

**Feature Address to be delivered at the Opening Ceremony of Caribbean Week of Agriculture, by the Honourable Indar A. Weir, MBA, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, at the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Centre on Wednesday, October 10, 2018 at 6.00 p.m.**

Master of Ceremony, Mr. Maurice Norville

Ambassador Irwin LaRocque, Secretary General of  
CARICOM

Members of the Cabinet of Barbados

Mr. Percival Marie, Director General, Cariforum at CARICOM  
Secretariat

Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Mr. Michael Hailu, Director, African Caribbean and Pacific  
European Union, Technical Centre for Co-operation on  
Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr. Julio Berdegué, Assistant Director General of the Food and Agricultural Organisation Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

Dr. Manuel Otero, Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture

Mr. Lucia Pierantoni, Head of the Regional Cooperation and Trade Section at the EU Delegation to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean

Mr. Barton Clarke, Executive Director, Caribbean Research & Development Institute

Dr. Lystra Fletcher-Paul, FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator for the Caribbean

Mrs. Ena Harvey, IICA's Representative in Barbados

Mr. Seibert Frederick, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security

Other Permanent Secretaries

Chief Agricultural Officer and Chairman of the CWA  
Committee

Specially Invited Guests

Visiting Delegations

Staff and Colleagues of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food  
Security

Youth in Agriculture

Members of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening!

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Opening  
Ceremony of the Fifteenth Annual Caribbean Week of  
Agriculture (CWA) 2018. I am indeed honoured, and  
especially so, as this event affords me the distinct pleasure  
as the new Minister of Agriculture and Food Security to

oversee the hosting of CWA in Barbados for the first time since its inauguration in Trinidad and Tobago in 1999. I am also delighted to extend a warm welcome to my fellow Ministers of Agriculture, our regional partners and their various representatives. I also wish to welcome members and observers of the Alliance, CARICOM's Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) as well as delegates from Latin America. I hope you were successful in your discussions held over the past three days and that the results will contribute (over the next two days) to the dialogues on the way forward over the next two days.

As you are aware this year's Caribbean Week of Agriculture began on Monday under the theme "Strengthening Agriculture for a Healthier Future in the Region" and ends on Friday, October 12, 2018. The hosting of CWA in Barbados is the culmination of one year's preparation. The organizing committee comprising the many regional and

local stakeholders who worked tirelessly with us here at the Ministry to organize this event must be highly commended. Even with the trying economic conditions, Barbados was committed to ensuring that CWA 2018 was actualized.

Ladies and gentlemen, once again we gather to discuss key issues of great importance to us in the agricultural sector in the region. The theme “Strengthening Agriculture for a Healthier Future in the Region” will always be relevant as it speaks to the fundamental role of agriculture and food production in helping to support the health and wellness of our peoples. Indeed, it brings into sharp focus, the need for us to pay greater attention to the development of agriculture in our region.

It has been said that the Caribbean is in the midst of a health crisis considering that the region has been listed as having

the highest mortality rates for non-communicable diseases in the Americas.

Likewise, obesity and overweight, in particular, childhood obesity are of increasing concern and a growing challenge across CARICOM.

Another cause for worry is that the people in the region are facing a triple burden of malnutrition, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiency, coupled with obesity.

Sadly, this situation is adding to the burden on the region's health services with an increase in lifestyle illnesses from poor nutrition and lack of sustained exercise. As a consequence, we are witnessing an increase in morbidity from diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and some cancers.

Ladies and gentlemen, these situations are particularly worrying to me because there is the view that, for too long, we in the region have overlooked the nexus between

agriculture and health and of greater concern is that it is being said that the agricultural sector within the region is declining.

Given the efforts that we are making to alleviate malnutrition; addressing the incidences of chronic non-communicable diseases which impact heavily on our scarce economic resources, it is critical that we do everything in our power to stimulate the agricultural sector to produce an adequate supply of more nutritious foods for our people.

I therefore envision that this CWA gathering will provide us with a unique opportunity for all stakeholders to re-assess and reflect on the important role of the Agri-food sector in contributing to food and nutrition security and healthy lifestyles, not only through increased production of safe and nutritious food, but also through improving prospects for trade and creating healthier economies.

Ladies and gentlemen, as neighbouring states in the Caribbean Community, I must stress that one state cannot face these challenges alone. Thus, our geographic position compels cooperation, collaboration and integration to meet our development needs. As The Honourable Prime Minister, Miss Mottley said, sustaining a country and a sense of Caribbean identity requires the constant sharing of ideas and experiences and the frequent exchange of information.

Strengthening our agriculture for a healthier future will not only be realized by ensuring food security, but I am convinced that engaging the youth in agriculture is one of the key components for food security in the future as there is the growing concern, not only regionally but worldwide, that young people are not attracted to agriculture. Hence we all must devise programmes that not only support agricultural education, but also provide incentives for young people to envision careers in agriculture. For encouraging

the pursuit of careers in agriculture will, no doubt, ensure the future of agriculture as we seek to prepare the next generation of leaders in food and nutrition security.

The push for our youth to become involved in agriculture is timely as we anticipate that they will be the drivers of some of the new technologies in agriculture in the future as we wait to harvest their collective skills and knowledge in solving some of the challenging issues of agriculture in the region.

This year, members of the Alliance namely, CARDI, FAO, IICA, the CTA and the CARICOM Secretariat have focused discussions that will highlight or lead to regional strategies on:

- School Feeding Programmes as a policy Instrument for Food and Nutrition Security
- Development of the Regional Coconut Industry

- Climate Resilience and Coconut
- Youth in Agriculture
- Natural Resource and Disaster Risk Management
- Small Ruminants
- Climate Smart Agriculture.

Ladies and Gentleman, I now wish to turn my attention to the development of the agricultural sector at the local level.

In our 52<sup>nd</sup> year of independence, we are less able to feed ourselves than we were in 1966. Our economic model has to change so as to allow us to build a more sustainable and secure future for all Barbadians. Fifty-one years after independence we must shake the stigma associated with agriculture and grow what we eat and eat what we grow.

There is nothing wrong with a university educated person being involved in food production.

The Government of Barbados will engineer a new dawn in agriculture providing Barbados with increased levels of food security, saving much needed foreign exchange, providing new employment opportunities, enhancing the health of the nation and making Barbados a more sustainable place in which to live.

If the sector is to play a meaningful role it must be commercially viable, scalable, foster entrepreneurship and be based on the application of science, innovation and research and development. Agriculture will only succeed if young people are encouraged and the remuneration is worth it. Our strategy is to provide the regulatory framework, fiscal incentives and demonstration projects.

There is no doubt that a thriving and productive agricultural sector is important to national food security and vital to the economic and social development of our country. We must therefore capitalise the industry and bring innovative

approaches to cultivation and production, as well as ensure that agriculture becomes a viable career option for young people.

We believe that with appropriate land use policies and the application of modern technologies and innovative agricultural practices, Barbados can make significant strides in growing healthy and nutritious foods for our own needs. This can be accomplished while simultaneously preserving a balanced environment and reducing agricultural imports. We have demonstrated our commitment to agriculture by offering assistance to farmers in various areas, such as the:

- Farmers Empowerment Enfranchisement Drive
- Small Ruminants Sub-Sector
- Training for backyard farmers.

Ladies and Gentleman, The Feed Programme was conceptualized to assign land to landless farmers. This programme is a government initiative which makes arable land, both private and public available to bona fide farmers who otherwise would be unable to access land. This programme should commence shortly.

The purpose of the programme is to empower Barbadians not only to provide for their families through agrarian reform, but also to increase and improve the productivity of value added agricultural products that should enable Barbados to become less dependent on imports.

To ensure that the farmers obtain the best available services, BADMC and my ministry will facilitate the necessary training, while BADMC will initially provide seedlings, fertilizer and all other chemicals throughout the first cycle of the training programme. During the second cycle, farmers would be shown basic book-keeping, including operations

and expenses and would receive the financial benefits derived from their produce. Further, small loans of five thousand dollars will be made available to these farmers.

Ladies and Gentleman, with respect to the Small Ruminant Sub-sector, CARDI is evaluating rations using the mulberry tree in combination with cassava peels, corn and wheat middlings. The objective is to reduce the cost of feed which accounts for 60% of the overall production cost. We have recently brought on board a consultant to develop strategies to further enhance the growth of the small ruminants sub-sector and consequently extracting the maximum value added to derive therefrom.

In this regard, we will be placing emphasis on exporting the semen of our black belly sheep which will allow us to maximize on the earning potential of this specie. I am cognizant that there is great demand for our black belly sheep which is sought the world over. We have recognized

that we can produce quality cuts of lamb thus increasing the earning from the sheep. For this reason, a concerted effort will be made to encourage the hotel industry to use more of the local mutton. Such an approach will provide greater revenue earning for farmers.

FAO has provided some valuable costing information from a study of a medium sized integrated multiplication and fattening unit for Barbados Black Belly Sheep production. I am told that a 300 ewe unit for Barbados would require an initial capital investment of \$109,641.

Training in proper management of the black belly sheep is an ongoing activity at the Greenland Research Livestock Station and a regional training workshop was held in Barbados only last month dealing with the marketing of small ruminants. That workshop was facilitated by IICA and FAO.

The Research on the Barbados Black Belly Sheep continues at Greenland with emphasis on selection of high quality rams and ewes for breeding. Farmers are sold lambs after the selection process of 120 days to improve and expand their stock.

The sustainability of an integrated small ruminant industry will require continued collaboration along the entire value chain notwithstanding significant capital injection.

Ladies and Gentleman, I wish again to extend my gratitude to the Government of New Zealand for the grant of \$255,500 to be used to tackle two major constraints to the development of the small ruminants sub-sector: adequate nutrition and improved genetics.

I wish to turn my attention to the issue of food security. Food Security and Food Sovereignty remain the most vital areas in the development of any country and Barbados is no

different. The Ancient Egyptian and Chinese dynasties were able to achieve this by constructing large granaries to store grain in time of famine. Similarly, we need to be able to feed our people in case of natural disasters and droughts.

The issue of food security is a matter of strategic importance to small island developing states as well as countries across the globe; the key issues being the adequacy of the food supply and the stability of and access to that food supply. Some of the strategic policy measures required to enhance food security include:

- strengthening of the purchasing power of the poor;
- better and more secure access to the food supply;
- greater efficiency of food production and distribution;
- strategic production of food;
- adequate industry growth rate and stability of food supply; and
- strategic storage of food.

With special reference to the poultry industry, such policy initiatives would further position the poultry industry as a source of income for the rural and urban unemployed and underemployed, and facilitate increased consumption levels for a given level of income. The poultry industry is one of Barbados's success story and my ministry intends to re-view any necessary policy to ensure that this industry continues to grow.

Ladies and Gentleman, our goal is not only that agriculture should feed our local population with nutritious and affordable food, but it should provide healthy alternatives for our tourism industry, hotels and restaurants and possibly have products for export in the future. This may be a futuristic view, but if we are determined, we will achieve this together, by supporting each other, exchanging ideas and by furthering our knowledge base and expertise.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you and I invite you to join me in visiting the booths at “Caribbean Market Place” and savour our culinary delights.