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Remarks by the President of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society

Professor Carlisle A. Pemberton

At the Opening Ceremony of 31st West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference,
9th Aug 2015 at the Buccaneer Hotel, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.



Honourable Governor Kenneth Mapp, Commissioner Robles, President Dr. David Hall, Mr. Kwame Garcia, Participants, ladies and gentleman, the press, on behalf of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society (CAES) I would like to welcome you to the 31st West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference. This Conference series was started in 1966 by the then Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management of the University of the West Indies and the Department organized the next nine (9) Conferences. The Caribbean Agro-Economic Society was formed in 1974 at the ninth Conference and thereafter the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society has been organizing the conference series. From the fifteenth conference in 1980 we have been having these conferences

every two (2) years. The Secretariat of the Society is housed in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

This conference series has been held in many of the Caribbean states including Puerto Rico and even Orlando, Florida. However, this is the first time for the U.S. Virgin Islands and hence the first time in St. Croix. So it gives the Society great pleasure to be with such distinguished company in the U.S. Virgin Islands. To organize this conference in the Virgin Islands, the Society has received the most admirable support of the University of Virgin Islands, Cooperative Extension Service and the Agricultural Extension Station, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Tourism, the Virgin Islands Port Authority and all the other places that will be visited on Wednesday.

Over the years, the West Indies Agricultural Economics Conferences have covered a wide range of themes and topics. Early emphasis in these conferences was on the diversification of Caribbean Agriculture because of the uncertainty of the market for Caribbean sugar and banana in the United Kingdom. Later conferences focused on topics of Agribusiness and sustainable development of Caribbean Agriculture.

Now the current focus is on climate change and food security. It has been apparent that the Caribbean is attempting to come to terms with the changing scenario that seems to be

emerging with respect to climate change. This is a topic that has been studied to some extent in the Caribbean and we have some indication of increased temperature rise of 0.5 degrees Celsius per decade and sea rise of one inch. While these figures may not seem to be very large, their impacts can be significant. Coming here to St. Croix and passing over Antigua, it is quite evident that the Leeward Islands are suffering quite markedly from the lack of rainfall. So that, we look forward to this conference and in particular the session on mitigating the effects of climate change and we take the point being made by President Hall and the Commissioner that the conference might be able to come up with some ideas as to how countries might deal with the problem of climate change.

The other topic that the Society has been focusing on in its conferences over the last few years is the topic of food security. The Caribbean is trying to come to terms with the emerging global food supply scarcity as the demand for food in this century is expected to increase particularly with the rising standards of living in some countries particularly China and Vietnam and countries in that part of the world. Also in the Caribbean, we are suffering from some of the effects of the lifestyle choices of individuals so there's now great need for the Caribbean countries to improve food and nutrition practices leading to more healthy diets so that we can reduce the incidence of lifestyle diseases such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes and so on. Again there will be a number of papers in this conference that would address the issue of food security and the factors affecting food security and also how countries can go about trying to ensure that their populations improve their diets. We hope we can contribute to the reduction of the crisis in terms of diabetes and hypertension that is sweeping not only the Caribbean but even the United States. So I'm sure at the end of this conference we would wish to report that the conference highlighted the scientific information and proposed practical ways in which people of the Caribbean can benefit from the research and development emanating from the scholars in the region. Thus, it is my hope that the conference can make a difference to peoples of the region especially to increase the food security and address the problem of climate change.

Now, as I said before, this conference has been fortunate to have the University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service take the responsibility of staging the conference on behalf of the Society and they have done an excellent job as you can see, particularly an excellent choice of hotel. There is always a danger in calling names in fear of leaving someone out but I must give special thanks to Kwame Garcia, Stafford Crossman, Kofi Boateng and their staff here with us, who have done so much in planning this conference. I remember visiting St. Croix twice and Kwame took me to almost every hotel on the island as we tried to make a choice. I know it has been difficult for them given the high standard of living in St. Croix to get the hotel that we can afford but I think they've done a very excellent job. I must thank the staff of the University for the admirable hospitality and also the people of St. Croix because everywhere we have gone we have got the very highest standards of hospitality and service. So on behalf of the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society I sincerely welcome you all to this conference and I know we'll have a wonderful time and we look forward to the reception this afternoon and a most successful conference.

Thank you very much.

