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**OPENING SESSION**

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# OPENING ADDRESS

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL ESPAT  
(Minister of Agriculture & Fisheries, Belize, C.A.)

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*Salutations:*

Rev. Fr. Noel Leslie, Pastor Sacred Heart Parish, San Ignacio; Mr. Rodney H. Neal, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries; Dr. Carlisle Pemberton, President, Caribbean Agro-Economics Society; Honourable Members of the National Assembly; Members of the Diplomatic Corp.; Permanent Secretaries; Heads of Departments; Personnel of Government Ministries; Invited Guests; Friends from abroad; Delegates.

It is a pleasure and honour for me as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries to address you on the occasion of the 21st West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference being hosted in Belize by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Belize, the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society and the Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management of the Faculty of Agriculture of The University of the West Indies.

Permit me to say how happy we are to be given the opportunity to host this important conference, and rightly so in the lovely town of San Ignacio in the heart of one of the leading agricultural districts of Belize. The theme of the Conference "*Sustainable Agriculture and Economic Development in the Caribbean*" is quite appropriate bearing in mind the proposed free trade regimes facing the Region amid rapidly increasing concerns for environmental protection and sustainability of resource use.

At the same time, let me take this opportunity to welcome you all in particular the foreign delegates and invited guests. I personally encourage our visitors to take time out to savour our excellent cuisine and enjoy our fine Belizean hospitality both of which Belize is known to be second to none. I am also sure that you will get a chance to see a bit of the beautiful country side

during your field visits on Thursday of this week which I know you will find most stimulating and rewarding.

The concept of sustainable development received prominence internationally with the release in 1987 of the Brundtland Report by the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development titled: "*Our Common Future*". This report identified the need for an integration of environmental and economic objectives to ensure sustainable development of economic systems. Sustainable development was defined in the Brundtland report as "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*".

The word "*sustainability*" is now widely used in development circles. In the context of Agriculture, sustainability basically refers to "*the capacity to remain productive while maintaining the resource base*". For example, the Technical Advisory Committee of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (TAC/CGIAR 1988) states: "*Sustainable Agriculture is the successful management of resources for agriculture to satisfy changing human needs while maintaining or enhancing the quality of the environments and conserving natural resources*". Many people, however, use a wider definition, judging agriculture to be sustainable if it is (after Gips 1986):

- Ecologically sound, which means that the quality of natural resources is maintained and the vitality of the entire agro-ecosystem - from humans, crops and animals to soil organisms - is enhanced. This is best ensured when the soil is managed and the health of crops, animals and people is maintained through biological processes (self-regulation). Local resources are used in a way that minimizes losses of nutrients,

biomass and energy, and avoids pollution. Emphasis is on the use of renewable resources.

- Economically viable, which means that farmers can produce enough for self-sufficiency and/or income, and gain sufficient returns to warrant the labour and costs involved. Economic viability is measured not only in terms of direct farm produce (yield) but also in terms of functions such as conserving resources and minimizing risks.

- Socially just, which means that resources and power are distributed in such a way that the basic needs of all members of society are met and their rights to land use, adequate capital, technical assistance and market opportunities are assured. All people have the opportunity to participate in decision-making, in the field and in the society. Social unrest can threaten the entire social system, including its agriculture.

- Humane, which means that all forms of life (plant, animal, human) are respected. The fundamental dignity of all human being is recognized, and relationships and institutions incorporate such basic human values as trust, honesty, self-respect, cooperation and compassion. The cultural and spiritual integrity of the society is preserved and nurtured.

- Adaptable, which means that rural communities are capable of adjusting to the constantly changing conditions for farming: population growth, policies, market demand etc. This involves not only the development of new, appropriate technologies but also innovations in social and cultural terms.

These different criteria of sustainability may conflict and can be seen from different viewpoints: those of the farmer, the community, the nation and the world. There may be conflicts between present and future needs; between satisfying immediate needs and conserving the resource base. The National Government may give priority to sufficient food at prices which the urban population can afford while the farmer may seek high income through high prices for farm products. Choices must continually be made in a never-ending search for balance between the conflicting interests. This means that well-functioning institutions and well-deliberated policies are needed on all levels - from village to global - in order to ensure sustainable

development.

Most of the CARICOM Member States continue to rely on the Agriculture Sector for the export trade and as an important source of foreign exchange to drive the national economies. Agriculture's contribution to the National Gross Domestic Products in 1989 ranged from 3 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago to 36 per cent in Guyana; with Dominica - 29 per cent; Belize - 22 per cent; Grenada - 21 per cent; St. Vincent and the Grenadines - 18 per cent, St. Lucia - 15 per cent and St. Kitts/Nevis - 10 per cent.

The Agriculture Sector is also responsible for employment of a large part of the labour force ranging from 23 to 39 per cent for eight of the Member States (Belize - 37 per cent; Dominica - 36 per cent; St. Kitts/Nevis - 33 per cent; St. Lucia - 30 per cent; St. Vincent and the Grenadines - 30 per cent; Grenada - 29 per cent; Jamaica - 28 per cent and Guyana - 23 per cent).

Despite the historical significance of Agriculture's contribution to the overall economy of the CARICOM countries, and significant human and financial inputs into the sector, the sector performance has been below expectation. An extensive institutional infrastructure has been established since the 1960s, yet the sector has been experiencing declining production and productivity contrasting with increased consumption of food which consumption is being filled in increasingly greater proportions from extra-regional sources. Several initiatives have been introduced to impact production and productivity and yet the region imports in excess of US\$1 billion worth of food, and there continues to be an outflow of essential foreign exchange, and aggravation associated with tenuous current account balances.

In light of the growing trend worldwide towards increased trade liberalization and the impending erosion of existing benefits of preferential markets from both within and outside the region, and the increasing global pressures to redirect resource use to sustain the natural resources (Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries), which in turn contributes to the tourism potential of those resources and our ability to feed ourselves, it is urgent that the Region review its

strategies to bring about sustained, structured and coordinated agricultural development and the efficient utilization of all available resources to achieve the desired increases in production and productivity in an environmentally acceptable mode. At this point I'd like to recall the recent signing of the Framework Convention on Climatic Change, and the Convention on Biological Diversity in Rio de Janeiro to which most of the CARICOM States may have been signatories, the sustainable use of its components and the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the prudent use of the genetic resources. The Government of Belize also expressed its support for the statement issued by the Alliance of Small Island States and supported "Agenda 21" the Action Plan for sustainable development to guide us into the 21st century. Approval was also given to the 27 Point Rio Declaration, having to do with preservation of Planet Earth for future generations.

The question arises: how easily can those recommended sustainable agricultural technologies or practices such as agroforestry, integrated pest management, integrated nutrient supply, multiple cropping system, integrated crop/livestock production, water and soil conservation, and selection and breeding of

agricultural crops and livestock on productivity and situation-specific properties be incorporated into existing systems of production and resource utilization without significantly affecting cost-efficiencies and competitiveness bearing in mind the present economic environment and proposed trading regimes? Can the Region undergo such changes without the required adjustments in the economic and trading environment to accommodate and smooth the transition to sustainable agricultural development? These are some of the important concerns which I wish this Conference can address and quite timely in preparation for the upcoming Regional Consultation on Agricultural Development to be convened by the CARICOM Secretariat and the Consultation on Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Caribbean to be hosted by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) both consultations being put on back-to-back in October of this year. With that challenge in mind, I invite you all to enjoy your deliberations and I look forward to a successful outcome. It is with great enthusiasm that I declare this Conference on Sustainable Agriculture and Economic Development in the Caribbean officially opened.

I thank you.

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# MESSAGE

**THE HON. SIR ALISTER MCINTYRE**

*(Vice Chancellor, The University of the West Indies)*

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I am very sorry that I shall be unable to attend this 21st Conference. I was privileged to attend the first of them, and several other sessions since. They have always been for me rather special occasions: a time at which one could get down to serious analysis and discussion with colleagues within the region, as well as overseas. More than ever before, the agricultural sector in the Caribbean needs this kind of detailed evaluation and fresh thinking. Innovative approaches will have to be found to take advantage of the technical change that is transforming production possibilities in agriculture, and making possible the cultivation of new crops and new varieties.

Furthermore, if the pace of economic development in the region is to accelerate, agriculture has to be prime mover in achieving greater production, higher levels of employment, and increased foreign exchange earnings. The intellectual community owes it to the region to spare no effort in tackling the many problems which have to be resolved if the agricultural sector is to move ahead.

I have no doubt that this 21st Conference, as its predecessors, will provide rich material, and analysis, that will as in the past be valuable to both private and public decision making.

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## MESSAGE FROM

JAMES P. HOUCK

*(President-Elect, American Agricultural Economics Association)*

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Greetings and best wishes at the opening of the 21st West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference in San Ignacio, Belize! I extend these greetings on behalf of myself and all the members of the American Agricultural Economics Association. We wish you success in your 1992 conference "*Sustainable Agriculture and Economic Development in the Caribbean*". These are vital and challenging topics for all of us who dwell in this hemisphere. The information exchanged and the knowledge gained from these discussions will, I am sure, be valuable for years to come.

Unfortunately for me, I am not able to attend and participate in this important conference. However, I do appreciate the kind invitation to do so issued by the Society's President, Dr. Carlisle A. Pemberton. I am certain that I would have learned much.

May I take this opportunity to mention that on August 1st, 1993 the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA) and

the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society will be holding a joint conference in Orlando, Florida. The AAEA will be the host organization since this conference will come before our annual summer meetings. Several invited papers sessions and other professional activities will feature members of your Society and will address issues of concern to the Caribbean. I invite all of you to participate in these meetings. We warmly welcome your attendance and cooperation. I am personally delighted that our two organizations will be jointly involved in this endeavour.

You will be learning more about this meeting in coming days and months. We will be working with Dr. Pemberton and others to make this 1993 meeting in Orlando a strong success. But for now, mark your calendar for August 1-4, 1993. We are looking forward to seeing many of you there.

Once again, greetings and best wishes for a very successful conference.