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THEME:

"MAXIMIZING REGIONAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD
IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN"

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

J.B. Yankey
(President, Caribbean Agro-Economic Society)

Mr. Chairman; Honourable Minister of State for Agriculture; Mr. President of the International Association of Agricultural Economists; Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen; Delegates.

This is the Tenth Anniversary of the West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference Series. This Annual Conference, until 1974, was managed by the staff of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad. Much of the care and attention required in the growing-up period was ably provided by many of the faces which we see here today who were and those who are still members of the staff of that valuable regional institution.

Many of the Caricom Governments have had the opportunity of hosting the Conference. This occasion therefore gives rise to reflection on the contribution that the Governments of Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have made in fostering the progress made over the past decade. We are most grateful to the public sectors of the Caribbean countries referred to for the responsiveness to our requests for assistance and support. We wish to take this opportunity to express our thanks and gratitude, and to record our sincere appreciation.

Caricom institutions such as the University of the West Indies, the University of Guyana, the Caribbean Development Bank, the Caricom Secretariat and the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute have played important parts in supporting the organisation of the Conference Series. Without their kind and varied sources of assistance we would not have had the success in promoting and developing this regional undertaking. This requires, to a large extent, the co-ordination of effort from our available manpower, particularly as the organisers, most of whom are employees of these institutions, live and work in different territories. I must further mention the substantial financial support in cash or in kind which these regional bodies have made towards the organisation and development of the Conference Series.

All these contributions have assisted us greatly in measuring up to the various tasks which we must fulfil to successfully carry on such activity for ten successive years. We wish, therefore, to say at this stage how grateful we are for this interest and support from regional institutions.

Commercial and financial organisations such as national business groups and the regional commercial banks have also come forward with the kind and helpful hand which have enabled us to improve our Conference facilities. Putting all these together there is no doubt that we have matured not only by experience in organisation but with the assistance and support of the public and private sectors of the Caricom region, the dedication and commitment of our professionals, technicians and farmers who have attended Conferences year after year; and those who

have always been willing to prepare and present papers within the many Conferences themes which we have covered since 1966. The publication of the Conference proceedings which are always available from the Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management of the University of the West Indies, Trinidad, should be used as a continuous source of knowledge and an up-to-date reference for all those who are engaged in practical work which arises out of policies and programmes designed to influence the development of the agricultural sector of this region. Those include policy makers, public advisors, professionals, technicians, commodity groups, farmers and others.

Last year, at the conclusion of the Ninth Conference in Jamaica, we entered into phase two of the Conference Series. We inaugurated the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society which, as you know, was discussed as far back as 1970 when we met in Roseau, Dominica. Today we are one year old. This Conference is the first of the many activities which we plan to engage in, as specified in our Constitution. It is, in fact, one of our major responsibilities as outlined in the objectives of the Society.

Many of you here tonight are not new to this assembly of persons engaged in agriculture in one way or the other. This Conference however has a major difference to those of the past. Maybe it is because our Society is named *Agro-Economics*, but it is a deliberate effort on our part to involve a multi-disciplinary team of agriculturists in the organisation and participation of this and future Conferences. Our target is the agricultural sector of our numerous national economies and this includes the *farm, the farmer, the farm family, the market place, agro-industry, marine life* (fisheries resource), the *supporting services*, but particularly those persons principally responsible for the organisation and management of this sector at the highest national level. If we are to make any impact on the development of agriculture by our involvement in discussing the real issues of the day, examining the practical problems and, as workers ourselves, looking for solutions and going back home to see how these can be effectively considered and implemented; then in our dialogue we must include all those who play a significant part at all levels; in the planning, development and implementation phases of any agricultural development process. This does not give the agricultural economist any monopoly role and it is most crucial that the farmer is involved and plays his respected part. Not only because from a diversity of views comes better answers to problems, but also because agriculture is complex and embraces many disciplines. It makes far more sense for us to meet, as we do this week, to come to grips with the vast difficulties with which agriculture is faced and how we as professionals, technicians and farmers can make a convincing and progressive case for a speedy revival of the agricultural sectors of the Caribbean territories as a stimulating and self-sustaining force in rural development; and in addition to prescribe and involve ourselves in the execution of possible courses of action in our respective territories, including the various national and regional institutions with which we work.

There is still more talk on the role that agriculture should play in human development compared to the action which takes place. Fortunately for us, we are in a country where agricultural development is taken very seriously, particularly towards self-sufficiency in food supplies. This

had a great deal to do with our choice of venue. We are most grateful to the Government of Guyana for hosting this Tenth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference.

On behalf of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society, I wish to express our appreciation and thanks to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture for all the assistance and support that has been given to us by his Ministry and other public agencies.

There are people in responsible positions in the Caribbean who continuously criticize professionals in this field of agriculture, as broadly as one may define it, for their lack of initiative and enthusiasm in tackling the real practical problems and for their reluctance to get out in the field to manage and supervise the work that must be done to get agricultural production and marketing in full gear. I must say we have a lot to blame ourselves for even though one can say that the criticisms, in most cases, are not always justified. I think, on the whole, that professionals tend to be too cautious and less adventurous in doing things for which we have the knowledge (which may not be too precise or complete), but could be used with experience, good judgement, insight and the commitment to take risks in getting the grass root things done in the interest of the countries which we are called to serve from time to time. We seem to spend more time talking around the subject than actually assisting in getting things done in agriculture in particular and in rural development as a whole. I hope this Society will find ways and means to be of practical assistance to Caricom Governments who are anxious to allocate resources for agrarian reform, improvement in marketing systems and facilities, price stabilization, crop insurance and so on.

It is my wish that this Conference which has drawn agriculturists from many fields and different countries will renew our spirit and will give us as much as is possible to go home and improve our agricultural situations, particularly as we focus on efforts to maximize food supplies.

Finally, I wish to say how happy we are to have Dr. S.R. Sen who is the current President of the International Association of Agricultural Economists. He has held this position since 1970. He is an Executive Director of the World Bank and has held many distinguished positions including Planning Adviser to the Government of India and Professor of Economics, University of Dacca. We are pleased to have Dr. Sen with us and I wish to invite him to address us.

[Impromptu address delivered by Dr. Sen.]