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PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CARIBBEAN FOOD CROPS SOCIETY



FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING
PARAMARIBO, SURINAM
JULY 24 – 31, 1967

VOLUME V

Marketing — John Grace

It has been said by a manufacturer that the process of production is not completed until the product is purchased by the final consumer. The same applies to Marketing Fresh Fruit and Vegetables which are the prime interest of this Society.

A trader made a further applicable statement "A product well bought is half sold".

These two statements sum up the key to successful marketing.

First of all however you must know your market, the desires and preferences, the price ranges of competition, the volume and saturation point.

You must then grow what is wanted, when it is wanted present it as traditional suppliers do, or better see that it gets to the consumer in an attractive and appealing state ready for traditional preparation or consumption in the market which you are supplying.

This is the optimum to which we should all aspire. You will realise however that there is no mechanical device to give you such results. It takes many dedicated men in various technical fields such as you represent to obtain the successful production and marketing of Fruit and marketing of Fruit and Vegetables.

To illustrate a case in question I give you our own experience. In 1961 we sent a trial shipment of Barbados Lisbon Yams to the United Kingdom just before Christmas. The result was good and we paid the producer over twice the price he could have got in the local market. We sent further shipments during the following months, but got complaints and poorer results.

About this time we found out that our main competitor from Africa was a long hard yam which was evenly shaped and cooked "hard".

To meet this competition and to overcome the complaint of excessive peelings from our "ugly" yams we decided to sample consumers, asking them to observe the smooth soft nexture and flavour of our yam. At the same time we set rigid standards of grading and went into the question of packaging. The African yam we learnt was packed in bags and suffered much breakage even though it was well shaped. The size of our boxes was too big for one man to handle and two men would throw it thus further causing our yams to be damaged. Cartons proved impracticable as the irregular shape of the yam caused the edges to collapse in stowing with the consequent damage and lack of appearance.

The extent of the market and best method of marketing had to be considered. After it was determined that Barbados Lisbon yams had established themselves as a separate product it was necessary to ensure we had the most efficient distribution to the consumer in all areas of the country. For this we appointed a wholesaler who had branches in each big industrial city where consumers were concentrated.

Next we had to get the growers to appreciate what was wanted

by the market so they could improve their growing, grading and handling conditions. Barbados Vegetable Growers Ltd., was formed in 1964 as a result. In the meantime prices were not quite as good as originally but reasonable tonnages could be moved which kept the interest of growers.

In 1965 we met with financial disaster mainly from the black spot to which Messrs. Jeffers and Headley have referred in their papers and our Department of Agriculture were most prompt and coöperative in setting to work on the problem. We dumped the yams to preserve our consumer acceptance. Considerable vigilance has been exercised since by all sections and no recurrence has been traced in any shipment.

Due to the close liason with Growers better prices were obtained this year partly due to better shaped yams of a more even size being produced and with greater yields per acre as can be substantiated by Mr. Hoard who is present today. It is expected that improved produce will be forthcoming from year to year in future.

You will realise that we control our market, demand and get a premium and although we may be reaching saturation point we have established a market which will last and defy a considerable amount of competition.

During this period we have also shipped Tannias, Eddoes Christophene, Pumpkins, Mangoes, Avacadoes, Beans and Tomatoes to the U.K. and other markets. Generally we have found that what is acceptable in Barbados is not what the other markets want. Further since most of these other crops are not grown on a large scale the incidence of diseases and rots have considerably hampered the development of greater volume, and now we await the appointment of additional technical staff to our Department of Agriculture so that our marketing of these other products can be increased.

Out of all this comes certain facts :

1. Before even a seed is ordered the market acceptance of the variety must be determined. The variety must be tested first for results in local growing conditions.
2. Production costs and economic yield must be determined.
3. Proper packaging treatment and handling must be practised on produce graded to market requirements.
4. Suitable transport both in type and frequency must be determined.
5. The period of year required and the period of production checked to determine if they coincide.
6. How close is nearest market as transport charges will be less. Spoilage and ripeness will also be a lesser problem.

To deal with the last point first, we in the B.W.I. have an import food bill, in 1964 of 244 million, which by 1970 is estimated to be 400 million. Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Dutch territories, the French Territories and the Dominican Republic all have an import food

bill. One of the items nearly all import is carrots. An item we all can grow and do grow. Peas, Beans, feed for livestock are all imported, as is a considerable tonnage of Meat.

In all this there are considerable wastages occurring — selling below production cost, dumping surpluses and yet other nations and territories right here around us in the Caribbean are importing from outside sources.

There have been numerous surveys done in this field. Most of the authorities claim not to have had enough time to effectively put their efforts to work. The former Caribbean Commission did the most effective study on the area many years ago and U.P.R. have some worthwhile studies on Puerto Rico. Mr. C. N. De Boer also has done a useful study.

Everyone of us is connected and concerned with Marketing. You may not be selling, but in the overall picture better produced goods lead to more sales and we are all interested in seeing increased production of Fruit and Vegetables in our country.

I appeal to each of you to go back to your country with a recommendation following this meeting that you will have your Government compile a monthly record of imports of Fruit and Vegetables for the last few years and a similar table of local production and wholesale prices. If Government has not got this information, I am sure that members of the trade, Supermarkets, Importers, Exporters have information which could be compiled. This information would then be interchanged with each other country through the departments concerned with Agricultural Intelligence Service and these findings will be published.

Following upon the conclusions a weekly or daily exchange of bulletins could be set up. The Trade, either exporters or importers could then buy or sell in the light of prices and quantities which are quoted. If the U.S. and some European nations find such a service necessary to their business how can we expect to develop without it?

Would this Society be the clearing house for information and the compiling of bulletins? The suggestion is not mine, but has been put by the author of one of the surveys.

Finally in the matter of quality and grading — No matter how big, beautiful or delicious the Fruit and Vegetable is, if it is not what the market wants you will not get the full market price. The grower therefore must be a part of any and every successful marketing organization. Since every selling organization will want repeat and increased business, the matter of satisfying the consumer with each and every shipment of equal quality will be foremost. I appeal to you and your compatriots therefore to wear your shoe leather by going to markets to see what is wanted, to see that it is grown to best standards and to send your produce. Do not wear out the seats of your trousers waiting for someone to come and make you an offer. We must be masters of our own destiny. We must live up to our responsibilities and reap the rewards of our efforts.