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**Tapping the potential of Science, Technology, and Innovation in Agri-food Chains –  
Creating Employment & Wealth for Youths in the Caribbean**

Agriculture in the Caribbean has now become the second income earning activity in many of its countries and to some, agriculture is becoming extinct. The Caribbean islands have now almost placed agriculture on the back burner while placing emphasis on other areas such as tourism and finance which is not a bad thing. However, this transition has significantly hampered the agricultural sector causing the rural communities to divert their attention to more or less urbanization because they believe that more money can be made through the other activities. Because of this, some of the Caribbean countries go through severe socio-economic and political situations and with these problems; the countries are faced with a high population growth rate, while the economic growth remains somewhat stagnant. In addition to the high population growth rate, the countries are then faced with unemployment, and a lack of food security thus creating greater ordeal for the country.

In the Caribbean, agriculture is very important to the countries even though it has been side stepped in order to give way to other economic sectors. To many persons, it has been the back bone of their livelihood in the rural communities. It has created many jobs for persons who have been poorly educated. Without agriculture, in many countries income could never be generated by many persons so if emphasis is not placed on agriculture people may starve and / or there will not be sustainable agriculture and food security.

In today's world, there are many obstacles which severely hamper the youth's chances for employment and wealth creation in the Caribbean and for there to be stability in a country in terms of employment and wealth creation, it needs to be politically, socially, and economically stable. Without stability, there would be rampant population growth rate without the coexistence of stable economic growth rate. Since most of the Caribbean countries rely on agricultural production for survival, the country would find that if there are not enough jobs being created to cater for the population through agriculture, in turn there would be food insecurity.

Moreover, our educational system is a key obstacle in the quest of today's youth for employment and wealth creation. It is true that the educational system does its best but there are key areas that I believe that they are missing out on. There are instances where parents cannot afford to send their children to school because of no jobs and money. When these children do not go to school, they create burdens on the economy. As these children grow up they too need to eat and how then can they sustain their selves. Since they have low levels of education or none at all, they tend to search for degrading jobs to do where they are abused by being paid low wages and being ill-treated.

There are instances where students are taught various subjects and they are not able to use it when they get out of school because there are no enterprises, where they can apply their knowledge. When they cannot find a job to suit their talents they would sometimes settle for degrading jobs or peddle drugs on the streets. On leaving school after a number of years youth find that some jobs are beneath them. Some jobs are not considered adequate for those who are not properly schooled or for those who live in the rural communities. Sometimes the country needs to look at the relevance of some of the courses being taught.

Agriculture in any country should make a significant contribution to its economy. However it could contribute a lot more if technology was greatly adopted for processing, harvesting, and to cater for a better future in agriculture. There are many ways in which agriculture, science, technology and innovation can be used to overcome the above mentioned obstacles.

Organizations such as Caribbean Agriculture Forum for Youth (CAFY) are a link to agriculture in the Caribbean countries and their youth. In almost every Caribbean island there is an agricultural forum for youth. They use agriculture, technology, science and innovation to help create employment for youth improvement in the Caribbean. CAFY gets the youth involved in commercial agriculture, sharing experiences, policy dialogue, and strategy development to foster increased involvement in a qualitative and quantitative manner. CAFY seeks to promote increased innovation among youth, particularly the youth in rural areas, to achieve greater development in rural areas for the broad based sustainable development of agriculture.

In Dominica the group has contributed vastly to their agricultural sector. They now have over 150 farmers included in their forum and quite a bit of them are young farmers. This group has achieved many goals such as helping to improve the livelihood of many rural communities by employing various agricultural tools and systems approaches along with technology, science, and innovation.

In St Lucia, the youth forum, the St Lucia Agricultural Forum for Youth (SLAFY) embarked on a project in January 2005, where a green house was established in April of that same year. There were specific objectives which had to be met and most of the objectives were met such as increased food production and to foster the adoption of the best farming practice. It has provided training in quality control and post harvest handling of fresh produce and there has also been training in identification of agribusiness opportunities and the development / formulation and operation of agribusiness plans. The project has identified, and developed institutional support systems for school leavers, who take up agriculture for their livelihood. This project has also identified key areas that could be developed in the schools agricultural syllabus, to better impact on food production.

There are many suggestions that the Caribbean islands can use to effectively better the agricultural sector such as organizing start up businesses for young entrepreneurs where they are able to develop the business as it goes on with the assistance of larger firms. These start ups should at least contain workspace, business services and utilities. Indeed, it is the combination of real estate and service provision which can make business start

ups a cost-effective means of assisting enterprise creation and development and funding can come from local and regional governments, universities, chambers of commerce, science parks and private real estate developers. The objectives of the start up business are as follows combating unemployment; expanding the supply of infrastructure; commercialising university research; upgrading the technological capabilities of firms in a given location; assisting socially disadvantaged groups such as youth and minorities.

The governments of the Caribbean countries should see to it that there are effective college and or university systems such that agriculture plays an important role in rural development. In order for the education system to be effective, key components such as proper structuring, the right course and excellent delivery methods must be attained.

In conclusion, it has been stated that agricultural development can play a critical role in wealth creation, poverty mitigation, and employment generation and also reduce the rural-urban drift. Caribbean countries need to build on the fact and take note that agriculture is a main stay and one of the vital solutions which helps in the fight against the plagues of society. This development is an ongoing process and to assure sustainability, agriculture must adopt new technologies, science, and innovations.

**Reference:**  
**St. Lucia Agriculture Forum for Youth**