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RANJIT H. SINGH
(President, Caribbean Agro-Economic Society)

*The Caribbean Agro-Economic Society and Caribbean
Agricultural Diversification*

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

On behalf of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society I wish to extend a warm welcome to this Conference on the theme "Implementing Agricultural Diversification: Policies and Strategies."

As many of you may know, the West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference Series is a long-standing one, having been started in the early 60s by the Department of Agricultural Economics & Farm Management at UWI. It continued as an annual event for about a decade before the formation of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society in the early 1970's. The series has continued as one of the major activities of the Society with continued support from the Department of Agricultural Economics & Farm Management, UWI and the Governments of the various countries co-hosting the Conference.

This year we are pleased to be in beautiful St. Christopher and Nevis for our 19th meeting – the second time the Conference has been hosted here.

For those who are new to the West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference, the question may well be asked – what is the purpose of these meetings? What do we hope to achieve? We in the society recognize that generally as a Region we share many common problems of agricultural development, although one may note different emphases between the smaller and larger states. More importantly, however, we feel that as a Region, we need to pool our limited professional/technical resources in solving the problems of development.

The West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference Series therefore is one forum where we attempt to bring expertise from our countries to focus on specific problems. Our meetings therefore attempt to bring together professionals and functionaries in agriculture from the various countries to:

- (i) Share experiences and to
- (ii) examine and critically assess various options/alternatives.

We are therefore attempting to expose Caribbean solutions to Caribbean problems!

The Society wishes to express its gratitude to the various Governments over the years who have been co-sponsors as we have moved the Conference from country to country in the Region. We are also grateful for the tremendous support from The University of the West Indies from the very start of the Conference Series. The Conference Series is considered a major outreach activity for the University. Through its Department of Agricultural Economics & Farm Management, the University also assists with the publication of the Proceedings and also supports the Secretariat of the Society.

Although we have identified the problem of Agricultural Diversification as a problem of major concern at the present time, clearly the issue has always been with us. Concerns to diversify agriculture date back to the post World War II period. At that time, however, the focus was more on production of food crops for domestic consumption.

At the current time, major global developments have impacted heavily on the performance of agriculture in many countries. Notable factors include the structural over-supply of major agricultural commodities, shifts in the direction of trade (e.g. sugar exports from the EEC) and the growing importance of substitutes and synthetics.

In the context of these developments therefore, it is imperative that we view Agricultural Diversification in the broadest context. It includes not only diversification of primary production but also:

- (1) The diversification in the use of products/by-products/waste products
- (2) The diversification of markets
- (3) The diversification in terms of product lines from primary commodities which we can produce, particularly those for which we have comparative advantage.

It is within the context of this broad definition of Agricultural Diversification that the Conference deliberations should proceed.

Last August the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society and Caribbean Food Crops Society hosted a joint meeting in Antigua on the technical issues in Diversification. For this Conference we are focussing on Implementation - specifically the Policies and Strategies necessary for successful implementation.

We think we have an interesting programme, and we look forward to fruitful discussions/deliberations.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Society,

I wish to express our sincere appreciation to all the delegates who have given up their valuable time and have travelled to this meeting. We have delegates not only from the Region but also from the U.S. (Howard University, the University of Florida and New Mexico State University), and our feature speaker is from the U.K.

I wish to also express our gratitude to the co-sponsors of the Conference:

- (1) The Department of Agricultural Economics, UWI.
- (2) The Caribbean Agricultural Extension Project of the Department Agricultural Extension, UWI.
- (3) The host country - the Government of St. Christopher and Nevis.

We greatly appreciate your generous assistance and support in the planning and execution of this Conference.

Thank you, kindly.