



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

ST. AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, WEST INDIES

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND EDUCATION

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

### **Education, Agriculture and Food production**

With the sudden awareness that we are poor and our economy is in recession, talk of diversification has once more taken center stage with particular emphasis on agriculture.

Now there is a lot of public discussion on issues affecting food production, food security, health and eating habits. One conglomerate that has traditionally been a major importer has engaged the issue of having more local foods on their shelves; the Head of the Agricultural Society has raised the issue of land tenure; one local rice farmer has gotten his rice on some local grocery shelves; the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency and the FAO held a symposium on disaster management and food security in small island states; the Faculty of Food and Agriculture at UWI which now boasts an innovation park, announced a competition among secondary schools to promote innovation in agricultural practices,.

Other interesting developments have been such events as a Cocoa Festival, Mango Festival, Breadfruit Symposium by Dr Nkrumah, Pigeon Peas festival in Rich Plain Diego Martin. There are some interesting experiments in farming and food by a range individuals and institutions. San Antonio Green Market in Santa Cruz for instance is really a non-formal educational institution for promoting eco-friendly and healthy consumption and production practices.

So at the level of policy makers, tertiary institutions, community organizations, various autonomous agricultural interests, agriculture and food production is on the move. In this climate of adjustment ordinary people are now compelled to think and to choose carefully. There is now an outbreak of common sense.

Human beings can learn fast when faced with difficult circumstances, and they can make radical adjustments in their lifestyles which can be sustained if the situation supports these shifts when these difficult circumstances subside. During the Second World War when international trade was interrupted, food production increased in Trinidad and Tobago. But after the war the availability of imports and the lack of constructive support for the sector led to a reversal of those gains as the cultural reflex position of a colonial society kicked in.

Right now in this climate favorable to agriculture and food production we need a task force to coordinate and rationalize the efforts of all the institutions involved in promoting food and agriculture: teaching institutions such as the UWI and UTT; the financing agencies such as ADB; the state institutions

dealing with land tenure; the research institutions which exist; the various agricultural interest groups representing farmers; the NGO's such as the San Antonio Green Market; marketing agencies such as NAMDEVCO; institutions in the hospitality sector.

We need to promote a kind of collective learning and sharing of knowledge which is the secret at the root of the success of science parks. In Silicon Valley for instance there was great intimacy between researchers in labs, university faculty, startup ventures, marketing firms, intellectual property firms. There were deep incestuous learning connections between these various agencies as the same people who were researchers, could become investors as well as faculty staff. The support agencies were intimately engaged in the business environment as well.

In our case there has been a great cultural divide between those who graduate from the universities and those who work in agriculture and food production. A similar gulf has existed between those who operate all the business support services for traditional import business and those who work in agriculture and food production. The greatest cultural divide has been evidenced in the disparity in tastes for local and foreign goods as well as a love/hate policy relationship- as agriculture is relegated to a Cinderella status in good times and by necessity thrust into favored status in bad times.

We need more students of food and agriculture leaving university who are prepared to be entrepreneurs. Such education must combine entrepreneurship and apprenticeships. Through apprenticeships students must interact with successful farmers and all the other agencies in food production. They must experience through apprenticeship the issues involved in the different aspects of food production, marketing, packaging, financing etc. Academic courses can also be taught using experience and apprenticeship as the experiential base. It means apprenticeships have to be meaningfully designed to allow for exposure to modern options in agriculture to which young people would find attractive lifestyles. To be successful such programmes must embrace all stakeholders: these include successful producers of all kinds, as well as researchers, lecturers and support agencies.

At the Secondary level there is room for what is recommended above to be applied as well. One of the problems at the secondary level is a lack of variety of options. Why not convert one government secondary school and specialize it in food and agriculture with a pedagogy based on apprenticeships in specially selected areas of food production that offers lifestyle careers that appeal to young people? Such a school can be sublet by the MOE to a board of managers chosen from the various interests in agriculture and food production. Students can be prepared for the entrepreneurial option, and with support, can graduate directly into their own business. Students can also experience earning some income through these apprenticeships and school projects. Apprenticeships can be used as the experiential base for delivering a core curriculum including such subjects as principles of business, accounts, integrated science and some specially selected subjects.

At the primary level we can begin to breach the cultural divide by making careers in food production more attractive. The School Feeding Programme was long extolled by both Lloyd Best and John Spence as a medium for changing tastes patterns towards local produce as well as providing steady markets for local producers.

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