



Office of the
Prime Minister

Welcome Address for the 34th Annual West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference

MONDAY 5TH JUNE 2023

Ladies and gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I welcome you to the 34th West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference, hosted by the Caribbean Agro-Economic Society. We are here to delve into the intriguing realm of "Emerging Challenges and Opportunities for Food Systems: Climate Change and Tourism Nexus." This conference promises to be a platform for engaging discussions, enlightening exchanges, and fruitful collaborations.

The chosen theme serves as a compass guiding our exploration of the intricate interplay between climate change and tourism in shaping our food systems. Our sub-themes, ranging from the challenges of food and nutrition security to the impact of sustainability and technological advances, provide an encompassing framework for our discourse. These subjects are not mere abstractions; rather, they touch the core of our region's well-being, development, and resilience.

Agriculture, as the backbone of our Caribbean economies, holds immense significance. It represents the intricate tapestry of our cultures, traditions, and heritage. The conference serves as a crucial platform to underscore the pivotal role of agriculture in addressing the challenges we face today. It is through the lens of economics that we explore innovative strategies and sustainable solutions to ensure food security for our people.

In this ever-evolving world, our region grapples with numerous obstacles and opportunities. Climate change, with its far-reaching consequences, poses both challenges and prospects for our food systems. The delicate balance between preserving our environment and catering to the demands of a thriving tourism sector calls for a nuanced understanding and innovative approaches. As we navigate this nexus, it is imperative to foster partnerships that promote resilient and sustainable agricultural practices, enhancing both the quality and quantity of our food production.

Food security remains a pressing concern, as we strive to provide adequate nutrition for our growing population. Our collective efforts should focus on identifying viable solutions, harnessing the potential of eco and agro tourism to drive sustainable food systems. The intersection of these industries holds immense promise for economic growth, job creation, and the preservation of our natural resources.

The Bahamas, with its unique geographical location and vulnerability to climate change, provides a compelling backdrop for discussing the sustainability impacts our region faces. We must confront these challenges head-on, leveraging our collective knowledge and experiences to develop robust adaptation and mitigation strategies. By integrating sustainable practices and technology-driven innovations, we can safeguard our agricultural sector, protect our natural ecosystems, and secure the future of our food systems.

Furthermore, we recognize the vital link between food, public health, and the overall strength of our Caribbean economies. Our collective efforts must aim not only to produce nutritious food but also to address public health concerns and stimulate economic growth. We must prioritize the development of school feeding programs that not only nourish our children but also provide a platform for agricultural development, creating a cycle of sustainable progress.

Technological advancements have the potential to revolutionize our food systems, making them more efficient, resilient, and responsive to the needs of our region. The conference will provide a space to explore these cutting-edge innovations, encouraging collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and industry experts. By embracing technology and digitalization, we can enhance productivity, reduce waste, and bridge the gap between agricultural potential and economic outcomes.

Moreover, as we delve into the economics of Caribbean food systems, we recognize the need for robust analysis, critical evaluation, and evidence-based policymaking. Through rigorous research and insightful deliberations, we can uncover pathways to enhance the profitability, competitiveness, and sustainability of our agricultural sector. It is through our collective efforts that we can forge a prosperous future for our farmers, agribusinesses, and the broader Caribbean community.

Lastly, I extend my warmest wishes to each and every one of you for a successful conference. May the next few days be filled with thought-provoking discussions, fruitful collaborations, and

insightful revelations. Let us seize this opportunity to forge new partnerships, exchange knowledge, and collectively address the emerging challenges and opportunities that lie before us.

In line with our shared goals, it is important to acknowledge the unwavering commitment of the Bahamian government towards progress in agribusiness and the promotion of food security, innovation, and development. Recognizing the vital role that agriculture plays in our nation's economic growth and the well-being of our people, the government has implemented strategic policies and initiatives to support the agricultural sector. With a focus on sustainable practices, technological advancements, and capacity building, the government is dedicated to fostering an environment that encourages entrepreneurship, investment, and the adoption of innovative approaches. This commitment underscores their vision for a resilient, self-sufficient, and prosperous Bahamas.

As we embark on this journey together, let us keep in mind the importance of agriculture, economics, food security, and sustainability in shaping the future of the Caribbean. Our collective efforts and contributions hold the power to transform our food systems, ensuring a prosperous and resilient region for generations to come.

Thank you for your presence, dedication, and commitment to the betterment of our Caribbean food systems. Let us commence this conference with enthusiasm, open minds, and the shared goal of creating a brighter future.

Welcome once again, and may this conference be a resounding success!

Thank you.