

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to identify the way a particular sample of youth perceive of agriculture in St. Vincent; and to seek to relate such perceptions to a number of implications for agricultural extension and communication strategies.

The researcher does not regard this study as complete pronouncement of the way national youth perceive of agriculture, for it was confined to select groups of youth located in various agricultural districts of the island.

It was assumed that their exposure to practical agriculture among small farmers should equip them to provide an indication of the kind of image projected by agriculture in their districts as they interpret what they see. It was further assumed that the aggregate perceptions could be significant to the administrators of the Extension and Communication Division in terms of strategies for agricultural developments.

The study utilized questionnaires with a randomized sample of 79 youth as respondents; group discussions with about 120 participants and, interviews with 20 young people.

The data revealed that over 75% of the respondents are cognizant of the economic contributions of agriculture to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, viz:

(a) its role in bringing in foreign exchange through trade,

- (b) utilizing a large segment of the island's manpower resources and,
- (c) providing food for the nation.

The majority of youth in the sample felt that the public itself shows scant regard for both agriculture and farmers; and believed that this was a function of:

- (a) both ignorance and prejudice of the non-farming sector, and
- (b) the apparent lack of professionalism by many farmers toward their career revealed in their inappropriate deportment, and a failure to acquire adequate training for their job.

Over 70% of the youth under survey, felt that agricultural development could be accelerated if the following measures among others were implemented:

- (a) introduce a proper agricultural science programme throughout all the Government primary and secondary schools of the island.
- (b) conduct a massive education drive for both the general public and the farming community aimed at improving the status of agriculture.
- (c) provide infrastructural and marketing facilities for the farmers and,
- (d) introduce a higher level of appropriate technology to increase agricultural productivity and instill respectability in farming as an important economic activity.

The research data revealed a general lack of information among the respondents on the many varied careers in agriculture they have been able to identify only the same four or five on the various occasions of data collection.

No student indicates a choice of farming as a first choice career and only two persons would, as a first choice wish to become part-time farmers.

The conclusion examines some positive actions that would be taken to institute productive farming systems and assist such youth to respond favourably and directly to the challenges of agricultural and rural development.