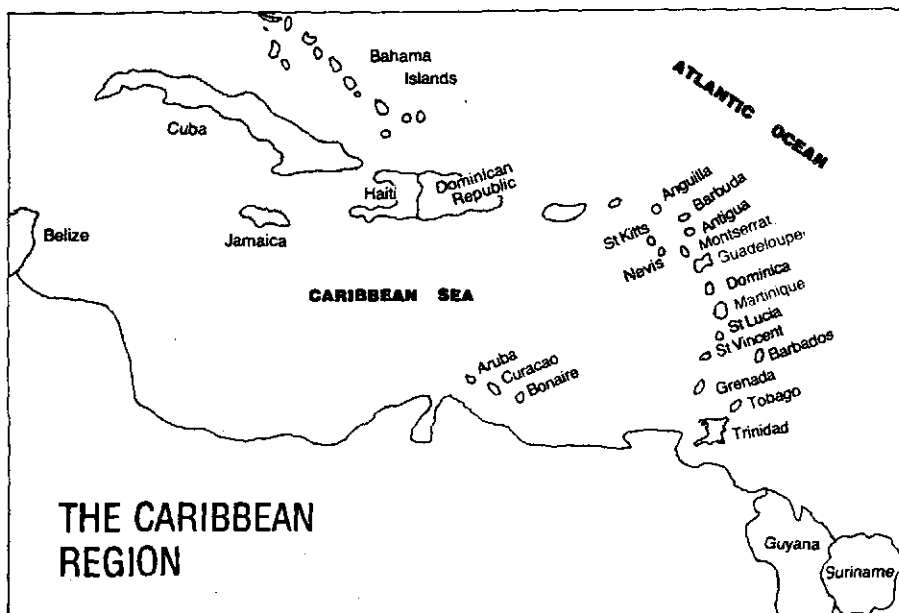


CARIBBEAN
DEVELOPMENT
 AND
CO-OPERATION
COMMITTEE



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 CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION COMMITTEE
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CIP AND POTATO IMPROVEMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN
 Prepared by
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 Lima, Peru

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UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA Office for the Caribbean

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CIP AND POTATO IMPROVEMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

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Up until recently, the International Potato Center (CIP) has had little visibility in the Caribbean region. During the first 12 years CIP has concentrated in those areas where the potential of the potato has already been recognized and rapid expansion is already taking place.

Two countries, the Dominican Republic and Cuba are a part of a joint effort which is called PRECODEPA for potato improvement in Central America. This is a pooling of resources for research and training in Central America with CIP providing technical and administrative support where needed to this Swiss funded program. The PRECODEPA approach has been so valuable that CIP has already initiated similar approaches in several other parts of the world. It could be a possible approach for agricultural development in general in the Caribbean.

Potato improvement in general in Central and South America is divided into two CIP regional programs; one is for the Andes, the highland region, the Center of origination of the potato and the second is for the non-Andean region. The non-Andean region is headquartered in Brazilia and much of the work done there is directly applicable to the Caribbean. Also the work done at CIP's high jungle station in San Ramon, Peru and also CIP's Philippine regional program would have good application to Caribbean conditions.

Where does the potato fit into Caribbean Agriculture; where should it fit? The potato is the most well balanced nutritionally of all the major plant food of the world. The potato produces more well balanced protein and calories per unit area per unit of time than other major plant foods. It is well suited for small farm conditions, is a good subsistence food but is readily converted into cash.

A good source of inexpensive seed has been the major limiting factor of the potato in tropical climates up until now, as well as the perishability of the crop after harvest. These limiting factors are rapidly being overcome in research at the International Potato Center in collaboration with national programs around the world. Use of true seed instead of tubers for planting is already a reality in some places and in others rapid multiplication of plant material is cutting down the cost of seed. Perishability has less importance where the potato can be produced almost the year around, than in climates where it is seasonal only. Inexpensive village level processing is now a reality for those tropical areas where perishability is a major limiting factor.

Vegetables to which the potato belongs as a group of foods, have been mainly forgotten up until now by those agencies trying to help solve food supply problems in the world. Concentration has been on cereals which are mainly suitable for large farm areas and extensive agriculture. Yet it has been through intensive vegetable production that China has mainly solved the food problems for its large cities. And this would seem to be the approach needed in many small countries where population is concentrated and farms are small. The potato and what CIP is doing has a direct application for such areas.

The emphasis of this conference is tremendously important to small countries where duplication and the re-inventing of the wheel must be eliminated. The principal questions in my opinion are:

1. How do you get countries to truly collaborate and depend on each other for research results. This encompasses much more than sharing results at regional meetings.
2. How do you develop a long-term plan so well done that it will continue regardless of political changes.
3. How do you develop the essential human resources and a salary structure to keep them.
4. How do you identify the comparative advantages for each country in a pooling of resources for agricultural development in the Caribbean.

What CIP has done with PRECODEPA in Central America has a direct application to some of these questions. Although PRECODEPA is for potatoes only, it could apply equally well for Agriculture in general if there was a sufficient genuine need and desire for co-operation. The essential starting point is when everyone places on the table what they have to offer to such a program instead of seeing what they can selfishly get for themselves from the resources available for such a joint venture.

CIP is ready for a much greater participation in the Caribbean area. The demonstrated genuine interest in increased use of the potato as a food by Caribbean countries in a united collaborative effort is essential. We are ready to increase the following:

- 1.- Numbers of research and extension staff being trained;
- 2.- Research material being provided;
- 3.- And consultants for specific problems or for technology being transferred.

