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CARIBBEAN FOOD CROPS SOCIETY



FIRST ANNUAL MEETING
ST. CROIX, U. S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
OCTOBER 11, 1963

VOLUME I

PANEL: PROBLEMS OF FOOD CROP MARKETING AND PRODUCTION

SUMMARY

Dr. W. F. Finner stressed the important role of markets in determining the pattern of agriculture in a country and cited changes in agricultural production in Mexico to exploit the withdrawal of Cuban supplies from the U. S. market as an example of this. Proper organization of marketing not only provided incentive for production but could exert a marked influence on the economic development of a country and assist in raising the nutritional level of a population by improving distribution efficiency. He emphasized that no single blueprint for marketing organizations was adequate or suitable for adoption by all countries at all times. A market which will not pay the extra cost of standardization and improved presentation of goods cannot justify provision of such services, while such services may be essential to develop competitiveness of goods where the market insists on improved presentation and standardization.

He then proceeded to outline and discuss the following aspects of a properly organized marketing system:

- (a) Ensuring of regular supplies
- (b) Maintenance of quality standards
- (c) Reasonable transportation costs
- (d) Processing problems including the use of suitable varieties for processing which often are unsuitable for the fresh fruit market and the need for maintaining continuity of supplies
- (e) Operation of an efficient and accurate market information service which is related to the existence of proper facilities for rapid communication
- (f) Provision of storage and processing facilities on an adequate but economical scale
- (g) Favourable tariff situations
- (h) Physical availability of a market, and
- (i) Wise judgment in the selection of the crop to be produced and avoiding the mistake of endeavouring to produce too wide a range of crops and of failure to specialize, in order to accelerate acquisition of the skills and technique necessary for efficient production

Dr. Abdul Rahman, in his remarks, described various methods of processing, e. g., canning, freezing, dehydration, dehydrofreezing, salting, fermentation, candying, pickling, each differing as to cost and in acceptability of the end product. He stressed the need to adopt a method which resulted in a product of acceptable quality at least cost, e. g. dehydrofreezing vs. freezing and preparation of plantain flour from green plantains including the skin by use of potassium meta-bisulphide.

Mr. Rogers informed the meeting of the emphasis placed by the Caribbean Organization on the importance of developing intra-Caribbean trade especially in vegetables and food crops and the reasons for this emphasis and the activities to this end in which the Caribbean Organization is currently engaged. He pointed out the fallacy of the idea that production in all the Caribbean islands was competitive. He dealt briefly with the objectives of the Organization's Caribbean Plan and outlined the work and progress of the Clearing House for Trade and Tourism Information operating in the Secretariat. He referred to Drs. de Boer's assignment as Market Analyst, and to the latter's expressed view that lack of assured markets was a major obstacle to expansion of production in many countries of the Caribbean. He referred to ideas under consideration by the Organization including the establishment of a Caribbean trade market.

In the discussion which ensued, speakers referred to the need to educate farmers, particularly small farmers, to accept the idea of expanding production in order to cheapen selling price and expanding consumption of their products.

The possibility of Caribbean countries producing food to meet the U. S. market, which is likely to be in short supply in certain months of the year, was indicated, and the necessity to select varieties which the market requires and which ship and transport well was stressed. It was pointed out that Florida does not can any of her tomato crop even when there is a surplus for the fresh fruit market because the requirements of the market for canned fruit and for fresh fruit differ markedly. It was also pointed out that the limited number of daylight hours in the Caribbean area made it difficult to produce tomatoes which can match the yields secured in areas with longer daylight. This was also probably associated with relatively low assimilation of carbon dioxide by tomatoes grown in the area.

It was also pointed out that lack of knowledge as regards the status of disease and pest problems of plants and animals in the various countries of the Caribbean was operating as a handicap to intra-Caribbean trade. There was also a tendency towards a lack of confidence in certificates of health issued in some countries and it was agreed that an urgent need existed for a careful study to be made by experts of the situation in each of the countries of the area and the formulation of realistic quarantine and import regulations.

The Meeting agreed that, at this stage, there was a need for an experimental approach to the problems of marketing in the Caribbean, bearing in mind that the main aim is cheaper food for the population; and the approach should include studies for more efficient distribution of imported foods.

Mr. Naylor outlined some of the crop losses occurring in the Caribbean area through attack of fungi, bacteria, viruses and nematodes, illustrating his talk with color slides. He emphasized the need for surveys and evaluation of crop damage through diseases and for full exchange of ideas and information on problems and methods of control.

Dr. Mario Perez described some of the problems of economics involved in control of pest infestation, the need for more information on insecticide residues and phytotoxicity of various chemicals, their effect on crop yields and their behaviour under different ecological conditions and the need for improved exchange of information between countries. He stressed the need for quarantine regulations to be based on knowledge of the pests occurring in the various countries, noting that the pineapple fruit worm occurring in Puerto Rico was not recorded elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Dr. Velez Fortuño pointed to the limited scope of plant breeding work currently in progress in the Caribbean and emphasized the need for:

- (a) a survey to provide complete information on pests and diseases of food crops in the Caribbean region
- (b) the establishment of a regional plant introduction centre to supply planting materials of improved varieties in the region
- (c) organizing Caribbean plant breeders in the Caribbean to plan their work as a team in a manner similar to the way in which the workers in Puerto Rico plan their programs in cooperation with the States of the Southern Region of the United States. A suitable project for attention might be the selection of a tomato variety adapted to the fewer daylight hours in the Caribbean as compared with temperate regions. Testing of varieties should also be carried out throughout the region as part of a cooperative plan to determine adaptability of the varieties under a wide range of conditions
- (d) a careful survey of genetic material available in the region would be a necessary first step. It was to be noted that some of the most promising varieties of papaya tested in Puerto Rico were of local origin, and material valuable for development or for breeding work might be uncovered.

- (e) evaluation of material secured from other areas would be the next step. The initiative of the Caribbean Organization in attempting to secure new ecotypes of pangola for introduction to the region was cited as an example of the type of action needed
- (f) establishment of a gene bank for the use of plant breeders in the region

He also stressed the importance of securing realistic plant quarantine regulations to prevent the spread of pests and diseases within the Caribbean area.

Mr. Haynes commented on the proposal for establishment of a regional centre for plant introduction and testing and pointed to the need to ensure that a wide range of ecological conditions should be presented at such a centre. He stressed that there would be a need for the establishment of sub-centres for testings. For this work, use of uniform standardized criteria for climatological descriptions was an essential.

Dr. Samuels indicated the long list of variables which operated to restrict the applicability of fertilizer trials to areas, crops and seasons other than those dealt with in actual field experiments. Of special interest to members was a chart he exhibited illustrating the influence of time of planting on yields of potatoes - sweet and Irish - corn, tomatoes, pigeon peas and cucumbers.

He summarized the practical suggestions proposed by other members of the panel and added the suggestion that in some of the smaller islands which could not afford the services of a qualified entomologist, technicians be trained to identify major pests and diseases. Attention was also called to the need for more intensive research on the use of foliar nutrient sprays, especially on soil, with a high pH value.