

MCAP Movement for Change and Prosperity

Agriculture Presentation

Production from the agriculture and fisheries sectors is the backbone of social and economic development for most developed and developing countries; this can also be true for Montserrat.

Agriculture and fisheries create employment for farmers, fishermen and retailers.

We must be able to feed ourselves. The ability to produce our own food could become critical, following natural disasters and during times of war, when food supplies may be interrupted due to shortage of supply or disruption of transportation links. Interruptions in food supplies are a distinct possibility because of the increased terrorist threat.

National food production has implications for food quality and the health and quality of life of our people. By producing our own food, we can ensure that it is fresh and of a high quality. It is clear that much of the food imported into Montserrat is of a poor quality.

Local agricultural production also helps in the creation of wealth for our nation by generating foreign exchange through exports, and saving foreign exchange through import substitution.

In spite of all the foregoing, the agriculture sector, including fisheries, contributes a mere 2% to GDP. Clearly, with increased investment, and the application of new techniques and technologies, agriculture and fisheries can easily contribute more to national development.

The challenge therefore, is to recognize the potential contribution that agriculture and fisheries can make, and to provide these sectors with the necessary investment capital and incentive packages offered to other sectors. For example, to encourage industrial development, Government would identify land, build factory shells, allow tax exemptions on machinery and raw materials, and provide tax holidays for the initial years of operation. Regarding agriculture, however, a plot of land may be identified, but little or no attempt would be made to provide access roads, irrigation, soil conservation works and marketing intelligence.

I feel strongly, therefore, that first there has to be a change in our thinking. We must see agriculture, not as a subsistence activity, but as yet another avenue by which we can create wealth.

MCAP's vision for agriculture is: **To redevelop agriculture and the other natural resource sectors in the north, using traditional and emerging techniques and technologies, to satisfy local demand and to target specific markets for export of fresh commodities and value-added products.**

At the heart of this goal is food security, increasing foreign exchange reserves and enhanced and sustainable livelihoods for residents.

Our primary goal must be to feed ourselves. This, of course, would save foreign exchange and would have a positive impact on the livelihoods of farmers, fishers and their families. We could make local substitutes interesting and appetizing by expanding our methods of food preparation and presentation to include those of the various nationalities and cultures of our CARICOM brothers and sisters residing here.

Montserrat has a number of excellent farmers who continue to work tirelessly under difficult circumstances to produce food; farmers such as James Pond, Jimmy Allen, Ellen Lindsey and Leroy Weekes are good examples. The techniques which these farmers have perfected to suit the local environment should be taught to a new crop of farmers. An MCAP Government will also promote new techniques and technologies in areas such as hydroponics, shade houses and green houses.

I would now like to introduce specific programmes that would realize our vision for agriculture and fisheries.

1. Young Farmers Programme

A large proportion of our farmers are over the age of 60. Therefore, our vision for agriculture must include the recruitment and training of young farmers. To achieve this, we will facilitate access to land, provide irrigation facilities, roads and other infrastructure, and ensure that the young farmers acquire technical, managerial and marketing skills for the production of high quality agricultural commodities. This sort of assistance must be provided if we are to attract young people into farming and ensure that our food production is in good hands for years to come.

2. Semi-intensive Small Stock Production

We will promote the use of semi-intensive small stock systems to produce goat and sheep meat for local consumption and export. Indications are that there is a shortage of goat meat throughout the OECS. We will therefore prepare technical information packages that will outline all of the areas important for getting into semi-intensive small stock production. We will also provide financial incentives to persons wishing to become involved. For local consumption, we are proposing that the carcasses will be frozen, diced and presented in sealed plastic bags so that one can go into supermarkets and pick up the product as we now do when purchasing chicken. **The semi-intensive small stock production system would help to address the loose livestock problem.**

3. Abattoir

Montserrat needs an abattoir as animals are being slaughtered under unsanitary conditions. Additionally, meat for export must be slaughtered to an approved standard. The present thinking is that at the current level of throughput, the abattoir will not be able to maintain itself. The increased number of animals that would be slaughtered to satisfy the regional market would be sufficient to make the abattoir viable and ensure that animals are slaughtered under humane and sanitary conditions.

4. Bay Oil and Bay Rum

An MCAP Government will promote the production of bay rum and bay oils for local consumption and export. The Montserrat bay rum has established a reputation on the international market and to ensure that it surpasses its previous market share, we will go back to using the traditional method of production.

There is also a lucrative market in Europe for bay oil to be used in the cosmetic industry. To facilitate entry into this industry we will prepare technical packages and provide access to interest free loans.

5. Herbal teas

An MCAP Government will also work with the private sector to develop a herbal tea industry. Teas would be packaged in tea bags and presented in attractive packages for convenience.

6. Cassava

We have heard much about the fledgling cassava industry in Montserrat. Every effort should be made to bring it to commercial production in the shortest possible time. Essential activities to achieve this include:

- a. Selection and testing of higher yielding varieties
- b. Importation of additional cassava raw material
- c. Production and packaging of cassava products for ethnic markets in Europe, Canada and the United States.

Here emphasis must again be placed on the fact that we must commercialize our agricultural production and move away from subsistence mode.

7. Fisheries

The fisheries sector has received even less assistance than the agriculture sector. We continue to practise artisanal fisheries while other countries exploit our deep sea stocks. To realize its fullest potential, the fisheries sector needs to develop more commercial type fisheries that would allow us to access deep sea fishing. This can only be achieved by provision of financial incentives, training of fishermen in new and improved techniques, and access to appropriate gear and insurance.

8. Fruits

Every year large amounts of fruits go to waste. We will develop two strategies to make use of these fruits:

- a. source machinery that with a few adjustments would be able to produce and can chunks and juices for various fruits as they come in season; and
- b. encourage solar drying of fruits targeted at the local and export market.

For these, we will need to develop a high quality product in attractive packaging targeted at the appropriate market. Dried fruits, for example, are a favourite in the health food market.

Implementation of the above will go a long way towards providing jobs, feeding ourselves, earning foreign exchange, eating healthily and improving livelihoods. Montserrat would be a better place for it.

I invite you all to participate in this Movement to Rescue and Rebuild Montserrat. On Election Day vote on the issues. Vote all nine for MCAP.

Come, let us build each other together.