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REPORT ON PUERTO RICO CONFERENCE ON
AGRICULTURAL PRIORITIES IN THE
CARIBBEAN BASIN

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REPORT ON PUERTO RICO CONFERENCE ON
AGRICULTURAL PRIORITIES IN THE
CARIBBEAN BASIN

BACKGROUND

The Conference was sponsored by the Organization of American States, the Government of Puerto Rico and the United States Agency for International Development. All countries included in the United States "Caribbean Basin Initiative" (CBI) were represented (except the Dominican Republic); agencies and institutions included the United States Department of State, the USDA, USAID, IICA, IDB, Peace Corps, CIDA, CIAT, Economic Development Administration, CARICOM, UWI, WINBAN, various departments of the Government of Puerto Rico and the University of Puerto Rico.

Guest speakers included the Governor, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Deputy Governor of Puerto Rico; the latter read a message on behalf of the Vice President of the United States.

The expressed purpose of the Conference was to:

1. elicit the advice of agricultural planners concerning regional priorities for rural development and related research needs;
2. Confer for planning and development of agricultural research projects for immediate OAS support.

The Conference can be traced to the US Programme in Science and Technology Co-operation which originated in 1981 as a Congressionally mandated activity of USAID with three principal objectives:

1. to stimulate and support new and innovative research approaches to current or emerging development problems;

2. to assist LDC's in building the scientific and technical capability needed to attack such problems themselves; and
3. to involve LDC scientists and scientific institutions more directly in setting priorities, planning scientific activities, information exchange and technology transfer.

This programme is a part of the United States actions relating to the 1979 United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development and is currently implemented through a system of competitive research grants. These grants are subject to four criteria: scientific merit, relevance to development, new and innovative approach and contribution to building scientific capability of the recipients.

It is out of this programme that USAID awarded some US\$400,000 to the Department of Scientific and Technological Affairs of the OAS for a joint "AID/OAS Programme for Research Co-operation on Tropical Plant Resources". This award was intended to provide small grants particularly to scientists in small local institutions for research on tropical plants as sources of human and animal food and also fuel.

The conference was funded from this grant and was intended to clarify priorities for allocations from this specific programme. However, the level and extent of representation indicated that the deliberations would extend beyond such narrow limits and have a much wider influence on the perceived (priority) needs for Caribbean agricultural research. In fact, the submissions made by country representatives support this interpretation.

PRESENTATIONS

Presentations by invited speakers included the following themes:

1. The Organization of American States Science and Technology Programme in the Caribbean - by the Director, Department of Scientific and Technical Affairs, Organization of American States.

The broad objectives of the OAS Science and Technology Programme are to promote science and technology in Latin America and the Caribbean and to contribute to the economic and social well being of the region. The programmes complement national efforts and are often multinational in concept with strong elements of horizontal co-operation.

With regard to food, emphasis is being placed on: reduction of post-harvest losses with special attention to the problems of packaging; the use of solar energy for drying; the development of marine resources and aquaculture.

2. Strengthening Agricultural Development: A Challenge to the Caribbean - by the Rector, Mayaguez Campus, University of Puerto Rico.

The agricultural research and development efforts at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) during the last decade were summarized.

The most important component of this address was the role which the UPR has perceived for its future activities in Caribbean initiatives relating to agricultural research and training. UPR considers that it can provide technical assistance in the transfer of technology, upgrading training and in the strengthening of institutional capabilities in agricultural development. UPR expects to be able to provide resources to strengthen regional institutions concerned with learning and research, and envisages the creation of an Agricultural Research and Training Programme for the Caribbean utilizing resources available at Mayaguez. It is envisaged that this programme could link the USA and the countries of the Caribbean in terms of research, teaching and technical assistance in agriculture, as well as other resources available to the food production system. Marine sciences, aquaculture and agro-technology were also considered areas for inclusion and priority attention under the envisaged programme.

The functions of the Programme and of UPR would be catalytic, focusing on the establishment of the organization and development of a scientific infrastructure to facilitate exchange of knowledge and transfer of technology.

The objective of the Programme would be institutional development to be achieved through the development of faculty and personnel in various regional institutions relying upon exchange of students, professors and other personnel, and also collaborative programmes.

3. Objectives and Approach of the Caribbean Group Agricultural Task Force - by the Chief, Division of Agriculture, IDB

This is a consultative group to co-ordinate agricultural development and act as an information clearing house with reference to agricultural development activities in the Caribbean.

4. The United States Department of Agriculture Programme of Assistance for the Caribbean Basin - by the Administrator, Office of International Co-operation and Development, USDA

The Office of International Co-operation and Development (OICD) was established four years ago to manage, facilitate and execute USDA's work in co-operative international agricultural research, technical assistance and training. OICD works in co-operation with US-AID, manages USDA's participation in international scientific exchange and research and acts as liaison with international food and agriculture organizations. OICD also works with US and foreign universities on international scientific and co-operative programmes and is active in involving US agri-business in development assistance and investment.

The CBI provisions for agriculture were outlined with specific reference to expectations that trade in agricultural products will be facilitated. Difficulties which some Caribbean countries have experienced with grades and standards and also US phytosanitary regulations was recognized. The US will therefore seek to increase its technical assistance and training to provide better knowledge of US grades and standards, make concerted efforts to promote understanding

of phytosanitary requirements, provide technical assistance on plant inspection procedures and operation of fumigation facilities, and also offer training on health and sanitary regulations.

This presentation complemented that of the Rector, Mayaguez Campus UPR in that proposed actions by the USDA tend to be concentrated on Puerto Rico which would become the focal point for US "institution building" and also constitute the gateway for US development actions in the Caribbean. *for*

agriculture research

The Conference was advised that the USDA is proposing to establish a plant and animal disease research and diagnostic laboratory in Puerto Rico where, for the benefit of all Caribbean countries, research, diagnosis, training and technical assistance could all be conducted.

The USDA Forest Service is considering the use of the Institute of Tropical Forestry at Rio Piedras as a Caribbean Forestry Training Centre.

With respect to crops research, the USDA is now involved in preliminary planning to upgrade the physical plant and expand the research staff of the USDA-operated facilities at the Mayaguez Institute of Tropical Agriculture. Plans are being formulated to initiate cooperative actions in management training for the benefit of agricultural research in the Caribbean. The strengthening of research links between universities in the Caribbean and those in the US is also being considered.

An International Agri-business Investment Information Centre is being established within the OICD to provide services to US agri-business firms interested in investment and joint ventures (that will aid Caribbean development). These services will include identifying investment opportunities, organizing a series of agricultural investment measures to the Caribbean and conducting follow-up support activities.

The OICD has also established an agri-business promotion council that will focus on how private US agri-business can foster the agricultural development and economic growth of Caribbean countries.

In addition to these activities, USDA is working with AID to offer technical assistance in natural resource areas such as: identifying soil types and soil capabilities; assessing water resources and their availability; studies of the environment for fish and wild life and flood control.

5. AID's Programme in Agricultural Development in the Caribbean - by the Director, Office of Resource Development, Latin American/Caribbean Bureau, USAID

This programme covers a wide area including research being carried out by universities and institutions, development projects and training at various levels.

6. The Caribbean Basin Initiative - a Framework for Creativity - by the Co-ordinator of Caribbean Affairs, US Department of State

The objectives, scope and possibilities of the CBI have been detailed at numerous fora and do not need to be reiterated here.

7. The Role of Research in Agricultural Development for the Caribbean - by the Senior Assistant Administrator, Bureau of Science and Technology, USAID

This address was given by an eminent scientist and was more technologically oriented than others. The essential message was that the Caribbean has the potential capability to realize significant increases in food production; in order to achieve increases of the magnitude required, the region must take actions to ensure there is an effective research base for agricultural technology, that there is implementation of sound policies and that infrastructure is developed to enable the technologies to be effective.

8. The Role of the Private Sector in Agricultural Development in the Caribbean Basin

Brief accounts were given by representatives of various US multi-national and local firms operating in Puerto Rico concerning their own perceived role, functioning, experiences and contributions to development in the region.

9. Research Priorities

Three Working Groups were constituted to prepare briefs containing the crops-related research priorities for each country as perceived by national delegates. The three groups established were:

1. Eastern Caribbean;
2. Central Caribbean (Haiti and Jamaica); and
3. Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) and Panama

..... The submissions of the three Working Groups are attached. The national interests as represented by the delegate(s) are reflected in these submissions. I attended the Eastern Caribbean Group sessions.

My comments on this part of the proceedings are that there was apparent inability or reluctance to seriously accord priority ratings to research needs. Indeed the submissions became basic shopping lists of perceived needs which were in keeping with general development aspirations.

There were indications that the submissions were not related to on-going research activities at the national level and certainly not to the work programme of important regional institutions. With respect to the Eastern Caribbean, ^{Guyana} Jamaica and Belize, there was no recognition of the role of the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) which did not occupy a seat at the Conference.

The conference agreed that countries may review their submissions and return them to the OAS Secretariat before 15 October 1982. In recognition of its wide geographical area of responsibility, CARDI would be asked to advise the OAS Secretariat on its research priorities. The OAS will carry out a final rating of the submissions and advise the participating governments and institutions before the end of 1982.