

COMMUNIQUE #1

From the 25TH West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference

“CHALLENGES FROM TRADING CHANGES”

The 25th West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference – the first to be held in Suriname - brought together experts from regional and international private and public sector organizations to address issues related to the challenges from changes in the international arrangements for trade. It also proposed a number of measures which should be adopted by the Caribbean in order to successfully meet these challenges. The conference was organized by the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society (CAES) and was co-sponsored by the University of the West Indies, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, Suriname; Agriforum (Suriname); CARDI and the University of Suriname.

Many interesting papers were presented at the conference regarding the wide range of challenges facing agriculture in the region in dealing with the changing trade environment. These include:

1. The threat of invasive species;
2. Degradation of the natural or physical environmental;
3. Food insecurity and the vulnerability of Caribbean economies to global convulsions such as wars and natural disasters;
4. Bioterrorism and food safety; and
5. The socioeconomic impact of these changes on the rural economies and the poor.

The conference noted specific areas of progress and opportunities for diversifying the agricultural sectors of the Caribbean economies, in view of the removal of trade preferences for key agricultural commodities. It also noted a number of policies to guard against the detrimental impacts of the aforementioned challenges. These policies and measures include:

1. Privatization or the reduction of state intervention. However the lessons from the past history of government intervention and privatization have to be borne in mind;
2. Promotion of diversification activities; including agro and culinary tourism; agro-forestry and wild-life farming;
3. Reorientation of the agricultural sector to serve the needs of the domestic population including: crime reduction, poverty alleviation, creation of environmental goods and cultural employment (maximizing domestic social welfare) rather than the needs of foreign interests;

4. Research and Innovation to increase the efficiency in agriculture;
5. Promoting success stories in agro-tourism;
6. Increasing integration of agricultural professions especially the need to bring Suriname professionals more into the main stream of agricultural science and Agricultural Economics in the Caribbean.

The conference noted that there was a large informal economy which makes it difficult to measure accurately the contribution of agriculture to the economy and this tends to diminish the perception of agriculture's role in the economy.

Several methodologies were also presented at the conference analyzing economic, environmental and social issues. The conference also provided a useful forum for professional exchange and furthering the integration of Suriname and its agricultural scientists within CARICOM.

The 25th West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference was held from the 15th to the 21st August 2004 at the Torarica Hotel, Paramaribo, Suriname.