

JHTA PRESIDENTS SPEECH  
TO THE  
CARIBBEAN WEEK OF AGRICULTURE  
“AGRICULTURE – HARVESTING WEALTH THROUGH TOURISM”

Mr. Chairman  
Minister of Agriculture – Hon Christopher Tufton  
Principals of the Inter-America Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)  
Principals of the Caribbean Research and Development Institute  
Principals of the P  
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture – Mr. Donovan Stanberry  
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism – Ms. Jennifer Griffiths  
President of Jamaica Agricultural Society – Sen. Norman Grant  
Head of Delegations from Cariforum  
Affiliate Partners in staging this event  
Distinguished Farmers  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would firstly, like to congratulate the organizers of this conference for recognizing the importance of Tourism in the development of Agriculture in the region, thus making my job of selling the ideas contained in my presentation to you that much simpler to achieve.

Tourism as a concept means many things to the people of the Caribbean. Mainly it is seen as:

- i. The purpose building of visitor accommodations on some of the best and most appealing real estate in our territories;
  - ii. Demanding the lion’s share of a country’s GDP for infrastructure mainly through the development of Roadways, Markets, Piers, and Attractions etc).
  - iii. The ability to earn hard currency for and economy
- All of which is not in and of itself a bad things.

However, as these are done there are usually two diametrically different views on its impact on the host country.

- a. Those against it will see the destruction of the natural environment; which is also described as a strain on the limited resources of the people and the invasion of ones culture by the investor and the subsequent visitors.
- b. Those for it will see the opportunity for exposing the world to the destination's rich cultural heritage; the exponential increase in jobs; the opening up of critical arteries into the country to facilitate the ease of movement of people, goods, services and experiences; and the opportunity of cross sector investments to include, furniture and craft manufacturing, Services to include banking, medicine, legal, accounting, construction, consultancies and very importantly Farming and Agro-Processing.

Both deeply held views are inherently correct, but more importantly can and does in many cases have positive convergence if the correct vision, planning and implementation are considered by the parties involved. Critically, the Tri-partite relationship of an Enlightened Government, a Visionary Investor and the Community must agree and put in place the work to garner the desired deliverables that will satisfy all concerned.

Every Country of the region, including those with significant reserves of oil or other energy resources now calculate their growth or decline in GDP on the fortunes of Tourism. However, way too many of said countries still play lip service to the necessary provisions that will sustain its development and continued improvements. Attached to this indictment is the fact that so

many of you farmers and many other disciplines not represented here today depend so heavily on us taking it seriously.

Tourism operates on a global stage with the clients we attract demanding global standards and amenities. Of course, there will always be a place for the charm of ethnicity and the inspiration of our culture. But even those travelers expect that the basic standards of home will be respected, but demand a promise of better than what they are accustomed. How many of you travel to destinations where your primary objective is to see if you can pay for and spend a week in a country and hotel where you are satisfied with no hot water, bad food, no air-conditioning or many other things to which you have become accustomed? The last time I checked that market niche – it was either very small or didn't exist.

With world tourism growing at a pace of between 6 & 7 % per annum, our national associations and Investors in tourism spend way too much time begging for incentives; infrastructure and investment facilitation to match our products with the best the world has to offer. While the comment is not equal to all our destinations, too many countries have not seen it fit to provide the enabling tax incentives and unencumbered investment facilitation mechanism to inspire capital into our economies. The more informed territories have taken the bug bear of red tape and inherent bureaucracy out of the way of serious people wanting to invest and provide jobs and pay well needed taxes into the country's economy. I congratulate those few and implore the others to quickly get on board. Because while the world grew at nearly 7% last year, the Caribbean barely recorded 2%. Yes, the US Passport Regime, Cricket World Cup Visa debacle and Active

Hurricane Seasons all contribute to this under performance in our region, but I submit that playing in there somewhere is the slow pace at which we recognize that the world no longer owes us any favors and have in fact got up and left us at the table. We must now find the will to tell ourselves that we alone can remove the backward barriers to growth that hold us back. We need better trained workers, a greater sense of good customer service, a focused policy to encourage investment in higher rooms, attractions, entertainment and transportation, all of which will provide measurable throughputs to the other sectors of our economies.

Regarding the inter-relationship between Tourism and Agriculture, Jamaica probably represents the best conversion in the Caribbean for food in your fields to that which is consumed in our hotels and hotel related restaurants. Of course this has a lot to do with the size of our farming sector and the variety of the fruits and vegetables grown here compared to our neighbors, however, we have only just begun to scratch the surface of what can be achieved.

Jamaica's Stop Over Arrivals, which refers to the number of visitors staying on our shores was in excess of 1.5 Million in 2006, with corresponding Revenues of nearly \$2 Billion. Both of these statistics represent the hope for the growth of the agricultural sector here and the mutually beneficial relationship that can exist if everyone takes advantage of its potential. Let's not forget as well that those amounts can and should be doubled if we do what is required to bring the visitors to our shores.

Let's talk about our sectors needs for what you supply.

It is accepted that September 2007 was an average month for Jamaica's tourism. In my 222 bedroom resort where each room has 2 guests, our all inclusive resort with an average occupancy of 65% served 8658 guest nights, for which meals were prepared with in excess of:

7,500 Kg of Vegetables;

1,200 Kg of Herbs and Seasoning;

8,600 Kg of Fruits; and

10,000 Kg of Meats, Fish and Poultry (combined)

Valuing in excess of US\$62,423 or J\$4.26M over the said period.

Now by extrapolating those numbers and assuming that Jamaica's over 27,000 hotel and resort bedrooms, running a conservative occupancy of 50%, our visitors in September would have numbered some 67,500 (\*\*) guest nights with a corresponding use of:

58,500 Kg of Vegetables,

9,360 Kg of Herbs and Seasoning,

67,080 Kg of Fruits

78,000 Kg of Meats, Fish and Poultry

Valuing in excess of US\$486,900 or J\$34.08M

*(Per Annum: US\$8.20 M or J\$574.0M at 70% occupancy)*

By any standard this translates into a huge opportunity for Jamaica's farming community, with lessons in here for all our regional brothers and sisters.

The question however, is how much of this are we currently growing in our fields and actually taking advantage of in salesmanship? This question is

critical, as you will remember I told you that tourists demand quality equal to or better than that which they are used to. Taste, Variety and Presentation are all important ingredients in the kitchens and on the plates of good hotels. Consistency of supply then follows as an even more demanding measure of our consumption.

Notwithstanding the important work of agencies like Jamaica's Rural Agricultural Development Agency (RADA) too often my members find themselves faced with significant shortages in the local markets due to floods, draught and the painful inconsistencies of price variations. While these are all a fact of life, they, for the most part can be managed. Like the hotel industry where standards are improving at an alarming an unstoppable pace, the technologies in farming are too.

The promise of Green House technologies is great to hear and may prove to be the solution to our challenges, but I would encourage the Governments and its agencies across the Region and the investors in the farms to immediately take seriously the ongoing cry from the tourism sector for quality, consistency and price as in this globalized world we all must demand from our partners the lofty heights of efficiency. Additionally, the unfortunate occurrences of Hurricanes and adverse weather systems must not force the ingredients from the plates of our demanding guests. They don't understand it and will in turn not accept it.

We are committed to consuming the supplies produced locally within the exacting standards that are demanded. But we refuse to accept the political posturing that obtains - as in the recent case of Jamaica, where obvious

shortages of Fruits and Vegetables due to the passing of Hurricane Dean in August demands that import policies and the attendant duties be revised, while the local farming sector recovers.

The pervasive suspicion that exists each time the tourism sector warns of being starved for critical ingredients (and not just from the farming sector), is in itself a deterrent to the fostering of a harmonious relationship between us and the other sectors of the economy. I can assure you that we are not prepared to starve you of your right to grow and prosper from our industry. But recognizing that we are the engine of growth for our economies, we are similarly not prepared to allow the gains achieved in our resorts and hotels to be eroded. Therefore, in the spirit of partnership I appeal for a multi-sectorial approach to growth that is not motivated by votes but by the economic prosperity of each and everyone of us.

I encourage my own members to develop lasting relationships with farmers in and around their operations. Invite those farmers in, not only to the receiving bay by your storerooms, but to experience the offerings of your restaurants and expose them to the reasons why we do what we do. Visit the farms, discuss your expectations and their abilities and limitations.

I am very aware that the improvements in our interactions with each other is half the tourism sectors responsibility, I however ask that your half be equal to mine as we seek the benefits of stronger national economies where everyone prospers, taking full advantage of the benefits of “HARVESTING THROUGH TOURISM”.

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\*\*Conversation for 50% occupancy for September in Jamaica, assuming 45,000 rooms and 2 guests per room  
27000 rooms  
/ 12 months  
\*2 guest per room  
\*30 days in Sept.  
/ 50% occupancy  
67,500 Guests