen.

PLENARY PAPERS