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THE PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS IN THE CARIBBEAN WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE NEW STRATEGIES FOR AGRICULTURE

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Food manufacture or processing in the Caribbean is a wide topic and one that inevitably needs to be looked at in relation to the different countries involved. To generalise is both difficult and dangerous.

Any ideas of large scale production sited in one country to serve all the Caribbean countries run into such problems as:

- (i) identifying markets
- (ii) siting the operation
- (iii) organising supplies
- (iv) selecting people.

Identifying the Markets

- the countries to be served
- quantities and prices
- competition from within and outside the region and any other protection that may be provided for local production
- most important - what does the market want? It may want a new product - or just a development of an old product packed in a different size or more convenient packaging.
- identifying the place for the product in the market is too often ignored until initial production has proved disappointing and there is a search for ways to recover the situation - *Market Identification is the First Step.*

Having identified what is to be produced the location must be chosen.

Siting the Operation

Siting the operation will need to take account of such factors as:

- the source of raw materials, perishable foods may dictate a site near the producing farms
- source of packaging, where cans should be considered
- people may be needed in small or large numbers and that can have a bearing on the choice of site
- the infrastructure needed: water, drains, electricity, can all be important factors. The cost of electricity or other power as well as staff size may make the difference between an expensive or acceptable price

- distribution within the country and by ship to other countries in the region will require study. The development of a better shipping service by WISCO and other shipping lines between the various markets should assist considerably. With a few high-priced or perishable items air transport may be a worthwhile option.

Organising Supplies

Organising the supply of raw materials is always necessary but where it involves agricultural produce this often needs very extensive organisation.

If a large financial investment is made in the form of buildings and machinery and staff, it is vital that a controlled, regular flow of raw materials of the correct specification is obtained. This requires planning - deciding what quantities are required and how they are to reach the factory. From this, the acreage to be grown can be decided and arranging the growing or farming tackled. Where the product is grown on trees this can require planning over several years, but where it is a quick growing crop it will still need to be planned.

In some cases the company may need to do some farming itself - either owning and cultivating its own farms or renting land and paying for it to be cultivated as it wants - thus providing a model for other farmers and possibly an area for trials of new varieties.

In many cases the factory will need to secure its supplies by *CONTRACTING* for an acreage or a definite tonnage of product to be grown. This will have the effect of guaranteeing the farmer a market for his crop at an agreed price and the factory an assured supply - not dependent on *market conditions*.

Selecting People

Whilst all that I have already said is necessary - the most important factor of all is *people who make things happen*. Getting the right people to start with is essential - training them and keeping their interest in their Company and what it produces is also vital. As a result of advertising through television, radio, books and newspapers, a market is created for better and more sophisticated products. These need better production and quality control which comes back to trained people.

If we in the CARICOM countries are to produce foods to be sold outside the region, we need to recognise the need to meet international standards of quality and packaging and marketing. Failure to do so will mean that our products will soon fail in many markets. Our own people travel abroad a great deal and now demand higher standards in what they buy and eat, so the old style packs will fail if they are not kept up to the latest standards.

It can fairly be said that what I have listed applies to any country in the world - that is true, but it does not mean that these things can be ignored here in the Caribbean.

It does mean that in many of the smaller islands the cost of getting produce from farm to factory over bad roads and in small quantities from small farmers is very expensive. The cost of cans brought in from elsewhere as well as power supplies can all mean that products will be too expensive

to compete with the same product produced in quantity with easier and cheaper conditions prevailing. We must, therefore, find ways of competing by finding new ways of producing our products, using new technologies - packaging that is less expensive to produce and transport - a different, better product that will be able to compete in the market in its own right - not as a commodity product like everyone else's and completely dependant on price.

I have referred to the problems facing the manufacturer - briefly because I am only one of a number of speakers.

What are the Prospects?

The manufacturer in the region - whether he is long established or new has to find his market - new markets are opening whilst old ones are closing - *all the time*.

School feeding is increasing all over the world. Here in Trinidad some 44,000 school meals a day are being provided at the present time for 175 days per year, but there is a need for some 300,000 meals per day to provide for all the Primary and Secondary schools.

The company at present providing these meals has indicated the quantities involved. For 300,000 meals the annual quantities include:

Cabbage, cucumbers, tomatoes and lettuce	-	2,000 tons/yr.	=	22.9 tons/day	
Carrots, beet and bodi	-	475 "	=	2.7 "	
Eggs	-	954 "	=	5.45 "	
Beef, chicken, goat and minced meat	-	5,145 "	=	29.4 "	
Fish	-	1,227 "	=	7.0 "	

These quantities present logistical problems in ensuring that they will be available when required - so much each day in term-time, not in the holidays.

These quantities are sufficient to warrant machinery to peel and chop and prepare and so they will raise the question of a small number of central kitchens with the problems of transport to the many schools or some form of preparation in many locations near the schools with the distribution problem transferred to the raw materials in unprepared or partly prepared form.

I mention school feeding in Trinidad because it is topical and illustrates the new opportunities that exist. Whilst the question of school feeding is being tackled, similar needs such as universities, hospitals, mental homes and prisons should be considered. They provide more constant requirements.

The oil rich states of Arabia are in the process of setting up elaborate school feeding programmes which are being tackled in various ways, with countries vying to pack complete meals or separate components. They may be opportunities for Caribbean producers there.

The world population is growing very fast and I wonder if the farming possibilities in Guyana and Belize particularly can provide more food which will need processing in some form, preferably in the region thus providing work and benefit locally.

How Can Manufacturers Get Help in These Matters?

1. The Caribbean Food Corporation has been set up by the 12 CARICOM States to be the Regional Implementing Organisation for Agricultural Projects. CFC is relatively new, but has developed fast in the last two years and now has a pool of analysts with expertise in a range of relevant subjects and the ability to call in others when the need arises. CFC is there to help set up commercially viable projects in the Region where they will have a regional dimension.
2. The Caribbean Development Bank is there to provide help to industry and agriculture.
3. CARIRI and CARDI are there to help with research development in agriculture and food processing. These are regional organisations, but in addition there are national facilities such as Agricultural Development Banks, Food and Agriculture Corporations etc.

We are discussing a subject that interests us all *vitaly* - FOOD. There are opportunities which have to be found - there are certainly difficulties, but there is now a range of tools to do the job.

Winston Churchill said at a critical time *Give us the tools and we will finish the job* - I think we have them.