

ABSTRACT

AN EFFECTIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM FOR THE
MANAGEMENT OF FOOD PROCESSING

By

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The development of agribusiness in Trinidad and Tobago is an integral part of the National Economic Programme. However the slow rate of entry by firms into this activity and the problems faced by those which have ventured into agribusiness, highlight the need for a thorough review of the factors which inhibit development.

Agricultural Extension with all its essential characteristics, is a system that possesses the art of educating rural people in agricultural and rural development. It has been long recognised as having an important role to play in any national economic development programme. However, difficulties persist, and limited research has been undertaken in regard to implementing effective extension systems which are properly managed within the framework of a wider agri-business environment. The emergence and success of this arm of the business however, is dependent on the success of the overall management system, its goals and its objectives.

The focus of this study centres on an analysis of the elements of an effective extension system with particular reference to a case study of a food processing enterprise.

The study takes into account the major theoretical issues involved in agribusiness development and examines the institutional support framework existing in Trinidad and Tobago. By means of a case study approach an examination is provided of the factors which account for the performance of a food processing company.

The company under study is primarily concerned with the freezing of fruits and vegetables through the process of the Individual Quick Freezing (I.Q.F.) technique. Originally the company's raw material supplies were based on adhoc purchases and later, resorted to the more modern contract farming approach. Likewise in the initial stages, the company had no formalised extension system and showed no appreciation for modern agricultural trends. However, the company soon adopted the more modern, pro-active integrated extension services approach. This improved all aspects of the company's operations from supplies to better, more harmonious relationships with farmers and public extensionists. Additionally, it fostered more confidence and a healthier company image and impacted positively on overall management.

The case under consideration, revealed that despite shortcomings in national policy and institutional programmes, the company experienced certain difficulties which were primarily due to its outdated approach to its extension and management practices.

Some of these difficulties relate to:-

- (1) An inadequate agricultural extension linkage system and insufficient attention to the agricultural raw material purchasing system.
- (2) An inefficient and incomplete managerial system, in particular:-
 - (i) the failure to establish short, medium and long-term organizational goals;
 - (ii) weak leadership and motivational practices which affected key areas of the company;
 - (iii) improper authority structure which denied the company the desirable autonomy;

(iv) job over-loading in key areas, including the offices of the Agricultural Officer and the Production Manager;

(v) a lack of attention to the dynamics of organizational change and to strategic management i.e. managing information to guide organizational change and to meet organizational needs.

(3) The absence of a well-thought-out, cohesive marketing plan which utilizes effective strategies in terms of the Product, the Price, the Promotion and the Distribution (Place) efforts.

Notwithstanding the difficulties experienced, there were positive elements which came out of the company's revised extension and management efforts. These took several forms of which the implementation of the pro-active integrated extension services approach, by virtue of its dynamic nature, begot the following:-

(i) The establishment of farmer groups;

(ii) The establishment of farmer co-operatives from within the farmer groups:

- (iii) The establishment of a contract farming approach;
- (iv) The incorporation and establishment of the three-sector approach to extension, involving Public (government and universities), Private (profit-oriented firms), and Voluntary (farmer organizations and commodity groups) extension efforts.

Recommendations are made on how the shortcomings might be addressed by means of a more concerted effort in the extension and purchasing systems. Also, the managerial system must be closely analysed to ensure that the relevant sub-systems are complete and efficient. In particular, the extension and marketing strategies must be well adhered to and made more effective.

Finally, organizational management must itself seek to be more dynamic and flexible, competent and possessing a stimulus for the future. In essence, overall management must indeed be strategic.

On the basis of what has been discussed in the preceding paragraphs the researcher is of the opinion that failure to act in accordance with these recommendations can lead to company failure, insolvency and eventually, liquidation.