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IICA's Contribution to Agro-Processing Development in St. Kitts and Nevis





## WHAT IS IICA?

*The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) was founded in 1942 as the specialized agency of the Inter-American System for the promotion of agriculture and rural well-being. Its headquarters are in San Jose, Costa Rica, and it has offices in each of its 34 Member States, as well as a permanent office for Europe in Madrid, Spain.*

*Its mission is to support the Member States in their pursuit of progress and prosperity, through the modernization of the rural sector, the promotion of food security, and the development of an agricultural sector that is technologically prepared, environmentally managed and socially equitable for the peoples of the Americas.*

*In accordance with its 2002-2006 Medium Term Plan, IICA focuses its cooperation in six strategic areas: Trade and Agribusiness Development, Sustainable Rural Development, Agricultural Health and Food Security, Technology and Innovation, Information and Communication and Education and Training.*

*The Member States of the Institute are Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela.*

*IICA also receives the active support of its Associate State, Spain. The following are the Permanent Observers of the Institute: Arab Republic of Egypt, Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, European Union, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Poland, Romania and the Russian Federation.*

*The governing bodies of IICA are the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA) and the Executive Committee; its executive organ is the General Directorate. Dr. Chelston W. D. Brathwaite, a citizen of Barbados, serves as the Director General of the Institute.*



## INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the IICA Office in St. Kitts and Nevis started the consultative process towards the development of a National Agenda. The aim of this process was to encourage dialogue and to promote medium and long-term national strategies toward sustainable improvement in agriculture and rural life. The persons who participated in the process included officials of the public sector, leaders of Producers' Associations and civil society organizations with broad experience in and/of agricultural knowledge. One of the areas that was identified for the Institute to focus its attention during the period 2002-2006 was the development of agro-processing.

"Agro-processing" involves the transformation of agricultural produce into different chemical or physical state. It describes the numerous activities that take place between harvesting or slaughtering of the raw product, and the production of the final product. These activities have long been a tradition for many Kittitians and Nevisians and during the months of August and September when fruits are plentiful, one could absorb the aroma of boiling fruits coming from the neighbor's kitchen. The products which were mainly jams, jellies, drinks and sauces were of high quality. However, they were usually stored in reused containers which were not properly labeled. Consequently, the presentations of the products were not very attractive.

Agro-processing has been recognized by the government as being critically important to the expansion and diversification of the agricultural sector of the Federation. According to Minister of Agriculture, Honourable Cedric Liburd, it can expand the market for primary products, add value by vertically integrating primary production and minimize post harvest losses. In addition, he stated that it could reduce the seasonability of consumption of some processed foods, increase farm incomes, employment and foreign exchange earnings.



*Hon. Cedric Liburd,  
Minister of Agriculture*





## ASSESSMENT OF AGRO-INDUSTRY ON ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

As a preliminary action, the Florida Associations of Voluntary Agencies for Caribbean Action (FAVA/CA) was requested by the Institute to assist in determining the status/needs of the agro-industry in St. Kitts and Nevis. This assignment was undertaken by Drs. Bob Bates and Mike Talbot during the period, October 2-6, 2002. Twenty two (22) persons on St. Kitts and fifteen (15) on Nevis were contacted and interviewed. The consultants' Terms of Reference included:

- Conducting an on site assessment/evaluation of agro-processors on both islands.
- Developing a training program to address: (i) Fundamentals of processing improvement/improve methodology (ii) Presentation and labeling and quality control.
- Advise on extended shelf life of products.
- Advise on small scale equipment to enhance productivity.

Some of the recommendations made were:

- The highest priority need is for training in food safety and preservation. In addition, a comprehensive workshop in the principles and practice of small scale food processing is essential. This should include information on the proper packaging and labeling of processed foods.
- IICA in cooperation with SEDU in St. Kitts and the Ministry of Agriculture in Nevis should encourage and assist local processors in the formation of a cooperative to serve as the focus for small processing industry. All activities: training, equipment/container procurement and marketing efficiencies dictate some degree of mutual assistance and cooperation at the community level. It is very difficult for individual processors to achieve economies of scale to serve the potential demand for local processed products.





- In relation to processing cooperatives in both islands, the feasibility of establishing community processing facilities should be explored. The facilities would spread the cost of the equipment, containers and utilities over many users. In addition, they could be used for large scale processing.
- On an individual scale, processors should be provided with sources of equipment, supplies and packaging. Small processors badly need information on packaging alternatives and small scale equipment for conducting the various food processing operations

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN

*In November 2002*, two-four day workshops were held in both St. Kitts and Nevis by Ms. Judith-Ann Francis, IICA's Specialist in Technology. Two days were devoted to the theoretical areas such as: The principles and practices of food processing; Presentation and labelling; Good manufacturing practices; The use of food preservatives; Small scale equipment and the need for standards.



*Agro-processor undergoing training*

The other two days were used for practical training. At the completion of the workshop, the participants were able to utilize the new information to produce better quality controlled products such as chips, jams, jellies, hot pepper sauce, mango chutney and chicken ham. Over all, the workshop assisted the participants to be better able to compete in the local and foreign markets by providing them with the information to identify market opportunities for "niche" or high value products, understanding regulatory requirements and provide product safety and quality assurances to buyers.

*In 2003*, the Institute further consolidated its work with the hosting of a six day workshop which resulted in the production of better quality value added products, improved product presentation and the formation of the Nevis Agro-processing Cooperative.





When contacted for comments on the impact which the training had on the group, the agro-processors had this to say:

.....Ms. Francis has a vast knowledge of various topics and was willing to impart what she knew. She was well equipped with handouts for the various sessions as well as ingredients for our recipes which were not readily available on Nevis. Ms. Francis encouraged competitiveness yet cooperation through working in small groups and always reminded us of maximizing sanitation in our production. I would like to thank IICA and the Department of Agriculture for organizing the workshop and to assist us to effectively increase and improve our products.

**Olvis Dyer**  
**DYPRESCO Products**

The training has helped me to improve on my skills as an agro-processor. I have improved in my products as well as in the presentation of the products. Before the training, I produced only wines and candied fruits but had great interest in sauces. After the workshop, however my interest in sauces developed. I then started to produce tamarind sauce, chips and candied fruits. As my interest in agro processing grew, I sought further training at CARIRI in Trinidad. There I was further able to develop my skills. As a result, my product line has grown and I am now producing a range of products. My packaging and labelling have improved and this is an important part of the marketing strategy. Thanks must therefore be extended to the Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture.

**Valary E. Hendrickson**  
**Val's Delights**



*Improved products of Agro-processors*





In 2003, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nevis, recognized the significant contribution which the Institute had made towards the development of agro-processing. In this regards, the Open Day/Exhibition for that year focused primarily on Agro-processing. In addition, the Coordinator, Mr. Augustine Merchant was given the honour of delivering the feature address at the function.

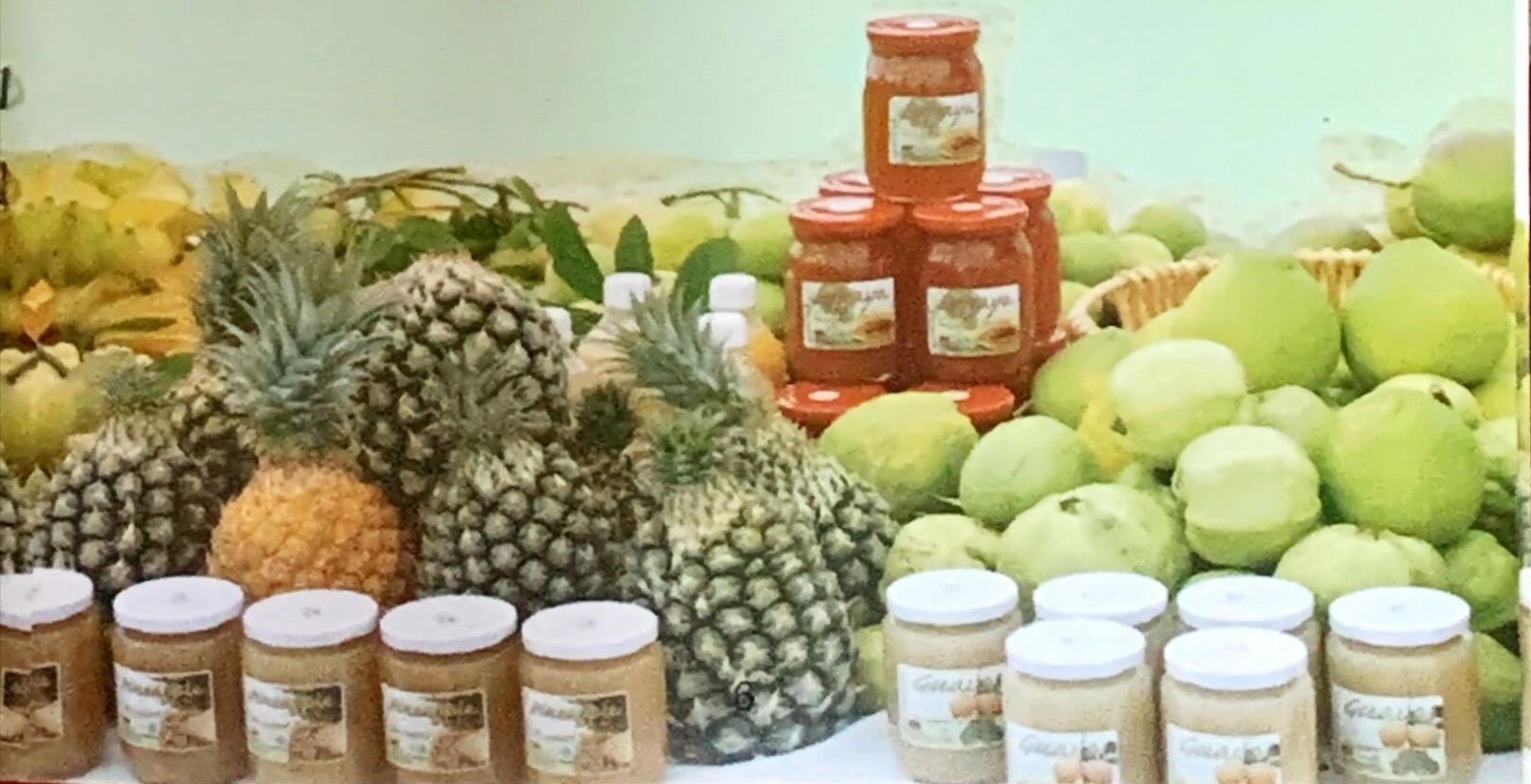


*Augustine Merchant,  
Coordinator,  
IICA Office in St. Kitts & Nevis*

Efforts were also made to raise the profiles of the agro-processors on St. Kitts and Nevis. Consequently, a 15 minute video documentary on the development of agro-processing was done and aired on the local television stations on both islands. This documentary was also shown at the 2003 Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA) Meeting, which was held in Panama.

The Institute also collaborated with UNESCO and co-sponsored a Project entitled, "Enhancing the Participation of Marginalized Youths in the Development Process of the Eastern Caribbean States." The overall goal of the project was to identify and train twenty persons from St. Kitts and Nevis in selected skill areas, while at the same time empowering and partnering them through entrepreneurship development.

It was anticipated that the participants would be assisted in establishing economic enterprises by which they can generate incomes for improving their livelihoods. One of the skills that was offered was beekeeping/candle making. Five young people were involved in this training and they were able to develop enough entrepreneurial skills to start a small candle making business.





*In June 2005*, the Canadian High Commissioner paid an official visit to Nevis. The office was instrumental in arranging with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Office in Barbados for the Agro-processors to meet with him to discuss their developmental needs. One of the requests that was made was for assistance in procuring equipment for a processing facility which was to be built by the Nevis Island Administration. The High Commissioner indicated that a request should be submitted to the Canadian Fund for Local Initiative. The IICA Representative, Ms. Una May Gordon also met with the High Commissioner and had discussions with the agro-processors.

*In 2005*, the Institute assisted Project Strong in developing a project entitled, "Preparing Disadvantaged Teenagers for Self employment." Project Strong is a non-formal institution, which promotes basic education among socially marginalized and economically disadvantaged youth. The project was submitted to the Canadian Fund for Local Initiative and received a Grant of EC\$30,000. The funds provided for the procurement of: one computer, computer desk, chair, printer, scanner, digital camera, 6 sewing machines, materials for basketry, beekeeping equipment (12 hives), refrigerator, stove and 130 jars for agro-processing.



*l to r: Ms. Una May Gordon, with Canadian High Commissioner; former Minister of Agriculture, Nevis, Mr. Livingston Herbert and former Director of Agriculture, Nevis, Mr. Sam Powell*



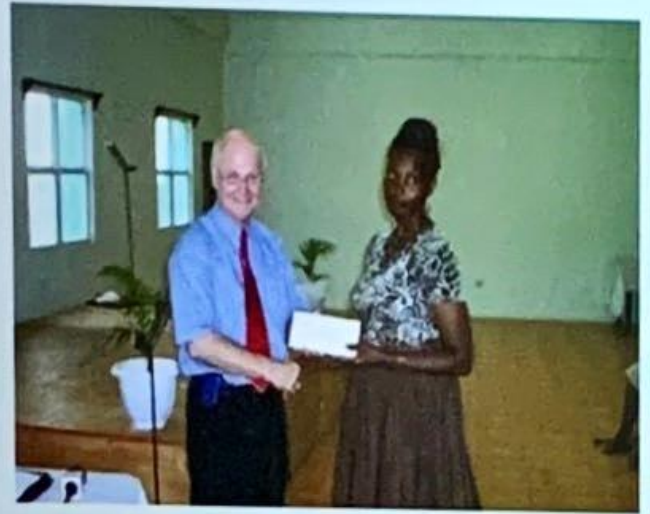
*Students of Project Strong displaying Agro-processing products*





Presently, over seventy five students have benefited from training in agro-processing. The Institute has recognized the special needs of small-scale female producers and has supported the empowerment of rural women towards improving their socio-economics status.

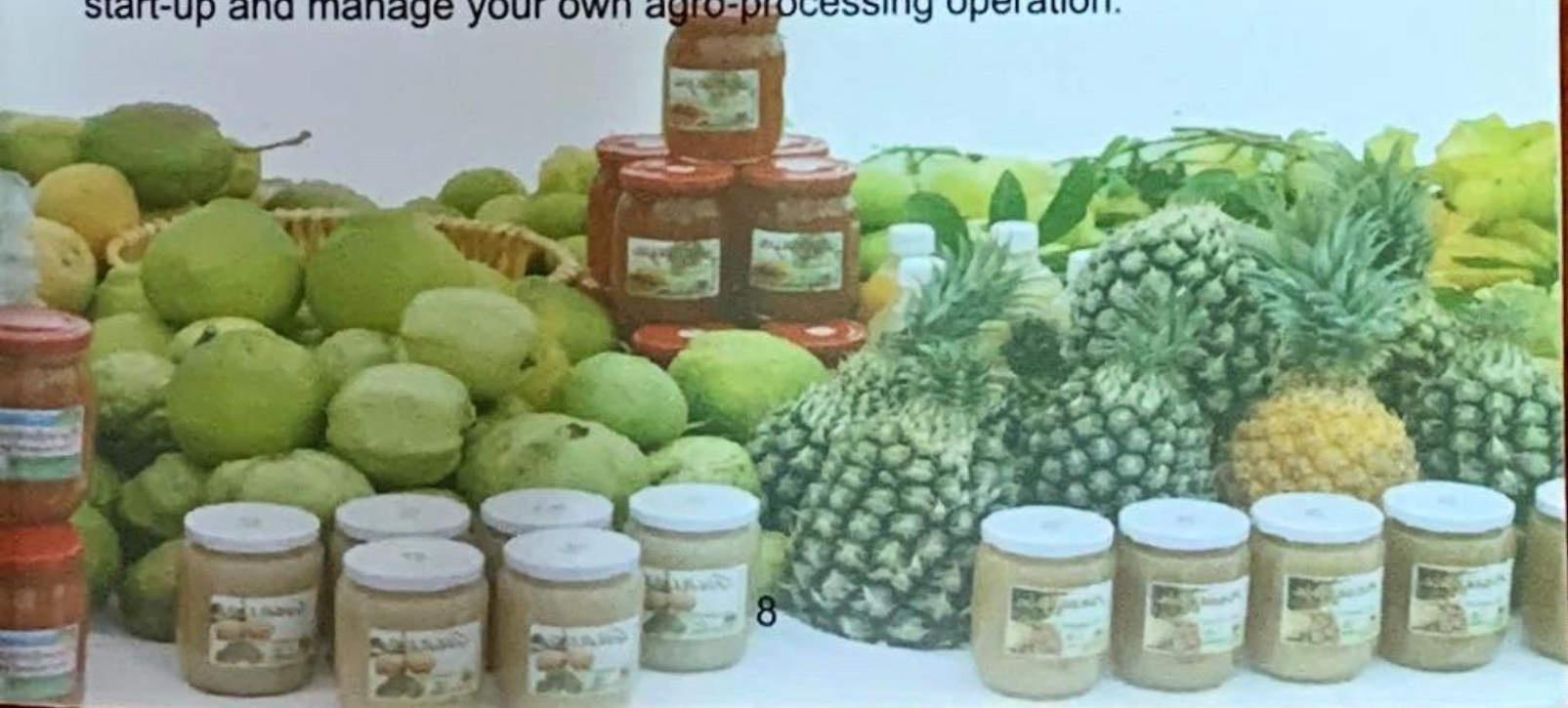
In this regard, the Fahie's Women Agricultural Producers Association was formed in 2004 and became an affiliate of the Caribbean Network of Rural Women Producers (CANROP) in 2005. Since then, a number of training courses in agro-processing have been organized and the members have been assisted in their participation at the Annual Agricultural Exhibition organized by the Ministry. The office has also collaborated with the Ministry of Gender Affairs and submitted a project proposal to The Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI). As a result, a grant of EC\$25,000.00 was received to procure equipment and agricultural tools for the women.



*President of Fahie's Women Agricultural Producers Association receives grant funds from CFLI*

The equipment which was purchased included a stove, refrigerator, pots, an electric blender and a vegetable juicer and will be used to initiate the development of a processing facility in the rural community. In July 2007, four members participated in a Sub-regional workshop which was organized by the Caribbean Development Bank. The workshop which was entitled, "Business Opportunities in Agro-processing of Tropical Fruits, Meats, Poultry and Milk Based Products" was held in Dominica.

The general subject areas covered included: overview of agro-products that can be successfully processed at the micro and small business levels; Food science and technology requirements for processing agro-products; review of formulations and processing procedures for a selected range of agro-products; food hygiene and sanitation requirement for processing; understanding the role of additives in agro-processing; packaging and labeling requirements and how to start-up and manage your own agro-processing operation.





A grant of US\$1,000.00 was provided by the British High Commission to assist in defraying some of the cost which resulted from participation.

With the rapid growth and development of the agro-processing sector on Nevis, the agro-processors were able to convince the government about the need for an agro-processing facility on the island. A task force was established by the Ministry of Agriculture to undertake the necessary preparatory work. The Institute was represented on the Task Force and was instrumental in arranging and funding a trip to Grenada by the Director of Agriculture, Mr Samuel Powell. The purpose of the trip was for him to observe the layouts of as many facilities on that island and dialogue with various operators regarding some of the best practices which they follow. Some of these best practices were incorporated into the plan for the local facility.

*In 2004*, the Institute assisted the agro-processors in obtaining a grant of US\$5,000.00 from the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute. The fund was used to procure the following equipment for agro-processing: Digital scale, scale portion, food processor, cutting boards, mixing bowl set, gas stove, heavy duty blender, double well gas fryer, spoon set, stock pot set 18, 27 and 36 quarts.

*In 2008*, the Institute in collaboration with the Department of Cooperatives developed a project entitled, "Enhancement of Production and Productivity of the Nevis Agro-processors Cooperative." This project was submitted to The Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives for consideration for grant funding. The Project was approved and grant funding which amounted to CD\$21,793.00 was approved to purchase equipment and to conduct training in food safety, food technology, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), group dynamics and financial management.

The equipment that was purchased included: Food blender, Kitchenaid mixer, food mixer, electric food processor, stainless steel table pans, chef/cook knives, paring knife, manual vegetable peeler, cutting boards, ladles, mixing bowls, 16 quarts stock pots, induction sauce pots, 53 quarts stock pots, French whips, solid serving spoon, bag sealer, pocket thermometer, Excalibur dehydrator and a Gas Counter Unit Hotplate.



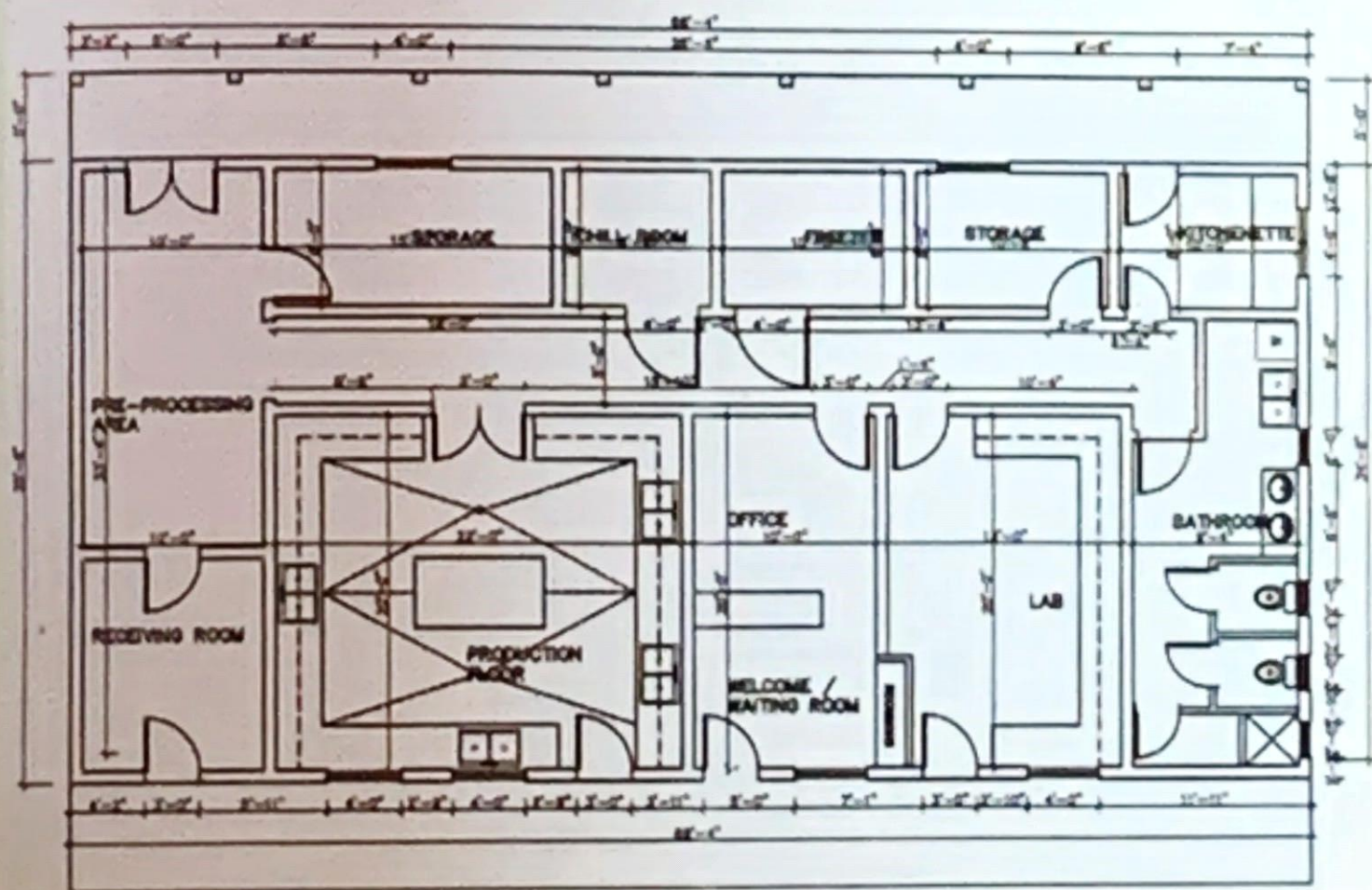


On Thursday 11th October, 2007 the Ministry of Agriculture, Nevis hosted a contract signing and ground breaking ceremony to mark the construction of an EC\$542,000.00 agro-processing facility.

At this historical/landmark event, the Minister of Agriculture, the Honorable Robelto Hector and the President of the Nevis Agro-processors Cooperative Ms. Olvis Dyer were high in praise for the work of IICA in assisting in the transformation of the agro-processing sector. It was indeed a proud moment for the Institute.



*Hon. Robelto Hector, Minister of Agriculture, Nevis Island Administration delivering remarks*



*Floor Plan of Agro-processing Facility*



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