

Sustainable Farming from a Management Point of View

Author: Vernon Ibrahim Daniel

May 2, 2007

4 D Ag-Center, Commonwealth of Dominica W.I.

vernon@4-dominica.com

As decade old agricultural production systems are being re-structured to accommodate an end product that meets the approval of conscious modern consumers, the spotlight is again on the farmers to satisfy the luxury and appetite of this new wave by embracing a transition process to a more environmentally friendly, economically sound and socially viable production unit.

The resilience of the Dominican farmers goes without a shred of doubt, especially in their production efforts over the past years, enduring the difficult challenges as prime benefactors of this sector even while competitive developments on the world market have compounded their business venture.

A question that has surfaced and remains unresolved in its most practical sense, is how do our farmers become competitive? And how do they position themselves to benefit from the dynamism of the trade industry that involves agricultural production?

From a professional point of view, at 4D, we recommend that all production efforts should be consumer oriented. It would mean therefore that farmers must become objective in their management methods and practices and constantly primed to adopt new technologies modified to suit their system and economy.

Although it is fact that a direct relation should be established between production and marketing in order for farms to become economically viable as a business, there needs to be established consistencies on the farm level that secures the farmers ability to easily incorporate and adopt technologies that increases efficiency and by so doing, lowers production cost.

In a sustainable system, low-input farming is based on a reduction but not necessarily elimination of chemical fertilizers, insecticides, and herbicides. Water is the principal resource that has helped agriculture and society to prosper, and it is a major limiting factor when mismanaged or when inadequate management practices are employed for its use. Soil erosion continues to be a serious threat to our continued ability to produce adequate food. Numerous practices have been developed to keep soil in place, which include reducing or eliminating tillage, managing irrigation to reduce runoff, and keeping the soil covered with plants or mulch.

Other important practices in maintaining a sustainable farming system will include the use of organic fertilizers based on the optimal use of plant and animal residues, liquid organic fertilizers and compost. Adequate combination and management of polycultures and/or rotations planted in contour, optimal crop densities and planting dates to facilitate continuous harvest. Additionally, empowerment of local people, participatory approaches and production of agricultural commodities that can be used to fulfill

the demands of the local and regional market is paramount. The use of local agricultural expertise is also essential.

A systems approach to transitional agriculture.

Traditional agriculture => Conventional agriculture => Sustainable agriculture => Agro - Ecological agriculture => Organic agriculture => Biodynamic agriculture.

