

A New Approach to Agricultural Diversity in Dominica

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Small island states in the Caribbean, especially Dominica have been outrageously labeled internationally to be extremely vulnerable to the forces of global development, accounting for monocrop economies, fragile ecosystems, little size and location in the hurricane belt as deterrents to new technological advancements in agriculture. Da Silva J.E and Taylor M, (1998) in an article, Island Communities and Biotechnology estimates that 4000 to 8000 small farmers in Dominica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines may have to exit the Banana Industry and re-invest in other ventures due to the phasing out of the European Economic Preferences for the Caribbean Bananas.

As a possible alternative, farmers have been called upon to embrace the diversification efforts set forth by their respective countries. It is evident today that most diversification proposals undertaken in the late 90's were incomplete and inadequate to the needs of the farmers and were inefficient as a means of increasing productivity since it involved the same conventional, degenerating farming practices employed in the past. In essence it is merely the elimination of one monocrop for another using the same farming techniques and does not provide any means of income security for the farmers. Most of the strategies employed for alternative crops placed these farmers in the same highly vulnerable market environment as the Banana Industry.

In the eastern Caribbean, agriculture has historically been the most productive sector of the islands economies, dominated by sugarcane and, more recently, bananas. Dependence on monoculture economies dominates. For instance, Barbados, St. Kitts, and the Dominican Republic have traditionally depended on sugarcane, while Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, and Dominica still depend on banana production.

Despite potential growth of other prospective sectors like Tourism and Manufacture, the Dominican economy is still highly dependent and will remain dependent on agriculture for a long time. According to recent data from the article Economy of Dominica, agriculture accounts for 18% of the GDP, (www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/economy-of-dominica). Any demise of the Banana Industry should not necessarily mean the end of the agricultural sector, a fate we have nurtured for too long by considering the Banana farmers as the only farmers on the island.

It is our sole responsibility as agriculturists and future agriculturists to pioneer the diversification efforts on the island in a sustainable and holistic manner in order to restore a pragmatic reconciliation among our farmers and the decision makers of our nation, some of whom have allowed a drastic degeneration of our only independent means of survival.

Given the present natural and unspoiled vegetation of Dominica, it has much to benefit from the new trends in Agricultural Production. It is in that regard we at 4D Ag-Center seek to inform our most esteemed readers of the advantageous prospects that Dominica possesses in reclaiming its position as the breadbasket of the region and our contribution towards this endeavor.

