

CARICOM Regional agricultural policy: an evaluation

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The integration of commodities markets in regional integration arrangements usually refers implicitly only to manufactured commodities. However, it should be recognized that the benefits of regional integration also apply to the integration of agricultural commodity markets.

Over the last decade, Caribbean countries have experienced a diversification in their economies, with reducing shares of agriculture and manufacturing in favour of services, particularly tourism. Both agriculture and manufacturing are under pressure from imports, mainly due to the liberalization of trade in the region.

From a regional perspective, the development of the agricultural sector in the Caribbean faces serious constraints with respect to markets (information, common standards), institutional bottlenecks, and common approaches to addressing problems of poor ecological sustainability. In addition, financing challenges and training problems exist. Both the domestic and export markets for agricultural products face increased competition from extra-regional sources.

Regional agricultural policy processes are constrained by limited interaction between national governments and national as well as regional agricultural stakeholders. Interaction between regional bureaucracies and regional stakeholders is inadequate. At the level of regional agricultural policy implementation, various constraints are identified. These arise, in part, because regional policy implementation requires that national governments of the region to effect these policies in their respective countries.

This paper focuses on an evaluation of recent regional agricultural policies. It identifies constraints and challenges which the regional agricultural sector has experienced. An historical overview of regional agricultural policy is outlined. The main stakeholders and influential actors in the regional agricultural policy process are also discussed. The current situation which characterizes regional agricultural policy is critically examined. Finally, an assessment of existing regional agricultural policy is conducted and some recommendations presented.