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THE PROBLEMS OF MARKETING DOMINICA FOOD CROPS IN TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL MARKETS

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Introduction

The economy of Dominica is so totally controlled from the outside that one can hardly define it as an economy if that word is to mean the activity organised, planned and controlled by Dominicans with a view to creating wealth. The figures presented in Appendix I hardly suggest the accumulation of wealth; rather, the State of Dominica is parallel to the agricultural plantations set up for colonial production, financed and absolutely controlled from the metropolis.

As Dominican, Caribbean, and Third World people, we live in a State of dependence upon richer countries that creates a cultural and economic framework within which we see ourselves struggling for more survival rather than working on for our sustained advancement. This narrow view of ourselves restricts our creativity, our self-confidence, leaving our people docile and passive at a time when docility and passivity characterise only the wretched of the earth.

From the outset then, the authors wish to make it clear that in dealing with any problem affecting Dominica we lay no claim to objectivity and impartial analysis as *"we are part of the framework of underdevelopment, we are part of the dynamics of poverty and have a totally subjective view of the required solution"*. [1].

In our view, overcoming the problems of food marketing does not mean participating in exercises that will leave us bobbing in a sea of academic possibilities and statistics. In this matter *"what we need most are studies pregnant with ideas, not studies full of sterile detail ..."* [1] as an efficient marketing organisation cannot operate side by side with untrained and unaware producers, poor communications, poor systems of data collection and collation, policies encouraging consumption of imports rather than the production of substitutes, the absence of a will to apply regional policies of cooperation, the obsession of national leaders with the consolidation of political controls.

These problems of marketing are the problems of underdevelopment at the micro level and we believe these will be successfully tackled only when scientific analysis of the problems is backed by the preparedness to tackle the social, political and economic inequities of our plantation economy.

Identifying the Markets Using Target Criteria

There are three broad criteria which can be applied in the preliminary identification of markets:

1. Target selection.
2. Target strategy.
3. Target analysis.

1. target country;
2. target group; and
3. target product.

Target Country

Antigua provides a traditional market for Dominican green bananas and other food crops, most of which are sold to the indigenous population. In assessing the Antigua market we can employ broad considerations of population growth, distribution, and age groups leaving out the matter of consumer taste, an already established constant.

With the introduction of a tourist industry, hence large numbers of foreign visitors, Antigua no longer remains a traditional market as the tourist group presents new eating habits which the hotels and restaurants respond to out of income necessity. These new acting habits gradually rub-off into the indigenous population to the point where a hot dog replaces the green-fig at the dinner table. The target country criterion then, is subject to variation and by itself is not a fool proof means in market identification.

Target Group

This concept is even more dramatically illustrated in the U.S. Virgin Islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix where the eating habits of the aliens had created a market for Dominican food crops. Alongside this group, the tourist population and the locals remain untouched by the Dominican products due largely to consumer taste. To open up this untapped target group to Dominican food crops requires attention to third criterion of market identification.

Target Product

The tourist group in St. Thomas referred to above, which has a high demand for items such as corn, cauliflower, and sweet peppers will be reached by Dominican producers only if the quality, packing, supply, price and promotion are competitive with existing suppliers from the U.S. Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico. Unless this happens the tourist group, although geographically accessible, remains an inaccessible market target group.

With these three criteria in mind, we submit Table 1 as an illustration of the application of the three criteria in identifying potential markets. This identification is intended to give preliminary indication of market possibilities and not to conclusively select a market target. This final selection can only be done after more complete market research has revealed reliable long-term potential.

In applying the three target criteria as an aid to preliminary market identification it is clear that geography, taste or product quality can be considered alone, but that combined application of the three will help reveal early market suitability of a target area.

Table 1. Potential Markets for Dominican Products

Crop	Target Country	Target Group	Target Product vis-a-vis Target Group		Remarks
			New	Old	
Plantain	St. Croix	Aliens		+	Expand and consolidate
Sweet pepper	St. Croix	Visitors	+		Promotion and distribution
Green bananas	Antigua	Locals		+	Expand and consolidate
Dasheen	Antigua	Locals	+		Promotion
Plantains	St. Croix	Visitors	+		Promotion and processing

Source: See reference [2].

Notes: According to this table, St. Croix presents various market possibilities. For plantains, directed at the alien group the market needs only to be expanded and consolidated through improved quality and distribution. For the visitor group plantains had to be promoted since they constitute a new item to this target group. In addition some processing as *salted chips* may make plantains more readily acceptable with this target group already more used to snacks.

Sweetpepper is not a new item to the visitor target group (although relatively new to the Dominican producer) and it may be feasible to channel this item through existing wholesale outlets which have already cornered the promotion and distribution of sweet peppers.

For green bananas and dasheen the products are the major consideration in so far as the green bananas already are fully accepted but the dasheen finds difficulty with consumer taste. Whereas it may be beyond the promotional capabilities of Dominica to introduce the Antiguan to dasheen in commercial quantities, it is well within our capabilities to expand and consolidate the green banana market.

Marketing and Nutrition

In recent years, other importation criteria have surfaced when the organisation of marketing was being considered, notable among these is the concern for human nutrition, and more specifically nutrition.

The matter is raised here to emphasize that no matter what high level of technical work is carried out by Caribbean scientists all is lost if we do not heed the primary purpose for which we are here - to help our people improve their whole level of living, not simply to earn more money. In this regard, we wish this conference to be particularly aware of our concern for the proper nutrition of all Caribbean people even as we concern ourselves with tripling earnings from export agriculture.

It should be noted here that the farmer is of greater concern to us than maximising export earnings not because these very earnings are re-exported to buy other foods which could very well be produced in Dominica (Appendix II); not because many of the more nutritious foods (peas, beans, etc.) are more suited to the small farm than the traditional export crops being constantly promoted; not because these food and vegetable crops are of higher value than

most traditional crops (on a per pound basis); not even because these food crops can help deal with the high rural unemployment plaguing our country; we are concerned about the nutrition of our people because our purpose is man.

On-Farm Problems

It is clear to us that the successful marketing of any product commences at the point of production where costs, qualities and other factors affecting eventual returns are largely determined. The need for this coordination of production and marketing in the areas of policy, programmes, and services had been seen in Dominica before now by Michael White former General Manager of the Dominica Agricultural Marketing Board. Mr. White laid out a 10 point programme for intensive coordination between the Marketing Board and the Division of Agriculture any one of which had it been implemented would have improved the agricultural situation measurably. For example, it was proposed that *"the Agricultural Division and the Board cooperate in the selection of a number of crops which are considered to be suitable for production locally and which can be marketed outside Dominica"* [3]. This point requires no further elaboration but rather implementation.

Much has been said and written about the farmers of Dominica [4,5,6] but the farms exhibiting suitable agronomic technology (especially conservation and rotation) are still scarce; even more infrequent are farms where records of any kind are being kept.

But it is not simply a matter of modern technology, because the peasant in his own way has evolved a most useful set of agronomic practices that have permitted him to survive in the absence of organised supportive services [7].

To our minds the major stumbling block to a more efficient on-farm production system in the peasant sector is the absence of organised collective effort in production, provision of services, such as grading, storage, transport and packing, and the training and education programmes which would highlight the need for these efforts.

Off-Farm Problems

These include the areas such as roads, research, supplies, and credit which are normally handled by Government and farmers' associations. The major bottlenecks seem to be at two levels, one, the level of the regional institutions designed to service agricultural marketing, and two, the level of national policy-making.

It is difficult for us in Dominica to understand how with an Agricultural Marketing Protocol (AMP) operating, Trinidad and Tobago can be launching full scale into bay oil production even while Dominican bay oil is sitting at home waiting for supplies currently on the market to be depleted. If it is going to be a *dog-eat-dog* approach we advocate the scrapping of the hypocrisy of an AMP and the public reprimanding of those regionalists who glibly talk of inter-territorial cooperation and understanding.

At the regional level also, we find that Geest is being difficult when he can't guarantee space on his ships for our produce but we totally ignore a West Indies Shipping Company with one Federal boat left which we

have not yet been able to organise for regular inter-island trade.

The problem closer to home, however, is the contradiction of some Governments placing no restrictions on the importation of food substitutes (mainly canned) even when they cry for local food production and the support of trade with sister producing islands. We face the absence of a rational and regular pricing system even for locally produced and sold items.

When an agricultural country can restrict the travelling officers of the extension division to 200 miles per month while security officers are given unlimited mileage it is little wonder that the farmer is vaguely familiar with his extension officer.

These contradictions at the national level leaves little doubt in our minds as to the absence of off-farm support for production and marketing of Dominican food crops.

Transport Systems

The poor state of marketing has often been blamed on the absence of shipping. Those who subscribe to this view seem to deny the importance of the on-farm and off-farm problems already mentioned in the paper. We do not subscribe to this view, not because the provision of shipping is a waste of time if production and distribution cannot first be regularised and rationalised; not because we see extreme contradiction between policy and action at the Government level which hinders the solving of the very problems that policy addresses, but because *there is shipping available*.

In Dominica alone, four vessels providing 242 net registered tons were listed in 1968 [8]. In that same year, 135 small vessels were in operation on inter-island routes in the East Caribbean, with a total of about 10,000 net registered tons. Many of these ships, especially from Antigua, Montserrat and St. Kitts are available for charter at short notice. In 1968 the total volume of trade between Antigua and Dominica alone that was transported on small vessels was 639 tons. From Dominica to St. Kitts in the same year, the volume was 641 tons.

In addition to boats, Dominica is served by Caribbean Air Services (St. Croix based), Dominica Airways, Air Guadeloupe, and LIAT. All except LIAT offer charter services to most East Caribbean territories. One of these airlines, Caribbean Air Services, already has a weekly track volume in food of 40 to 50 thousand pounds.

Not to limit our view to the Caribbean, the 1974/75 grapefruit saw the dilemma of farmers refusing to ship fruits by the Dutch boats which were available through fear of displeasing Geest, the regular carrier.

The problem then, is not the absence of shipping, rather it has to do with the island's irregular seasonal production which forces the vessels to seek business elsewhere creating a situation where they are not always available when production is on. The other aspect of the problem then is the lack of control by producers over any shipping which would ensure transportation of produce when available. The need for this is well illustrated by the grapefruit growers situation this year.

We must admit as a final point on shipping, that most of the small

vessels plying between the islands are not designed for the safe carrying of food and vegetable crops and this has significant bearing in produce quality. This has a limiting effect on the possibilities for expansion of existing markets and seriously affects Dominica's chances of breaking into new markets.

The Marketing Board

The failure of this body to provide Dominica producers with a serious sustained level of service needs no elaboration instead this paper confines itself to making recommendations for vitalizing the Dominica Agricultural Marketing Board.

Recommendations

In view of our analysis of the problems of marketing as being the problems of underdevelopment our recommendations cannot be taken as a shopping list of ideas with some items to be taken and others left out. The total or package approach is what is suggested here, as more of these recommendations will be effectively implemented if action on the others is delayed.

Policy

The efforts of production must be more closely linked with marketing activity a situation which can be achieved by the proper coordination of the policies, programmes and services of the Marketing Board and the Division of Agriculture. For example, there can be cooperation in the *"selection of a number of crops which are considered to be suitable for production locally and which can be marketed outside Dominica"* [3].

Greater incentive to food crop production can be provided through subsidized (credit) fertilizer, and collective storage, for example.

National policies must be broad enough to encourage the producer and market associations to seek buyers in areas such as Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China (more likely possibilities for the sale of processed foods exists with these countries).

Shipping

Any small vessels built for the inter-Caribbean trade, must be specially designed to carry food products in a condition that will permit the produce to arrive at market with quality preserved.

Shipping schedules need to be regularised but this can only be done for agricultural produce when the producer can guarantee regular supplies of sufficient volumes to make the vessel's stop economic.

Producer groups need to own and manage their own vessels.

Any discriminatory regulations against small vessels in the Caribbean ports need to be removed.

Market Research

Producer groups need to work closely with existing market agencies

and the division of agriculture in compiling market information starting at the local level then channeling the data to regional organisations - not vice versa.

Market and production forecasting must be introduced.

Production

All forces need to be mobilised to regularise products for ensuring year round supplies of most food crops.

Land utilisation based on all available agronomic, economic and sociological data needs to be immediately activated especially in the absence of an effective price system to penalise misuse of land and reward rational farm development.

The encouragement of producer associations and cooperatives which would facilitate introduction of innovations in the above areas and be able to exert pressure on national agencies for implementation of suitable policy.

Education

We recommend the simultaneous launching of a two-pronged programme, at one level, the *Informal Education Effort* and the *Formal Education Effort* at the other level.

The informal level involves training the producer in better methods of production, harvesting, handling, storage and record-keeping. We recommend an approach that will bring rural youth of high school standard into dialogical contact with farmer with a view to overcoming the limiting effects of information lag, on commercial production. This approach has the effect of educating the young teacher to farming, and training the farmer in organised commercial production.

At this level we also recommend that Caribbean professionals, academics and technicians engage the producer in dialogue aimed at achieving mutual understanding of the dynamics on the plantation economy.

The formal level of education is aimed at programme pursued at University and Institutes of higher learning. These programmes leave us totally unprepared for the implementation of change and improvements in our various sectors. Our training has been carried outside of a development perspective, we see ourselves repairing a broken structure that has never worked well anyway, rather than being creative in the bold formation of the new Caribbean society we love to talk about. This total awareness approach is advocated because ultimately the producer of food in Dominica should come to realise that any move to organise himself for improved marketing will cause repercussion throughout the production, service, and policy-making levels of the economy - a step towards total transformation of our agricultural economy from the plantation type to a worker-managed and controlled economy.

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Appendix

Balance of Visible Trade, 1961-1970, and Imports of Selected Agricultural Products, 1969-1971, Dominica.

Year	Balance of Visible Trade (EC\$'000)	Irish Potatoes		Beans, Peas, Lentils		Onions		Vegetables	
		Volume (lb.)	Value (EC\$)	Volume (lb.)	Value (EC\$)	Volume (lb.)	Value (EC\$)	Volume (lb.)	Value (EC\$)
1961	-3,290.6								
1962	-5,060.1								
1963	-4,124.5								
1964	-6,365.8								
1965	-8,103.7								
1966	-6,895.7								
1967	-6,469.8								
1968	-7,732.4								
1969	-10,565.0	576,067	50,870	418,446	133,252	370,613	44,237	142,699	39,810
1970	-19,604.6	503,636	56,563	406,644	133,853	378,221	64,726	146,806	44,966
1971		573,261	51,203	235,990	78,409	426,796	56,976	42,406	13,147

- Sources: (1) Balance of Invisible Trade, *Annual Statistical Digest*, No. 4, Dominica, 1970.
 (2) "Agricultural Imports", Division of Planning and Development, Government Headquarters, Roseau, Dominica.