



Issues and options for Caribbean Agriculture Development

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Agriculture is too vital to our way of life for us to lose faith in it, or allow it to vanish - Owen Arthur (Prime Minister of Barbados)

Abstract

Sin duda alguna el sector agroalimentario como componente de nuestras economías tiene múltiples interrelaciones hacia atrás y adelante, mismas que no son consideradas al momento de cuantificar el aporte real del sector a la economía. Ha habido varios estudios que tratan este tema, en los cuales se procura recalculan el valor que la agricultura agrega a la economía, ligándole eslabones previos como la provisión de insumos, o posteriores en el caso de la agroindustria.

Este artículo, nos ilustra otro vínculo de la agricultura, pero esta vez con el sector turismo, que en el caso del Caribe ha tenido buenos sucesos a nivel nacional.

► 1. Introduction

Exactly thirty years ago many persons including myself, was actively involved in “community agriculture”, it was the era of promotion for “self-reliance” and “eat what you grow”. At that same time, and as I

recall, the debate was raging about the status of agriculture development and its relevance to the economic development of the countries of the region.

Issues surrounding the development of community tourism were also being aired and a number of individual initiatives were

taking form. The early debates about the status and importance of tourism development to the national economies were also becoming more frequent.

Governments around the region were also being confronted to judge solely the economic performance of both sector and balance their commitments based on these performances.

Whither the social contribution of the agriculture sector to national development?

It can easily be argued thirty years later, that the relative decline in the agriculture sector in the countries of the region is matched by a parallel increase in the development of the tourism sector. But, as I see it, agriculture and tourism together are the only two sectors that boast any real hope for advancing the economies of the Caribbean region.

Some questions beg:-

- i. Have we embraced the development of one sector to the detriment and or demise of another?
- ii. Have the managers of the agriculture sector failed to capitalize on the strengths of the sector and allowed the “weaknesses” to be embedded in the minds of our people?
- iii. Can one sector survive without the existence of the other?
- iv. Should a more coordinated effort be placed on linking both sectors for the accrued benefit to the region and,

- v. Is this coordinated effort of linking the agriculture and tourism sectors the answer to saving the agriculture sector of the region?

While the search for answers will continue, this paper will raise candidly a number of issues and options for Caribbean agriculture development, in the ongoing debate of linking agriculture and tourism.

► 2. Carribbean Agriculture

The importance of the agriculture industry/sector to the socio-economic wellbeing of the Caribbean has been clearly stated in numerous monologues preceding this dialogue. Mindful however that although the sectors' contribution to GDP has the social benefit of providing employment to approximately 45 percent of the regions population the true value of the sector is greatly undervalued.

From the examination of the statistic as presented in Table 1 and 2, it is clearly visible that if we take the forward and backward linkages which creates the agri-food industry, then commitment or the lack there-of to agriculture development is merely an economic decision as this has to be weighed against heavily argued optimism that the tourism and services sectors are the engines of growth and the economic saviours for the region.



Table 1:
Agri-food related statistics for CARICOM region

Country	Total Economy		Economic Activity (GDP)				
	Agriculture	Food, beverage and tobacco	Agrifood Services, etc	Agri-Food Industry	M US\$	(%)	
	M US\$	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	M US\$	(%)
Antigua	721	100	3.2	1.0	3.3	54	7.5
Bahamas	4818	100	1.0	4.6	11.8	842	17.5
Barbados	2535	100	4.8	2.6	9.1	416	16.4
Belize	843	100	18.4	7.5	12.8	326	38.7
Dominica	248	100	15.9	3.4	9.7	72	28.9
Grenada	414	100	6.1	3.0	9.3	76	18.4
Guyana	717	100	26.4	6.2	8.8	296	41.3
Haiti	3435	100	25.3	3.8	13.8	1473	42.9
Jamaica	7871	100	6.0	6.4	12.8	1984	25.2
St.K&N	356	100	2.8	4.1	9.2	57	16.0
Montserrat	29	100	5.4	4.0	24	10	33.5
St. Lucia	660	100	5.7	2.1	8.2	105	16.0
St. Vincent	361	100	8.7	2.2	5.5	59	16.4
Suriname	952	100	9.5	2.3	8.2	190	20.0
T&T	9628	100	1.5	1.7	2.3	529	5.5
CARICOM	33588	100	6.7	3.8	8.8	6491	19.3%

Source: International Bio-Food Institute





Table 2:
Agri-food related statistics for CARICOM region

Country	Total Economy		Employment (No. of Jobs)				
			Agriculture	Food, beverage and tobacco	Agrifood Services, etc	Agri-Food Industry	
	('000)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	'000	(%)
Antigua	30.0	100	4.0	1.0	3.9	3	8.9
Bahamas	172.7	100	3.5	2.8	14.7	36	20.9
Barbados	144.0	100	4.2	2.9	8.4	22	15.5
Belize	88.9	100	28	5	17	44	49
Dominica	25.0	100	24	3	10	9	37
Grenada	42.3	100	14	4	10	12	27
Guyana	341.2	100	29	5	12	158	46
Haiti	3637.6	100	51	3	10	2,282	63
Jamaica	1388.6	100	21	4	12	520	37
St.K&N	18.2	100	14	4	9	5	27
Montserrat	4.5	100	18	6	18	2	41
St. Lucia	43.8	100	22	2	7	14	31
St. Vincent	67.0	100	25	2	6	22	33
Suriname	169.4	100	6	2	10	31	18
T&T	594.0	100	8	1	3	70	12
CARICOM	6767	100%	35.1	2.9%	9.7%	3230	47.7%

Source: International Bio-Food Institute



We need to pay attention to resources constraints, rural to urban drift, emigration, technology and increasing cost of inputs coupled with decreasing income from sales of output which have tended to act against development in the agriculture sector over the last ten years.

Any evaluation therefore, of the socio-economic viability of the agriculture sector must involve consideration from a holistic view as suggested in table 1. The availability of land, the cost of water, labour and agriculture productivity, opportunity cost, commodity prices, marketing systems, value adding, credit, taxation and other fiscal issues will have a line in the discussions.

Is there hope?

There appears to be great potential for agro-processing, value adding and niche marketing as the domestic and tourism food and beverage industry imports large volumes of products that are found in the region.

The key question however, is, *why is the Caribbean a net importer of food when many of the items imported into the region are produced in other countries under limited or even worst climatic conditions with seasonal variations which limits production periods?*

► 3. Caribbean Tourism

The tourism industry is a major source of income for most Caribbean countries, with results indicating a contribution of 14.8 percent to total GDP. (CTO 2003) The industry is therefore seen as one of the most important sector for future economic growth of the region, capable of creating jobs and earning important foreign exchange. But,

The sector has subjected the region to outside dependence and the result of this dependence has made the region vulnerable and more susceptible to external shocks¹.

**Table 3:
Stop over Arrival to some IICA member countries in the Caribbean**

Country	Period	2002	2001	% change 2002/2001
Ant. & Barb.	Jan-Dec	198,084	192,276	2.5
Bahamas	Jan-Dec	1,402,894	1,428,209	-1.8
Barbados	Jan-Dec	497,899	507,086	-1.8
Belize	Jan-Dec	199,521	165,663	1.8
DRepublic	Jan-Dec	2,793,581	2,777,803	-2.6
Grenada	Jan-Dec	132,416	123,351	7.4
Guyana	Jan-Dec	25,673	22,698	13.1
Jamaica	Jan-Dec	1,266,366	1,276,516	-0.8
St. Lucia	Jan-Dec	253,463	249,261	1.3

Source: Caribbean Tourism Organization

1. Refer September 11th event in USA and impact on Caribbean tourism.

While the Caribbean Tourism Organization remained optimistic about the recovery potential of the industry, an examination based on the statistics given in table 3 above and

compared to the statistics in table 2, begs the following question: - are the following statements below which highlight sentiments within the tourism industry plausible?

²In many Caribbean countries the political sympathy and overwhelming sense of entitlement is usually with agriculture as a result of historic precedent. Unfortunately, the globalization of agricultural commodities has made Caribbean agriculture uncompetitive and, as a result, it has lost market share and output.

In contrast Travel and Tourism in the Caribbean has enormous competitive advantage, even in a globalized economy, to create new opportunities and employment. However, it requires a fair and level playing field to demonstrate that it can provide.

Governments across the Caribbean should step back from the emotional “feed ourselves” approach to agriculture to a more balanced approach, ie “create self-sufficiency and diversity” through Travel and Tourism.

▶ 4. Linking Agriculture and Tourism - *Common vision needed*

Nikolaos Karagiannis (2002) in his paper to an international tourism conference at the University of the West Indies, Mona, states that “...it is imperative to develop and strengthen the links between tourism and agro-processing industry, which appear viable, advantageous, warranted, and strategically important in a long term perspective, and which will set up incentives and open up possibilities for a wide

range of new economic activities...” *Is it just the agro-processing industry?*

It is clear that the design and implementation of actions for sustainably linking agriculture and tourism in the future will have to be driven by a common vision and must pay particular attention to the numerous initiatives that are taking place around the region.

I have identified seven classifications that need to be examined and must be understood in order for appropriate actions in linking agriculture and tourism to be designed and implemented. These are;

2. Extract from World Travel and Tourism Council - The Caribbean, The Impact of Travel on Tourism on Jobs and the Economy (2002)



1. Agri/eco tourism
2. Community tourism
3. Cultural tourism
4. Eco tourism
5. Food tourism
6. Green tourism
7. Heritage tourism

In all the above agriculture is undoubtedly the driving force to success, and so it can safely be said that the efforts to forge linkages between agriculture and tourism is not a new phenomenon. The many variations however, pose some interesting questions foremost of which are:

Why have the two sectors remain so distantly apart after decades of coexistence? and,

Are we diluting efforts and shortchanging agriculture, by embracing these numerous classifications?

Analysis of success or failure is important for charting future strategies and priorities for linking agriculture and tourism across the region. A series of examples of successful linkage initiatives are given below to draw attention to the few significant opportunities across the region. The examples are not an exhaustive compilation.

- i. The Appleton Rum Tour in Jamaica
- ii. The Jamaica Jerk Festival
- iii. The Barbados Crop Over Festival

What has allowed these initiatives to be so successful and what is preventing the development of more sustained linkages?

► 5. Information a Limiting Factor

Current initiatives aimed at linkage agriculture and tourism are being developed on a scanty information base. At present, there is a paucity of information on the actual levels of linkage between tourism and the agri-food industry. However, while considerable information is available within the tourism sector to engender development, there is need to match the information base of the agriculture sector with that of the tourism sector to facilitate accurate comparative analyses within and between the sectors.

The lack of adequate information to justify investments is also a limiting factor to the development of sustainable agriculture and tourism linkages.

Serious perspective thinking will have to be applied to present the argument for agriculture

► 6. Environmental Issues

The quality of the Caribbean tourism product depends heavily on the maintenance of a healthy and attractive natural environment. If there is going to be a linking of agriculture and tourism then concerns will be raised over some practices employed in the agriculture sector which impacts the environment.

6.1. Climate Change

Both the agriculture and tourism sectors are water dependent and thus sensitive sectors to probable climate change scenarios on water resources of the region. These are important issues for consideration in any large scale linkage initiative. Establishing economic priorities in times of scarcity may have impact on the socio economic balance of the countries of the region.

▶ 7. The identity crisis

At the heart of the issue is not whether we have the capacity to link the two economic sectors, but the question of whether both sectors can embrace each other, while maintaining its own identity. *But, is it necessary to maintain individual identity, and what then are the options?*

▶ 8. Risk sharing

Success or failure of the linkage effort will depend on the involvement and continuity of efforts in both sectors. Both therefore, need to be prepared to share the risk.

▶ 9. Quality standards and food safety

The tourism industry has already embraced standards which have transformed it into a quality and standard driven industry. The CTO Strategic plan highlights the fact that; “Tourism is a labour-intensive, quality-driven service

profession. It depends crucially on the skill level and professionalism of the workforce to make the sector productive and competitive”.

If the agriculture and the agriculture products are to become more visible and integrated with tourism and the tourism product, options for compliance in terms of product standardization, authenticity, food safety, and quality assurance will have to assume increasing importance. The traceability to the source of supply, consistency and quality of produce pesticide residue levels and genetically modified organisms all have to be embraced.

9.1. Shifting burden of proof

Having established itself as standard driven industry large lawsuits have been known to have been filed claiming cost for medical bills resulting from foodborne illnesses within the industry.

This scenario has widened to the general consumer population who no longer have to prove that product has caused injury or illness. The burden of proof has shifted along the agrifood chain and the agriculture sector will have to embrace this changing scenario to be accepted.

▶ 10. The role of government

The tourism industry is a standard driven industry with large private sector investments. This allows for high percentage of self assessment and self regulation as a determinant of competitiveness within the industry.

The agriculture sector throughout the region is regulated by government. It means therefore



that, government agencies responsible for developing and implementing policies will have to move away from imposing and policing standards in the agriculture sector towards, monitoring, verification and validation.

This would mean updating agriculture legislation, improving infrastructure and building of regional capacities to take on these changing roles.

► 11. Matching goals with cost

Any effort to sustainably link agriculture and tourism will require some form of investment and probably some changes in behaviours, so the question of cost becomes an economic one and the cost effectiveness of the desired linkage will undergo much scrutiny. Even if an economist was able to accurately forecast the full cost and benefit of a sustainable linking of agriculture and tourism, their calculations would be received differently from country to country around the region.

It is my view, that agriculture and tourism linkage can only be successful if cost effective and if the goals are developed on a region wide basis, matched to benefits at the country levels and are achieved at the lowest possible cost.

What then are the goals to be achieved that will impact cost across both sectors?

- i. Benchmarking?
- ii. Good Agriculture Practices (GAPS)?
- iii. Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPS)?
- iv. Good Service Practices?
- v. HACCP Certification?

► 12. Financing options

In dialogue with both sectors, one option put forward by industry players for financing agriculture and tourism linkage is a Caribbean fund for the granting of incentives and promoting linkages across the region. The question of prioritizing and monitoring would raise serious questions to the administration of this effort.

At this time financing agriculture and tourism linkage will therefore have to be considered in the general scheme of development financing from both sectors.

► 13. A role for IICA as a Development Institution

Sustainable agriculture and tourism linkage programmes must be joined together by public and private sector stakeholders' participation.

In 2002, in guidelines developed for an agro-tourism project for Antigua (TCP/ANT 8821) Kathleen Ford stated in her conclusion - "Perhaps the onus of initiating and strengthening agriculture and tourism linkages does not lie with the government but with well informed smart-partners in the agriculture and tourism sectors who will together chart their course forward based on the deliverables expected by all concerned".

It stands to reason therefore, that a sustained agriculture and tourism linkage programme across the region will only work if there are effective networking, smart-partnering and an efficient intermediate institution providing

support in training and education, technology development, logistics coordination, management and financial support.

The IICA with its network of offices and technical expertise can provide the important coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanism which will be critically needed to adjust and refine agro-tourism linkage programmes as experiences accumulate and situations change.

IICA has moved forward and established an agro-tourism linkage centre in the Barbados office, with objectives as outlined in the concept paper developed for establishing the centre. *Will this initiative propel IICA to be the required smart-partner of choice?*

► 14. Reflection an conclusion

One reflection of the lack of embracing of the regional agriculture sector by the regional tourism sector demonstrates that there are trade-offs taking place. At the national levels ad-hoc

initiatives have been very successful. With regional organizations spanning both sectors, *why has there not been a region-wide initiative to date? and;*

What is the future of agriculture and tourism linkage in Caribbean agriculture development? Not all will agree on the way forward but at this time it is certain, that the one alternative which looks bright is the opportunity to sustainably link agriculture with tourism which could play a key role in stemming the total demise of Caribbean Agriculture. It is, clear from the number of questions raised that a coherent strategy is necessary for the endogenous linking of agriculture and tourism in the region.

By recognizing and systematically chronicling the similarities and differences, the challenges and opportunities in the sectors, policy changes can address the issues that are rooted in the development of both sectors.

However, governments will have to commit to legislative changes and industry players will have to simply agree.



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