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CLOSING STATEMENT

WENDEL PARHAM

(Chairman, Local Organizing Committee)

PREAMBLE

The Caribbean Agro-Economic Society was formally launched on April 8, 1974 at the 9th West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference in Jamaica. The major activity of the Society has been the organization of its conferences which started as an annual affair, but in recent years became a biennial occurrence.

Conferences have been organized and held in the following territories: Antigua, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago and St. Kitts & Nevis. The Secretariat of the Society is housed in the Faculty of Agriculture, of The University of the West Indies at St. Augustine Campus.

This is not the first time the conference is hosted in Belize and the Society would like to once again give recognition and express sincere thanks to the Government of Belize, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, for readily accepting and co-hosting this 21st West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference in Belize. The Society looks forward with great enthusiasm to convening future conferences in Belize and feels confident that the Government of Belize will continue to be of assistance and will extend the innate Belizean hospitality.

This conference on Sustainable Agriculture and Economic Development is of prime importance at this time in the light of the decline in Agriculture production and productivity in the region, the current moves towards globalization of free trade, the formation of trading blocks, and the growing international concern for protection of the environment and resource conservation. These are several issues which have not been fully answered or clarified at this conference and still need to be unsolved. However, the success of the conference lies in the fact that a solid base has been laid against which present and future issues and concerns

can be measured and justifiably addressed in terms of the necessary actions and/or activities to be carried out to resolve the various problems and constraints affecting sustainable agriculture and economic development in the region and at individual country levels.

Belize is presently at the center stage of international attention with respect to the current state of its natural resources and is a leading advocate in the area of environmental protection and resource conservation. Belize has recently become a member of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development and is developing appropriate legislation and institutions (including a Ministry of the Environment) to advance environmentally sustainable development. The Belize Government is setting aside more than 1/3 of the country's land mass in environmentally protected areas and is increasing public education and public awareness programmes to increase community involvement in environmental protection. Several projects and activities are on stream including land use and land capability studies, agricultural diversification projects, farming systems projects, natural resource management and protection projects, and coastal management projects, in an effort to address sustainable agricultural development. Belize should be applauded for these.

ISSUES ARISING FROM THE CONFERENCE

(i) *Dimensions of Sustainability:*

The presentations at the Conference on this subject demonstrated a remarkable similarity with respect to the concept of "Sustainable Development" which was defined as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future

generations to meet their own needs."

However several issues arose in the discussion of the best way to measure sustainability and also the extent to which the present generation must sacrifice to allow future generations to meet their own needs.

The key issue was the position of the poor with respect to sustainable development. Could the poor be reasonably expected to make further sacrifices to permit increased consumption by future generations? The only answer consistent with equity is no!

The next issue then is how do we define the poor in order to determine who must be exempted from sacrifice. This issue attracted a lot of debate especially regarding the incidence of general poverty in the Caribbean.

(ii) Macroeconomic Policies:

Conventional shortrun approaches to agricultural development should be limited to consistent policies and programs that promote new avenues of growth and resource conservation.

The shortcomings of the private sector and the market system in the past must be noted; measures that promote less economic concentration, more internally based development, greater national participation and more equitable distribution should be introduced.

The international economic environment has changed considerably in the past decade and together with the new trading regimes, as represented by the North American Free Trade Area and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, have serious implications for the development strategies pursued in the Caribbean region; it is urgent that research findings regarding the potential impacts of the changed international economic environment inform decision making at the policy level in the Caribbean.

The transition to sustainable development requires critical changes in the educational and technology generation systems; the government has to take the lead to ensure that the formal and informal education institutions incorporate the contents and processes that promote these changes into their curricula and associated activities.

(iii) Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development:

Access to land and credit remains an important constraint to sustainable agriculture in the Caribbean. Both the bureaucratic problems of land reform and land tenure as well as issues of farm size and land utilization (more environmental friendly crops and technologies) need to be analyzed and addressed urgently.

Lowering costs of production of different crops and alternative production processes are essential to improved farm decision making as well as national agricultural sector planning. Agricultural economists throughout the region need to place emphasis on this important microeconomic analyses.

Consumption and production patterns in the region continue to reflect a dependence on external products. A more internally based food system is essential both to food security, employment generation as well as long term self reliance and sovereignty.

The marketing systems in the Caribbean continue to be characterized by high post harvest losses, absence of developed market outlets, and inadequate information systems. The traditional marketing board approach needs to be reconsidered in order to incorporate more backward and forward linkages.

Agro-industrial processing in the Caribbean remains underdeveloped and is a reflection both of technology availability, technical know how and market opportunities. Particular attention should be paid to indigenous knowledge regarding medicinal plants and the commercialization of these processes. At the regional level more cooperation for human resource development is important in addressing this need.

Rural and urban community linkages and the alienation of the youth from agriculture remain problems. The attitudes to work in general and to agriculture in particular require the attention of the educational, technological and social institutions.

(iv) Belize:

Investment in aquaculture in Belize arose out of a concern from over fishing of the marine

resources within the reef and also from the existence of a lucrative market in the metropole. However, this industry is largely controlled by foreign investments and is dependent on foreign seed stocks, imported feeds, and technologies not well developed in Belize at the moment. The economic and environmental impacts of the aquaculture industry need to be carefully addressed.

Agriculture in Belize is market driven and is dictated largely by an economic system of production which involves little consideration for sustainable agricultural practices of production and ecological and social impacts. These export market driven production and food production systems must include those practices which are not only economic in nature but also those that are ecologically sound, and socially acceptable.

Agro-forestry has shown little or no impact on the Belizean economy as it is relatively non-existent. However, there is great scope for improvement and/or development in this area. This may fit quite readily in a farming system approach to agriculture in particular in the remote and hilly rural areas. This type of system will blend readily with existing farming practices of rural people.

Agriculture policies in Belize are largely geared for production of those export commodities bringing in foreign exchange and production of food crops for domestic consumption. Agricultural diversification activities are centred on new export crops, import substitution, and processing of food products. These policies will need to be adjusted to address not only economic concerns but also the environmental and social concerns associated with sustainable agricultural production. This, however, will of necessity require changes in the international economic order.

(v) Appropriate Technology:

With respect to Appropriate Technologies for Sustainable Agriculture several issues were raised including the farm-size debate, pricing structure, the value of research and scope of modern technology.

The debate continued as to whether small farms or large farms are more efficient. Some hold that the larger farms will always be

more efficient. The call was made for findings of potato research in the Caribbean to be shared.

The potential for the use of tissue culture in the production of planting material was raised, but at the same time caution was suggested in terms of potential drawbacks or mutations. The problems of storage as well as processing were raised.

With respect to sustainable systems of production, organic farming was recognized as a possible one. In the coconut and banana industries in Trinidad and Tobago there was little chemical use. There was also little evidence that use of chemical inputs increased productivity in these enterprises. This seemed to be different from the case of banana production in St. Lucia and white potato production in St. Kitts. More research is needed in this area.

These were some suggestions that the systems in use at the Sugarcane Feeds Centre in Trinidad should be extended widely in CARICOM.

ACTION BY THE CARIBBEAN AGRO-ECONOMIC SOCIETY

At the Annual General Meeting held Wednesday 15th July, 1992, the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society adopted a motion to engage in a number of activities that would allow the Society to play a more meaningful role in bringing about the sustainable development of Agriculture in the Caribbean Region.

The first activity planned by the Society is the execution of a number of studies on issues arising from this conference so that definite programmes can be instituted with sustainable agricultural development.

Member Government, and institutions in the Region will be approached by the Society to support the conducting of these studies.

To enable the widest possible participation of members of the society in this endeavour, a roster of members of the society willing to undertake these studies will be drawn up as soon as possible.

The second activity planned by the society is the issue of timely releases to the media on important issues that have a direct bearing on the sustainable development of Caribbean agriculture.

The third activity planned by the Society is the holding of regular seminars and symposia throughout the Region to discuss topical issues as they arise.

The Society has also decided to launch an Awards Series which would honour distinguished agricultural economists in the region. These awards will also enable an increased public awareness of the contribution of the field of agricultural economics to the betterment of rural peoples of the Caribbean.

Finally the Society intends through future West Indies Agricultural Economics Conferences to review progress made in the achievement of these objectives and advance further along the lines of bringing about the betterment of the rural peoples of the Caribbean.