

24th West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference

Theme: Agriculture, Trade and the Environment in the Caribbean and the Americas

Conference Communiqué

Regional Governments and the private sector were urged to re-dedicate their efforts to stimulate Regional agriculture within the current world economic environment at the recently concluded 24th West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference which, was held in Grenada, July 9th-13th 2002. The Conference brought together experts from Regional and international private and public sector organizations to address issues related to the theme, *Agriculture, Trade and the Environment in the Caribbean and the Americas*. The Conference was organized by the Caribbean Agro Economic Society (CAES) and was co-sponsored by the Food and Resource Economics Department, of the University of Florida, the Ministry of Agriculture Lands, Forestry and Fisheries, Grenada, and the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus.

One of the key issues emerging from the research and discussions at the Conference was Food Security, and in this regard the Conference adopted the following declaration:

“At the conclusion of the Plenary Session on Food Security at the 24th West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference, held today, Wednesday, July 10th, in Grenada, the delegates reaffirmed support for the Rome Declaration adopted by the 186 countries at the World Food Summit in 1996. This gave a commitment towards reducing the number of malnourished people worldwide by a half by 2015. This commitment was reconfirmed at the recently held (June 2002) World Food Summit – Five Years Later. The delegates also endorsed the position taken at the 27th FAO Regional Conference of Caribbean and Latin America to make Food Security the *first priority* of the FAO and to promote the drawing up of a *Voluntary Code of Conduct on the Right to Food*.

The Conference urged CARICOM Governments to ensure a framework for regular monitoring and reporting on food security status in their respective countries, as well as increasing interventions to achieve higher levels of food security at the household level, such as:

- ✚ Improving relevant databases
- ✚ Increased focus on research and development at the Regional level
- ✚ Promoting more efficient use of community based food supplies
- ✚ Focusing on the roles of women and education to improve health and nutrition

The Conference also endorsed the following recommendations to the Governments and the private sectors of Regional states:

Given the current international environment of increasing support for agriculture in the USA and the European Union, unless Regional agriculture receives additional support it will fail to meet its economic potential. Therefore governments are urged to support Regional agriculture by:

- Setting targets with respect to the balance that must be maintained between Agriculture and other sectors of the economy
- Developing a macro-economic policy framework that stresses increasing linkages between agriculture and other sectors of the economy
- Increasing direct support to the Agricultural sector in the areas of:
 - Institutional reform;
 - Investment in research and development;
 - Infrastructural development;
 - Development of regional capacity and expertise in Food Safety;
 - Land reform and
 - Environmental regulation and mitigation

The Conference, while noting that there was need to improve the competitiveness of Regional agriculture, recognized that Regional agriculture continues to be threatened by the transition to trade liberalization and that there were continuing efforts by the various agricultural industries to become more competitive. Towards this end the Conference recommends that Regional Governments along with the industries examine opportunities for increasing competitiveness.

Also there is need for Regional Governments and the private sector to publicize the contribution of agriculture to the Regional economy. The Conference recognized the inadequacy of using GDP accounts as a measure of agriculture's contribution to Regional

economies. The Conference also recognized the work by IICA to fully document the contribution of agriculture to the Regional economies and called for all Regional governments to recognize and support such research which, would see agriculture viewed as important to the economy as tourism, financial services and manufacturing.

The Conference was opened by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Lands Forestry and Fisheries, Grenada, Ms. Claris Charles and coordinated by Dr. Ranjit H. Singh, Head, Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, UWI, St. Augustine.

A special feature of the Conference was the Fourth Lewis-Beckford Memorial Lecture in honor of the outstanding West Indian economists Sir Arthur Lewis and Professor George Beckford. Professor Timothy Josling of Stanford University presented the lecture. He highlighted the experience of the sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreements, both in terms of their effect on changing domestic health, safety and quality regulations and as ways of resolving trade disputes.