

DRAFT

Meeting of the Caribbean Ministers and Delegates to the 27th Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, Havana, Cuba, April 23, 2002 (Sala 7, 9.00 a.m.)

Attendance:

Antigua: The Honourable Vere C. Bird
Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries

Mr. Lesroy Grant
Deputy Director of Agriculture

Bahamas: Mrs. Valerie Outten
Director of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Mr. Michael Braynen
Director of Fisheries

Mr. Simeon Pinder
Deputy Director of Agriculture

Barbados: Mr. Carston Simmonds
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Belize: Mr. Sergio Garcia
Chief Executive Officer
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives

Guyana : Dr. Dindyal Permaul
Permanent Secretary

Dominica: The Honourable Vince Henderson
Minister of Agriculture and the Environment

Trinidad and Tobago: Mr. Swallay Mohamed
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources

FAO: Mr. Joseph Johnson, Sub-Regional Director, Sub- Regional Office, Barbados
Mr. Deep Ford, Food Systems Economist, Regional Office, Chile

Caricom Secretariat: Mr. Sam Lawrence
Regional Transformation Programme

Record of the Meeting:

- (1) The paper prepared for this meeting “ Trends and Challenges in Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in the Caribbean” was presented by the Sub Regional Director. The presentation and the paper were well received by those in attendance. The issues raised in the paper and other critical areas of importance to the development of the agricultural sector in the Caribbean were discussed. A summary statement of these observations and recommendations are presented in (2) to (12) below.

- (2) The importance of expanding trade, new products and new markets, including using domestic and regional market opportunities as a launching pad for extra regional markets was discussed. Assistance with regard to negotiations to facilitate both the accessing of potential opportunities as well as protecting current markets was requested for the region as a whole.

- (3) The challenges and limitations of trading intra- regionally were mentioned. The establishment of the CSME and it leading to increased harmonization across the region, including the removal of barriers to intra - regional trade were identified as areas of priority. The different currencies in the region was identified as a factor contributing to limiting trade.

- (4) The need for institutional capacity building in many areas essential to agricultural development was stressed. Training should span the entire commodity system(production, marketing and supporting services) as well as what might be considered special topic areas, food safety, organic production, property rights.

- (5) It was suggested that efforts at transformation be focused around very specific production and marketing opportunities. In this regard it was mentioned that the CARICOM Secretariat had identified six agricultural production areas for focus: poultry, small ruminants, papaya, hot pepper, sweet potato, coconut oils and fats).

- (6) An improved organizational and commercial approach to agriculture was called for as a model for assisting farmers to move from being traditional producers to being rural sector entrepreneurs. The poultry sector organization experience in the Caribbean was suggested as one from which lessons could be learned.

- (7) Quality was identified as the advantage that Caribbean countries had to sell. It was suggested that an enterprise development, market driven approach be adopted. This included changing the perception of farmers as traditional producers and promoting their participation in the sector more as an entrepreneurs.
- (8) The weakness of the information and communication systems across CARICOM member states in terms of sharing agricultural information in all areas (activities, conditions, policies, technologies, partnerships, etc.) was identified and a call was made to improve this through all the different mediums of communication. The Latin American and Caribbean Regional FAO website was mentioned as one source of information and it was pointed out that discussions are underway to placing a Caribbean button and an english document button on this website. Assistance to support additional sources of information and their sharing across the region was requested.
- (9) The need for Caribbean agricultural leaders, in both the public and private sector, to work more closely to establish new Caribbean agricultural products, as well as exports in extra regional and intra regional markets was mentioned in the context of the recognition that opportunities were being lost due to slowness in consolidating market positions. The examples of ackee and hot peppers grown outside the Caribbean region were given as an example of these extra regional developments.
- (10) The need for strengthening the research capacity in the region, including the reduction in the duplication that exists, was pointed out. It was agreed that the Caribbean Ministers of Agriculture would include discussions on CARDI during their normally held meeting and would approach FAO for assistance in this area.
- (11) The developments in biotechnology, biosafety and related areas and their potential to promote as well as to harm the development of the Caribbean agriculture sector was highlighted. The role of GMO's in food safety and issues related to patenting of Caribbean national heritage products were two examples of issues to be addressed. In the latter area sea grass and black pineapple from Antigua were mentioned. Assistance from FAO in the area of training, equipment, information exchange, and negotiations to improve Caribbean capacity was requested.
- (12) Assistance on land use, land tenure, credit and crop insurance issues were identified as critical to assisting rural entrepreneurs to

make the investments and take the risks associated with the production of agricultural commodities. It was recognized in these areas there has not been adequate progress and as a result agricultural development has not proceeded as might be expected.

The meeting ended at 12.00 noon.