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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

EXPORT OF NON-TRADITIONAL CROPS

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Honourable Prime Minister; Mr. President, Hon. Minister for Agriculture; Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of friendly nations; Executive Officers of the Caribbean Food Crops Society; distinguished delegates; ladies and gentlemen:

I am indeed honoured to be asked to give the keynote address to the 22nd Meeting of the Caribbean Food Crops Society. When I was appointed as Saint Lucia's Ambassador in Washington, I thought I had freed myself of all engagements involved in addressing agricultural meetings, but I was quick to learn that the ambassadorial field is all encompassing.

In my two years in Washington, I have had to deal not only with diplomatic relations between friendly and not so friendly nations, but also with little birds called parakeets and enormous mammals called whales, bananas and mangoes, fish and meat, tourism and industrial development, minerals and energy resources, science and technology and now in Saint Lucia with non-traditional crops.

Essentially, I have learned that all these matters impinge in many ways on relations between nations for, in the final analysis, relations between nations are intimately interwoven with economic affairs, which include matters of trade, matters of survival which relate to food whether it be traditional or non-traditional crops.

When we address the subject of non-traditional crops, we must first define our terms. In attempting to define non-traditional, I find it useful to define the word traditional. Something traditional is a mode of behaviour or practices, followed by a people continuously, sometimes for generation to generation. When we talk about a traditional practice, we talk about a time honoured practice or set of practices. Therefore, it appears to me that the term non-traditional would refer to a pattern or mode of behaviour or practice which has not been followed by people continuously for a period of time, i.e., it is not a time honoured practice or set of practices.

Traditionally, therefore, must be viewed as a time phase phenomenon; it must perhaps be viewed as a feature of culture, a feature which is either rooted in a people with time or which is behavioural or ethnic rooted; it could be an adoption or adaptation phenomenon. Non-traditionally should therefore be viewed as a mode which could with time become traditional.

It is reasonable to assume that what is non-traditional today could become traditional tomorrow. The banana industry is a case in point. Before the 1930's bananas were not grown as a traditional crop in the

Windward Islands. But, as time progressed, bananas became the traditional crop. Therefore, we must view non-traditionality not as a static phenomenon, but rather as a phenomenon that can be subject to change.

This is important, for if we are to succeed in the export of non-traditional crops we must think in terms of a deliberately phased transition from a non-traditional to a traditional situation, we must be thinking in terms of a dynamic situation.

Permit me, therefore, to define my terms as they relate to crops. To me, traditional export crops would encompass crops which are systematically produced for export for well defined established markets; crops which presently are customarily produced in volume and quality to significantly impact upon the economies of producing countries. Non-traditional crops would therefore encompass a non-systematic production in limited quantities and of variable quality for markets which are not well defined and crops which impact insignificantly or marginally on the economies of producing countries.

The question then comes to mind: Why have these crops been non-traditional in the export trade? One may deduce that they have been non-traditional because of an unawareness of the markets or there were no markets at point in time, lack of technical knowledge of these crops in terms of appropriate varieties and agronomic requirements, high incidence of diseases and pests or agro-ecological conditions which adversely afflict them affecting their survival or low cost benefit ratio returns which act as a deterrent to farmers. These are some of the conditions which could contribute to making a crop non-traditional for export.

Therefore, you ask yourself: How could these crops become traditional in time? I hope you agree with me that our aim ought to be, in the final analysis, to cause a shift from non-traditionality to traditionality. Of paramount importance to my mind, is an awareness of the markets. We need to know where the markets are, their requirements in quality and quantity as well as economic marketing arrangements for the same.

In my many deliberations with the functionaries in the U.S. Department of Agriculture whose function is to deal with the Caribbean Basin Initiative, I belabour the point that if we in the Caribbean were to be made aware of the markets and demands for tropical crops, and if it is economically feasible to produce and market these crops, we could mobilize our resources to produce them in the desired quality and quantity for identified markets in the United States provided that there are no insurmountable barriers to trade. I usually cite the banana industry of the Windward Islands as an example of an industry that was developed in the first instance, to meet the requirements of a well defined market involving a complex mobilization of thousands of farmers and guided by organized and structured management, a sound technical base and a very reliable marketing infrastructure.

We must therefore ask ourselves: Which institutions in the region are pursuing the studies on identifying the markets and the demands of the market for non-traditional crops? Which institutions are probing the global market place, so that we in the region can so channel our production capabilities?

This leads us to another question: Have we categorized our non-traditional crops into taxonomic, biological, economic or agronomic groups, and shouldn't we be in a position to define the present land use pattern and the land capabilities of our territories in order to gear ourselves to produce these crops? Don't we need to examine and study the adaptability of these crops to our agroecological zones taking advantage of the genetic pool available to us? In this regard are we aware of the global genetic pool available to us?

We must therefore ask ourselves: Which institutions are addressing themselves to these very important aspects so that we could advise our Governments and our farming communities on the optimum land capability parameters for production of specific crop varieties? Further, in order to be able to do this, don't we need to direct our energies at an understanding of the agronomic requirements of these crops and the pests and diseases that afflict them? In essence, do we have the technical packages for each crop which could serve as a guide to our farming community to produce the quantity and quality under well defined conditions for the market? Further, do we know whether a business venture for the export production of our non-traditional crops or group of crops will bring a margin of profit to the farmer?

Mr. President, I have taken pains to ask all these questions because all too often we have advised our farmers to produce crops with wrong assumptions or with too little knowledge of either the market, the crop agronomy, pest and diseases or cost benefits, as well as barriers to trade, etc., only to end up leaving the farmer with a heavy debt to carry and frustration at the end of his growing season. This is the most demoralizing side of farming which can only be averted if we have the sound backing of research and development.

I am not suggesting by any means that we set up another research institution to start tackling the questions posed. It is my view that much of the information is already available to us in the region from the various national, regional and international organizations now serving us.

Further, upon examination of the many factors and considerations related to the export of non-traditional crops, we must not fail to identify the present local traditional products of these crops. For example, there are farmers who, over the years, have specialized in the production and export of the very non-traditional crops that we are now addressing.

These farmers could be targets for an expanded production programme to meet increased demands as markets are identified and expanded upon. With a little help, and improved technology, these farmers could possibly become core producers and lead the way to traditionality.

This brings me to the important area of national and regional policy. To my mind, it is the role of our technologists to assist Governments and Government functionaries in the formulation of policy which would embrace considerations like optimization of land use, labour and capital, improvement of the nutritional base of our populations, improved foreign exchange base, improved self-reliance and improved economic position of the farming community.

Our Caribbean Community Secretariat has put together five volumes on a "Regional Food and Nutrition Strategy for the Caribbean" which contain the essential ingredients of policy statements and well defined strategies and targets as well as institutional networking for implementation of policies. Although the priorities may not be the same, the objectives of the Food and Nutrition policy would be for the most part comparable to the objectives in the development of an export market for non-traditional crops. It should not be difficult to blend the two. I recommend the CARICOM document (the five volumes referred to earlier) to all policy makers involved in Caribbean agriculture.

It is significant to note that in repeated CARICOM reports, including a "Review of the Agricultural Sector 1980-1984" published in May of this year, emphasis was given to the importance of developments in the export of non-traditional crops as a means towards the economic progress of the region. This was also reported by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations at the Nineteenth F.A.O. Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean held in Barbados between 5th-13th August this year. The topic of the conference was "Problems Affecting Agricultural Development in the Small Island States of the Caribbean".

The Caribbean Food Crops Society must therefore be congratulated for leading the way by adopting the theme of export of non-traditional crops for its twenty-second meeting. This meeting must be viewed as a launching pad, a new beginning and I hope that the deliberation on this subject as well as the movement from non-traditional to traditional crops will be a reality.

This will, nevertheless, call for some very serious thinking on a series of interrelated matters and in all this we will have to address the questions of institutional streamlining, the question of the role and functions of the various local, regional and international institutions now serving us. Are we making the best use of these institutions and are they being mobilized and coordinated to serve us?

In this regard, Mr. President, I refer to the May 1984 CARICOM review of the agricultural sector which states: "The research facilities of the region are currently operated in an uncoordinated manner. Furthermore, there is often a wasteful duplication of effort and an inability to translate important research findings into practical results".

Further, the F.A.O. meeting of this month held in Barbados, referred to earlier, under the section of "Agricultural Research and Extension Policy and Programming" states as follows: "Objectives and linkages with sub-regional and regional research centers continue to be lacking notably in the smaller island States".

Mr. President, I have focused on this area because in the development of our theme which is the export of non-traditional crops, we must seek to effectively manage our scarce resources through an integrated approach to development. This, we must agree, can be more easily achieved through a greater integration of our institutions.

The Caribbean Food Crops Society has an important role to play in this regard, for it embraces not only the national, regional and international institutions of the region, but the farming community as well.

It is clear from your programme for this meeting and the questions I have posed that this meeting, although commendable, can only scratch the surface of the subject under consideration.

I therefore regard this meeting as the sowing of fertile seeds on fertile ground which could lead toward future developments in the systematic export of what are now non-traditional crops to traditional crops. I recommend that in order to give in-depth consideration to this subject, a workshop be organized to look at well defined practical areas in the development of the export of non-traditional crops. This can more aptly be coordinated by one of our regional institutions and/or the international organizations serving the region. My suggested subject areas are as follows:

1. A categorization or classification of non-traditional export crops as they refer to our region with data base on comparable geographical regions of the world where these crops are grown successfully.
2. The world market for these well defined categories of crops. An exposé of the world market demand should include a review of the past and projections as they relate to the future.
3. The major agro-ecological zones where these crops can be grown in the region. A quantification of production capabilities of these crops in the region and a quantification of production parameters as they relate to local and regional/international markets.
4. Variety and quality standards required for targeted markets both regional and international.
5. The known pests and disease problems and their control as they relate to production of these non-traditional export crops and the known pests and disease problems as they relate to barriers to markets.
6. A suggested national and regional policy framework for export of non-traditional crops and a time phase programme for export of well defined non-traditional crops.
7. The agro-industrial backup to a programme of production and marketing of non-traditional crops.
8. The research, development and extension needs for the development of an export market for non-traditional crops.
9. The marketing infrastructure required for the export of non-traditional crops.

I am not one of those who would wish to perpetuate more technical meetings than we now entertain, but it is clear to me that if we are to make an impact at all and to bring about meaningful change from non-traditional, we ought to seriously consider these topic areas in some

depth. Otherwise, we could find that what appears to be feasible may be because of lack of proper understanding of the market place, the crop and the economics of production.

This has been one of the problems facing the agricultural thrust of the Caribbean Basin Initiative as it relates to agricultural produce. We already have several examples of agri-business ventures which were thought to be viable, only to find out at the end of the line, that there were so many problems, so many barriers to trade, be they disease problems or economic barriers. The farmer or investor has too often ended up holding the debt. We therefore have to plan strategies very carefully and I think it is the role of our existing national/regional and international institutions to assist our Governments and farmers in the formulation of well defined plans and targets for the future. It is also important to have high level consultations between producer and consumer countries. I must also make the point that we are already making strides in the export of non-traditional crops, details of which I expect will be presented at this meeting. We must continue with our resolve to expand our programmes, but I contend we must enrich our knowledge in key areas before it is too late.

Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Minister of Agriculture, as policy makers and as hard working farmers that you both are, your presence at this meeting is, to my mind, an indication of the importance that you give to this subject. As past Director of Research of our banana research organization (a position I held for over a decade) and now as your Ambassador in Washington, it is very clear to me that we cannot survive world competition if our policies are not guided by very sound technological bases emanating from our national and regional institutions with strong linkages with international institutions. I know that I am speaking to the knowledge, the experienced and the converted. You have therefore made my task easy.

Mr. President, I thank you for inviting me to this meeting to share some of my thoughts with members of your Society on the export of non-traditional crops and I wish your meeting every success as we move from the non-traditional to the traditional.

I thank you.