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## DISCUSSION REPORT

*(Paper presented by J.B. Yankey)*

The discussion centred around two main issues: the profitability of the banana industry and the impact of the Agricultural Marketing Protocol on farming in Dominica. The viability of bananas was questioned in view of the facts that fertilizer prices had almost doubled in the past year and that the yield per acre was under 3 tons, when a yield of 7 or 8 tons per acre might be needed to make the industry viable. What emerged was that the price of fertiliser was not a good criterion for judging the performance of the industry as there were a few hundred farms producing 14 to 20 tons per acre. Agriculture's performance must be looked at on a crop by crop basis, determining who were the full-time or part-time businessmen in agriculture, what they are doing, their time and occupation. The questions must be directed at the people who derive their livelihood from agriculture and these are people not of 3 tons but more possibly of 10 tons.

With respect to the Agricultural Marketing Protocol, the point was made that Dominica had not responded to the available opportunities. Dominica was a prime producer of bananas, citrus, coconut, bay oil, vegetable straws, food crops, mainly of root crops rather than vegetables, mainly for export to the United Kingdom and the United States of America. On the other hand, the Protocol emphasized very strongly on food, vegetable and roots whereas Dominica was not even self-sufficient in vegetables and exported root crops to the Virgin Islands, some residuals to Barbados. Opportunities presented under the AMP were handicapped by the marketing process - since Dominica is not self-sufficient in vegetables, the local market is more lucrative for the farmer who has to go through more risks because of their perishability. The domestic industry cannot be moved as has been tried, for example in the citrus industry. The attractiveness in the region for citrus is second-place to the United Kingdom market as the latter is a profitable one.

In order to further develop the AMP to benefit a country like Dominica, serious efforts should be made for self-sufficiency in food. The Import Bill in all the territories is out of hand and the first thing to do is to decide regionally what are the areas of production in which countries ought to specialise. The countries will first produce for domestic consumption and then for the AMP territories. He emphasized that unless a commitment is made, nothing will ever be done. The region has strong potential for food production but some of the best lands are in other crops. The question must be answered as to whether it is possible to produce agronomically crops like garlic, and if so, how to produce.

Between 1955 and 1965, production of bananas almost doubled, implying that there was an increase in the areas under production. The area under domestic crops was somewhat reduced by smaller farms coming into banana production, the reason being that the industry gained momentum when public policy in releasing land and providing access roads was implemented. Thousands of acres were thus opened up and many subsistent producers of food went into bananas. Because of that there was substantive supply of labour to the large estates and their availability

for labour became minimal, with an apparent shortage of labour. All the suitable areas available have more or less been exhausted and consequently agricultural production must be increased from the existing areas.

On the question of whether there was any situation where the co-operative took over the functions of an original institution and had caused an increase in income to the farmer, Dr. Yankey replied that of all the co-operatives which started in the sixties, the only one which could be called that was called banana producers. This was a politically-oriented organization, with poor management who quarrel when prices go down and do nothing when they are good. Those who are exploring new avenues are the strongest co-operatives operating their own distilleries, under their own management. They are principally small producers but something must be done to keep them going or they will drop by the wayside.