AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
http://ageconsearch.umn.edu
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

The West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference Series: A Critical Review of Conference Themes Over the Years

Suresh C. Birla
Retired Senior Lecturer, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, WI

As we participate in the Twenty-fourth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference it is high time to look back at these conferences from a historical point of view: How were these conferences started? What has been achieved, and, where do we go from here?

More than 36 years, ago the First West Indian Agricultural Economics Conference was organised by the Department of Agricultural Economics & Farm Management at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. There was no specific theme for this conference. However, at the opening of this conference this is what Dr. H.D. Huggins, the then Pro-Vice-Chancellor at UWI, St. Augustine had to say:

> *"Universities must take an important part in economic development. The University of the West Indies, in particular the St. Augustine Campus, is a part of the public economic development complex working to raise efficiency in the agricultural sector of the territories in the region. The University, along with the research agencies of Government, joins in the common search for new insights, new knowledge and new methodology appropriate to the task of finding solutions to the problems and obstacles to the economic development of the Region. It is as part of this task that this First Agricultural Economics Conference is held."*

Is this not the objective of all the conferences held since then? No wonder The University of the West Indies named the building, where the headquarters of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society is located, the Dudley Huggins Building.

In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the conference series by reviewing the themes of the conferences. Observations have also been made regarding participation, collaboration and sponsorships, as well as any new developments.

The conference series was initiated by the Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management in 1966 to provide a forum to discuss the economic problems of the agricultural sector of the region. It was the original intention of the organisers to confine the conference to those working on the economics of agriculture in the area. But this exclusive concept gave way to an inclusion of persons who were closely concerned with economic aspects of Agriculture's problem.

Initially, no themes were proposed for these conferences. The first conference attracted 20 papers in the following areas:

a) Economic Development 9
b) Commodity Series 4
c) Marketing 7

The First Conference attracted 20 overseas participants from 12 countries and 24 local participants.

The success of the First West Indian Agricultural Economics Conference led to the decision that annual conferences be held.

The Second Conference was held again in Trinidad in 1967 in collaboration with the International Root Crop Society and covered a much narrower range of subjects which allowed for much greater concentration on a few subjects. Twenty-one papers were presented at this conference covering the following four subjects:

a) Economics of Root Crops 9
b) Banana Industry 4
c) Land Use Planning and Policy 5
d) Social Aspects of Agricultural Development 3

The Third Conference in this series was held in Jamaica in 1968 in collaboration with the Institute of Social and Economic Research. A specific theme was selected for this conference, "Agricultural Development and Planning in the West Indies" and attracted 20 papers which were published as a special number of Social and Economic Studies (Vol.17, No.3, Sept. 1968). Eight papers were selected and reprinted by the editor as part of the proceedings of the conference. According to the editor, most of the papers not appearing in the proceedings dealt with past planning efforts in individual countries of the Region. All of those revealed the familiar story: Planning for agricultural development in the Region had been largely unsuccessful.

The selection of papers was designed to provide a meaningful description of the social and institutional structure of the agricultural economies of the Region. The contribution was, more generally, in terms of understanding the development problems in plantation - type economies.

A New Format

The Fourth Conference, which was held in Barbados in 1969, saw the emergence of a new format for future conferences. Two distinctive features of this conference were a session which examined the case of the host territory, in relation to the conference theme, and a tour which illustrated the theme very closely. These features were so valuable that it was decided to include them in subsequent conferences. This has been followed up to now. The theme for this conference was, "Diversification, Import substitution and Regional Economic Integration in West Indian Agriculture" and attracted a record attendance of persons to the conference country. Fourteen papers were presented on the following topics:

a) Diversification 2
b) Import Substitution 3
c) Host Country's Agricultural Sector 6
d) Marketing 3

The first four conferences were held at UWI campuses. The interest generated by these conferences among non - campus countries was so great that invitations from the Governments of Dominica and Guyana were extended to host the fifth and sixth conferences, respectively, in their countries.

The Fifth Conference, held in Dominica, had two main themes: "The Prospect of Agricultural Development in the Smaller Territories" and "The Role of Small Farming in the Commonwealth Caribbean." The conference attracted twenty papers. William G. Demas, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Caribbean Regional Secretariat, presented a very comprehensive paper on the theme.

The theme of the Sixth Conference convened in Guyana was, "The Role of Marketing in Caribbean Agricultural Development." In all, 16 papers, including five about the host country, were presented and discussed at this conference.

The Seventh West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held in Grenada with the following themes: "Land Reform and Financing Agricultural Development in the Commonwealth Caribbean." The conference attempted to provide a bridge from international experience of land reform - one of the main topics - through Caribbean experience (by case studies of an old land reform, Mexico's, to a new one, Cuba's), to the examination of the reform required in the Commonwealth Caribbean. A public forum on the subject of Land Reform in Greneda, was held in the School of St. George, and was attended by over 300 people. Thirteen papers were presented at this conference - two on Financing Agricultural Development and 11 on Land Reform.

It was in this conference both Sir Arthur Lewis and Prof. George Beckford participated together.

The Eighth Conference returned to the starting place of the conference series. The main themes of the conference - "The Impact of Britain's Entry into the European Economic Community on Caribbean Economics and the Scope and Progress of Rationalization in Caribbean Agriculture" - were the subject of lively and well-informed discussion. Twelve papers were presented on the themes. The first theme benefited from the knowledgeable and thoughtful views of several participants who had previously been involved in official discussions and negotiations, as well as from analytical rigour of other delegates who had not had the same intimate experience of the subject. The conference undoubtedly led to a much greater understanding of the issues.

On of the highlights of this conference was a panel discussion on the subject, "Is Trinidad's Agriculture Ready for Diversification?" held at the headquarters of Trinidad & Tobago Island-Wide Cane Farmers' Association.

A New Era – Emergence of Caribbean Agro-Economic Society

The Ninth Conference held in Jamaica, in April 1974, gave birth to the Caribbean - Agro-Economic Society. All future conferences were to be organised by the Society. Proceedings of this conference include the Constitution of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society.

The main theme of this conference was, "The Relationship between Agriculture and Other Sectors with particular reference to the Competition for Resources in the

Commonwealth Caribbean." It attracted 14 papers around the main theme.

The Caribbean Agro-Economic Society organised for the Tenth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference. This conference was held in Guyana with the main theme, "Self - Sufficiency in Food in the Commonwealth Caribbean."

And what a good start for the Society. For mounting this conference the Society got the sponsorship of the Government of the host country, Guyana, the University of Guyana, The University of the West Indies and the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute. In fact, this conference was held in association with the Eighth Technical Group Meeting of the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute. The conference was very well attended with a record 130 registered participants (93 overseas) who came from various institutions, organizations and other bodies throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, the United Stated of America and Canada.

Fourteen papers were presented in plenary session on the main theme. Four Technical Group Sessions were also held on the following topics:

1. Developing the Region's Cereal (Rice and Maize) Industry
2. Developing the Region's Root Crops, Fruits and Vegetables.
3. Developing the Region's Fish and Livestock Industry and
4. Developing the Region's Grain Legume and other Protein Sources.

A record number of 25 papers were presented and discussed in different working groups and recommendations were made.

So far, these conferences followed a traditional pattern - papers were invited on a selected theme or topic, presented, discussed and published in the proceedings. However, the Executive of the newly-formed Caribbean Agro-Economic Society seemed to be very much concerned about the lack of action and implementation programmes. In view of this thinking, at the Tenth Conference held in Guyana, basic objectives of the conference series were reconstructed as follows:

- To find practical solutions to real problems existing in the respective rural sectors of the region as we move our venue from territory to territory.
- To promote and encourage in - depth analytical discussions on agricultural development issues relevant to the experience and needs of individual CARICOM territories, with the emphasis on the host country.
- To direct the use of regional expertise available at conferences towards action-oriented debate thereby releasing practical knowledge from the many disciplines which need to be considered simultaneously in planning rural development.

Keeping the above objectives in mind the Eleventh West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held in Dominica from April 20-24, 1976. The theme of this conference was, "Implementing Programmes for the Development of the Rural Sector."

A Case Study Report on the selected area in Dominica, prepared by regional consultants, provided the material for presentation and discussion.

The final recommendations for the development of the study area - Grand Bay, Dominica - were prepared by a post-Conference Committee appointed by the Society. These recommendations were presented to the Government of Dominica in September, 1976.

The case study generated so much interest in Dominica that, of the 146 registered participants, exactly one-half of these participants were local.

The Twelfth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference, organised by the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society, was held in Antigua. Its theme was "Implementing Food Production and Marketing Programmes in a Developing Tourist Economy".

Following the precedent established at the Dominica conference held the previous year, this Conference focussed on a case study working document, though, on this occasion, supplementary papers were presented at the plenary sessions. The document was entitled "An Integrated Production and Marketing System for the Antigua Agricultural Sector". The conference programme also included a panel discussion on the Regional Food Plan.

This conference may be regarded as the continuation of a new experiment where the Society was attempting to play a role in an effort to alleviate some of the problems associated with the development of agricultural production and marketing in the territories of the Caribbean Community.

The Society, for the second year running, was able to convene a team of multi-disciplinary consultants from within the Caribbean Region who had, at short notice and under resource constraints, been able to provide a document for the conference.

The Thirteenth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held in St. Kitts.

The conference, in keeping with the recently established tradition, focused on the agricultural sector of the host country with a view to formulating recommendations to the government on the basis of its general deliberations. The theme of the conference "Utilising Agricultural Resources for Economic Well-Being" was chosen by the host government.

Opportunity was taken during the conference to discuss a special area of interest of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society, i.e. the functioning of regional institutions in the context of the agricultural development of the Commonwealth Caribbean.

The role of nine organisation engaged in the development of agriculture in the region was discussed.

Finally, after the conference a Proposal on a Strategy for the Development of the Agricultural Sector in the State of St.Kitts/Nevis/Anguilla was submitted to the Government by the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society. The proposal dealt with policy and institutional arrangements, the Sugar Sub-Sector, Production of Non-Sugar Agricultural Commodities and Marketing of Non-Sugar Agricultural Commodities.

Fourteenth and Fifteenth Conferences were held in Grenada and Belize, respectively, in pursuance of the restructured objectives of the Society. The emphasis at the Fourteenth Conference held

in Grenada was on the achievements of government farm programmes while the Fifteenth Conference held in Belize dealt with the Food and Nutrition status of the country.

After six conferences dealing with the case studies, it appears that continuation of such an approach was not considered sustainable. Even the proceedings of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Conferences were not published.

The Sixteenth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held on the St. Augustine Campus, The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago, from July 18-24, 1982.

This occasion marked a return to the birthplace of the conference series as well as a change in the format used since the Eleventh Conference.

The main theme of the Conference - "Changing Perspectives in Caribbean Agriculture"- was the subject of rigorous and indepth discussions which, no doubt, led to fuller appreciation of several of the theoretical and operational issues involved in bringing about adjustments in Caribbean agriculture to meet future challenges.

Three plenary session on "Changing Perspectives of Agriculture at the National Level" attracted two papers while the other session on "New Strategies for Agricultural Development" attracted six papers. Four workshop sessions and contributed papers attracted another 14 papers.

The Seventeenth Conference was once again held at the St. Augustine Campus, The University of the West Indies. The main theme was "Agribusiness - The Way Forward for Caribbean Agriculture."

Seven plenary sessions were organised to deal with different aspects of the Agribusiness. Eighteen papers were discussed in these plenary sessions. There were three concurrent sessions on (i) fisheries (ii) livestock and (iii) agricultural economics where another 16 papers were presented and discussed.

The Eighteenth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held in Jamaica during April 7-10, 1986. The theme of the conference "Incentives and Support Systems for Food and Agriculture" was particularly relevant due to the slow pace of agricultural diversification experienced in the Region and the rapid growth in the extra-regional food import bill.

The thrust of the conference was directed toward identification of sound and practical approaches to the development of support systems for the agricultural sector paying special attention to the non-traditional commercial sub-sector. Eight papers which addressed broad theoretical and conceptual issues were dealt with the plenary sessions. The remaining nine papers were discussed in workshop sessions, hereby providing an opportunity for intensive reflection on the relevant issues.

Participation by international figures such as Professors Leo Polopolus and Glen Johnson helped to broaden the perspective of conference deliberations.

The Nineteenth Conference was held in St. Kitts and Nevis in April 1988. The main theme of the conference was "Agricultural

Diversification: Policies and Strategies." Twenty papers were presented and discussed under the following four sub-themes.

1. Theoretical and Analytical Issues in Diversification 5
2. Marketing and Nutritional Bases for Diversification 5
3. Issues in the Implementation of Diversification Strategies 5
4. Agricultural Diversification in the Commonwealth Caribbean 5

A Panel Discussion on Agricultural Diversification in St. Kitts and Nevis was held and recommendations were submitted to the Government.

The Twentieth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held in Tobago in April 1990. The theme of the conference was "Economic Development through the Revitalization and Modernization of Agriculture." In focusing on this theme, the agricultural economists in the Region have attempted to develop new models and paradigms which will accelerate the pace of development while ensuring the integrity of the environment. This process of sustainable economic development is, of course, easier to speak of than to execute.

Proceedings of the conference were published in two parts. Part A, consisting of specially reviewed and selected papers, was published as, much awaited, Vol.1, No.1, March 1992 of *Farm and Business: The Journal of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society*. The remaining 21 papers were published as Part B of the proceedings.

The Twenty-first West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held in the quaint town of San Ignacio, Belize, from July 14-18 1992. The theme of the conference was "Sustainable Agriculture and Economic Development in the Caribbean". Twenty-eight papers presented at the conference dealt with the clarification of the concept of sustainability, the Caribbean in the wider context of the global economy and the implications of sustainable development.

In addition, at the conference, there was inauguration of the W. Arthur Lewis Lecture Series. The lecture was presented by Professor Compton Bourne, Deputy Principal and Pro Vice Chancellor of The University of the West Indies.

The next conference in this series was held in 1997. However, in between, the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society organised two special conferences: First in collaboration with the American Association of Agricultural Economists in Orlando, in August 1993 and the other in association with the Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad in September 1994. The theme for the Orlando conference was a continuation of the Belize one - "Challenges to Achieving Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Caribbean" while for the Trinidad Conference the theme was "Advances in Tropical Agriculture in the 20th Century and Prospects for the 21st".

The Twenty-second West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held in Barbados in August 1997. The theme of this conference was "Trade & Economic Liberalization: Implications for Agriculture and The Environment in the Caribbean and Latin America".

A large number of papers were presented at the conference. Most of these

papers report on and summarise the country experiences with trade liberalization and globalization, the special circumstances of traditional export crops such as banana and, to some extent, sugar, and strategies to achieve greater efficiencies in production and marketing. Issues of patenting and the protection of intellectual property, dispute resolutions and the workings of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and their implications for Caribbean and Latin America, in general, were also explored in the presentations.

The Second Lewis-Beckford Memorial Lecture in memory of Sir Arthur Lewis and Prof. George Beckford was delivered by Prof. C.Y. Thomas.

The Twenty-third West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held in The Bahamas, from November 15-18, 2000. The theme of the conference was "Trading Arrangements: The WTO and FTAA: Rethinking the Development Paradigm for Agriculture in the Caribbean and Latin America in the 2000's". As we move into the 21st century the Caribbean and Latin America, along with the rest of the world, will need to confront the reality of the new, emerging world trading order.

The main concern expressed by the 22 papers presented at the conference included competitiveness issues (rice and livestock), the future of quotas (sugar and bananas) and the general way forward for the agricultural sectors of the various participating countries. Other issues included those of the links between the environment and trade, intellectual property rights as well as many papers on the specific impacts of trade liberalization in particular countries.

According to The Communique, "The Caribbean has not yet reaped many of the expected benefits from the 1995 GATT/WTO Agreement. Indeed, over the last several years developing countries generally have had to bear a heavier burden of adjustment than the developed nations. The conference noted that while modest gains were achieved in certain sectors nearly all the sectors were adversely affected. The situation with the banana industry was particularly alarming."

A special feature of the conference was the Third Lewis-Beckford Memorial Lecture in honour of outstanding West Indian economists, Sir Arthur Lewis and Prof. George Beckford. Prof. Vaughn Lewis of the Institute of International Relations, St. Augustine Campus, The University of the West Indies, presented this lecture.

Table 1 provides the location, period and themes of all the conferences.

An examination of the themes of all the West Indies Agricultural Economics Conferences clearly reveals that these themes were chosen to promote the development of the agriculture sector in the Region. Agricultural planning, diversification, land reforms, marketing, agricultural policy, trade reforms are all integral parts of a very complex agricultural development problem. Though a specific theme has always been chosen for the conference series, papers presented at all the conferences show great divergence. It is clear that authors of the papers understand the first lesson in economics. Everything depends upon

everything else. Moreover, most of the themes are of dynamic nature. There is no fixed solution to a given problem.

Let me conclude by narrating an old saying associating with Mark Twain, *"Everybody is talking about the weather but nobody is doing anything about it."* Similarly everybody is talking about the theme but who is doing anything about it. What has been achieved through these conference series? It is very difficult to answer this question. However, a very modest claim of achievement made by the past President of the Society cannot be denied, and I quote: *"Through these conferences the CAES has been able to contribute to the development of our human capital in the Region, in that our Conference Series focused on contemporary issues of the day - thus affording our members and participants the opportunity to explore and debate alternative strategies for addressing critical issues relating to the transformation of Caribbean Agriculture."*

A Few Suggestions

- Attempts should be made to mount future conferences in countries of the Region where none has been held so far.
- Careful consideration should be given to greater cooperation and collaboration with similar organizations in Latin American countries.
- A special issue - Readings in Caribbean Agricultural Economics - based on selected papers presented at different conferences, be published. In order to select papers for this issue the Society should form a small group to review and select papers from past proceedings.

TABLE 1. LOCATION AND THEME OF WEST INDIES AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS CONFERENCES

Conference Series	Location	Year	Theme
First	Trinidad	Mar. 66	Economic Development, Marketing
Second	Trinidad	Mar. 67	Root Crops, Banana, Land Use Planning
Third	Jamaica	Mar. 68	Agricultural Development and Planning in the West Indies
Fourth	Barbados	Mar. 69	Diversification, Import Substitution and Regional Economic Integration
Fifth	Dominica	Apr. 70	The Prospect of Agricultural Development in the smaller Territories and the Role of Small Farming in the Commonwealth Caribbean.
Sixth	Guyana	Mar.-Apr.71	The role of Marketing in Caribbean Agricultural Development
Seventh	Grenada	Apr.72	Land Reform and Financing Agricultural Development in the Commonwealth Caribbean
Eighth	Trinidad	Apr.73	The Impact of Britain's Entry into the European Economic Community on Caribbean Economies and the Scope and Progress of Rationalization in Caribbean Agriculture.
Ninth	Jamaica	Apr. 74	The Relationship between Agriculture and other sectors with particular reference to Competition of Resources in the Commonwealth Caribbean.
Tenth	Guyana	Apr. 75	Self-Sufficiency in Food in the Commonwealth Caribbean.
Eleventh	Dominica	Apr.76	Implementing Programmes for the Development of the Rural Sector – A Case Study – Dominica
Twelfth	Antigua	1977	Implementing Food Production and Marketing Programmes in a Developing Tourist Economy - A Case Study - Antigua
Thirteenth	St. Kitts	1978	Utilising Agricultural Resources for Economic Well -Being
Fourteenth	Grenada	1979	Government Farm Programmes
Fifteenth	Trinidad	1980	Food and Nutrition
Sixteenth	Trinidad	July 82	Changing Perspectives in Caribbean Agriculture
Seventeenth	Trinidad	1984	Agribusiness - The Way Forward for Caribbean Agriculture
Eighteenth	Jamaica	Apr. 86	Incentives and Support Systems for Food Agriculture
Nineteenth	St. Kitts	Apr. 88	Agricultural Diversification: Policies and Strategies
Twentieth	Tobago	Apr. 90	Economic Development through the Revitalization and Modernization of Agriculture
Twenty-First	Belize	Jul. 92	Sustainable Agriculture and Economic Development in the Caribbean
Special One	Orlando, USA	Aug, 93	Challenges To Achieving Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Caribbean - (with AAAE)
Special Two	Trinidad	Sept. 94	Advances in Tropical Agriculture in the 20th Century and Prospects for the 21st (with Tropical Agriculture.)
Twenty-second	Barbados	Aug.97	Trade and Economic Liberalization: Implication for Agriculture and the Environment in the Caribbean and Latin America
Twenty-third	Bahamas	Nov.2000	Trading Arrangements: The WTO and FTAA. Rethinking the Development Paradigm for Agriculture in the Caribbean and Latin America in the 2000's
Twenty-fourth	Grenada	July 02	Agriculture, Trade and the Environment in the Caribbean and the Americas