



Inclusive neoliberalism? Perspectives from eastern Caribbean farmers

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Abstract: Banana farming in the Eastern Caribbean has gone from riches to rags since the 1990s, as the region's economic and social mainstay has severely contracted. This article reports on interviews conducted at the grassroots level with about 150 current or former banana farmers in Dominica and St. Lucia, and at the administrative level with numerous government and banana sector officials and other stakeholders. The interviews sought to answer two interrelated questions: (a) How have farmers experienced and responded to this severe contraction in the banana export industry? and (b) To what extent does current development policy supports farmers' economic needs? Indeed, many of the stated goals of the current development paradigm, referred to as 'inclusive neoliberalism', align with the farmers' stated needs. We seek to understand the extent to which this development policy manifests itself at the grassroots level in the form of support that small farmers can actually use to help sell their products. Our interviews document multiple ways that banana farmers have been hurt by changes in international trade policy. The interviews also reveal a considerable gap between the stated desires and development policy priorities of farmers, on the one hand, and the impacts of development policy at the grassroots level, on the other. We conclude with suggestions on how to bridge the gap between inclusive neoliberal development policy and the needs of small farmers, who for decades have been the social and economic bedrock of Eastern Caribbean societies.

Key words: inclusive neoliberalism, development policy, global banana trade, dependency, Fair Trade, Caribbean

I Introduction

This article examines the relationships between development and agricultural trade policies, on the one hand, and the experience of and challenges facing small export-oriented farmers, on the other. It begins with a brief review of neoliberal development policy, and its most recent incarnation in the form of inclusive neoliberalism. The article then presents the recent history of banana trade policy and the neoliberal factors leading to the collapse of Eastern Caribbean banana exporting. The article then summarizes the data collection methodology. The next two sections review the empirical findings drawn from interviews with banana farmers and other agricultural stakeholders. The first section provides a profile of banana farmers and the factors leading most of them to abandon the industry. The second presents farmers' views of government agricultural policies. The article concludes with a summary of the findings and a list of priorities, if small farmers are to be heard and supported, in accord with the stated aims of inclusive neoliberalism.

II Inclusive neoliberalism

The neoliberal policy era began around 1980 with the elections of Reagan in the US and Thatcher in Great Britain (Harvey, 2005). Even advocates admit that in the early years neoliberal development was implemented according to a top-down approach that prioritized national economic growth above all other concerns. As neoliberal architect Jeffrey Sachs describes it: international development agencies applied a 10-step programme with few modifications from country to country. Sachs admits that this universal approach was too rigid to accommodate the needs of diverse populations and contexts (Sachs, 1999).

Empirical evidence mounted throughout the 1980s showing that the neoliberal development programme had severe shortcomings. Critics of neoliberalism called for development priorities initiated from the 'bottom-up' that would take into account the needs of the world's most vulnerable people. They argued that such development, which is 'localized and contextually rooted, small in scale, flexible, culturally sensitive, democratic and participatory, and which centres on the

empowerment of the poor' (Parnwell, 2008: 113), would be both more ethical and more effective.

In response to the building pressure for reform, major international financial institutions (IFIs), including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), began an ambitious effort to reinvent themselves as sensitive and responsive even to their most vehement critics. As part of their new strategy, IFIs reoriented from an unwavering neoliberal focus on economic growth to include poverty reduction as a foremost goal of development (Craig and Porter, 2007; Porter and Craig, 2004). This new 'inclusive neoliberalism' is an attempt to respond to critics by making development policy more 'country driven' and 'indigenously owned' (Craig and Porter, 2003: 53; Fine, 2001: 12). These ideas about making development policy more inclusive have percolated down from the global to the country-specific level. Whatever his motivation, St. Vincent's Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves has pledged to head a 'poor people's government' with a "Together Now", inclusive, participatory' set of policies (cited in Payne, 2006: 38–39). Poverty reduction strategies have become a centerpiece of inclusive neoliberalism throughout the global South (Halcrow Group Limited, 2003: 145; Porter and Craig, 2004). The IMF's web site (2009) makes available the poverty reduction strategy papers of 66 countries.

To illustrate, Dominica's poverty reduction strategy document states that economic growth is to continue as the development priority (this is neoliberalism's core value) because it alone can reduce poverty (the inclusive theme), especially the rural poverty created by the collapse of banana exports (Dominica, 2006). On page one and repeatedly later in the document, the essential point is that 'the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica (GOCD) regards the pursuit of sustained strong economic growth to be the main strategy to alleviate poverty'. We learn

that such growth requires foreign investment, because 'Dominica is not internationally competitive' (p. 2). Luring foreign investors requires reducing government spending and rewriting laws to 'enhance flexibility in the labour market' (that is, make it more favourable to employers; Dominica, 2006: 45; Halcrow Group Limited, 2003). The poverty reduction strategies of other Eastern Caribbean countries are similar. For small farmers, whose livelihoods were devastated by earlier rounds of neoliberalism and who are now identified as an impoverished target population, the inclusiveness of these policies can appear suspect. Further reductions in government support and greater labour flexibility is unlikely to help farmers with their priorities of marketing their products at a price on which they can survive. We return to these ideas in the empirical section.

Inclusive neoliberalism has certainly changed the way the IFIs present themselves and their policies, and has added poverty reduction and some country-specific content of development policies. But Porter and Craig (2004: 411) argue that poverty reduction strategies are actually very similar from one country to the other, in that they:

do everything possible to create a system of global openness and integration ideally suited to the interests of international finance and capital, within a geopolitical system aligned in every way possible to the interests of most powerful nations, all while depicting the framework arrived at as being first and foremost about the interests of the poorest and most marginal people on the planet.

These authors have interpreted the effort to make neoliberalism more inclusive as driven by an interest in placating rather than incorporating ordinary people. Other critical scholars argue that the IFIs continue to be run by small circles of bureaucrats and technocrats who, rhetoric aside, effectively work to retain and even increase top-down control over the process of development (Peet, 2007; Plehwe, 2007).

The conclusion of Craig and Porter (2006: 250–51), after examining inclusive neoliberalism in four of its model countries, is that it is fundamentally ‘a reaction led by major Development institutions (and their political backers), concerned about how failure undermined the legitimacy of their institutions and the wider Liberal order’. They and others argue that the IFI’s new strategy may indeed be effective, but as a means to reinforce and augment neoliberal hegemony, rather than truly improve development policy for those at the grassroots it purportedly serves.

Observing over the longer time frame, one finds a similar pattern of adept responses to critics. World Bank development policy has been in constant revision with regard to its stated aims. The World Bank is skilled at absorbing outside critiques and embracing them as its own in revised development policy (Peet, 2007). Empirical work is needed to identify gaps between the rhetoric of development policies and their impacts on the ground and in the lives and livelihoods of working people. Through detailed examinations of the impacts of inclusive neoliberalism in the global South, and in this case the Eastern Caribbean, we can determine the extent to which it has in fact expanded the voices behind and benefits of development, or merely extended its disciplinary reach.

III Banana wars

Small farmers, each growing bananas on just a few acres of land for decades provided a huge share of national export earnings of the Eastern Caribbean countries of Dominica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent. These three countries, plus Grenada, comprise the Windward Islands. But Grenada has over decades exported more nutmeg and cocoa, and therefore bananas were never as central to its economy as on the other three islands. Near the peak of ‘green gold’ in the mid-1980s, St. Lucia obtained a remarkable 34 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) from the banana exports. Dominica was not far behind with

bananas comprising 30 per cent of GDP in 1980, and then 20.1 per cent in 1992. For St. Vincent, bananas were 16 per cent of GDP in 1990 (Anderson *et al.*, 2003; John, 2006). Bananas’ contributions to total employment in these three countries were similarly huge. No other world region was so reliant on one export commodity, yet at the same time so insignificant in terms of their contributions to global trade (Josling and Taylor, 2003).

By 1997, banana exports had fallen to 7.4, 7 and 6 per cent of GDP for Dominica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent, respectively (Payne, 2008; Reid, 2000). The decline has continued since. The significance of this drop is amplified by the fact that few, if any, exports have arisen to replace bananas as an economic mainstay. In fact, only St. Lucia has had significant growth in alternative sources of foreign-exchange, namely, manufacturing and tourism, although the later is largely up-scale and foreign owned (Anderson *et al.*, 2003; Pattullo, 2005).

1 Windward Banana dependency meets the WTO

The recent demise of Windwards’ banana industries culminates a long process of external dependence that began as far back as the early colonial period. Britain and France horse-traded these islands back and forth, and they ultimately ended up as British colonies (Richardson, 1992). Similar to what occurred elsewhere in the Caribbean, their economies were structured to suit the interests of the colonial power, resulting in high levels of export specialization focusing on just one or two export commodities at any point in time. In turn, each major export crop experienced difficulty with markets, costs and profits, leading to its decline and eventual replacement with another commodity (Honychurch, 1995; Thomas, 1988). The banana is the last of those commodities, but it appears to have no clear successor.

Bananas were first introduced in the region in the fifteenth century as a local food, and were produced commercially in Costa Rica

and Jamaica by the 1890s (Myers, 2004). Bananas were being produced commercially in Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Dominica for export to Canada before World War II, but shipment stopped during the war because the ships were sunk. After the war, banana exporting recommenced and Windward Island production increased in volume. But then it was directed entirely to Europe, and after 1952, specifically to the UK, where it has remained focused ever since (Anderson *et al.*, 2003). This arrangement resulted from a recommendation by the Moyne Royal Commission, charged with studying the impacts of the decline in sugar exports and the social conditions in Britain's Caribbean colonies that generated unrest during the first four decades of the twentieth century. To stimulate the banana industry, Britain offered Windward Island farmers interest-free loans, production assistance and a guaranteed market (Clegg, 2002; Torgerson, 2007).

Bananas were well suited to conditions – both geographic and social – in the Eastern Caribbean. Bananas can be cultivated in a variety of landscapes including even the Windwards' rugged slopes. They are adaptable to either the plantation or the small family farm model of agriculture that dominates in the Eastern Caribbean. Additional advantages include the ability to grow bananas year-round and to harvest them weekly or bi-weekly, providing an unusually regular income for farming families. While the region's frequent hurricanes level banana trees, they grow back and can be harvested again nine months later.

By the late 1950s, as a direct result of late colonial British policy, bananas were on their way to becoming the principal export of Dominica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent, and an important commodity for Belize, Grenada and Jamaica. A more detailed account of the establishment of the Eastern Caribbean's banana industries has been written elsewhere (Clegg, 2002; Grossman, 1998; Reid, 2000; Thomson, 1987).

A Windward Island banana culture emerged in which thousands of independent, small-scale farmers raised bananas for export, while, in most cases, simultaneously growing food crops for their own sustenance and for small-scale sale to itinerant vendors or at local outlets. Thus, despite the back-breaking nature of banana cultivation, it proved to be quite popular with the farmers. By the late 1980s, these three islands were numerically dominated by banana farmers and their families, and the social and economic contributions and influence of banana farmers permeated their entire societies.

In 1952 Geest Industries Limited, a British firm started by Dutch immigrants, successfully bid for the job of being the sole importer and marketer of bananas from the Eastern Caribbean (Anderson *et al.*, 2003). It entered into a purchasing contract relationship with each island's banana grower associations (BGAs). Geest also handled transportation with its fleet of refrigerated ships that called on all four Windwards each week or fortnight, ripened the bananas in its own sheds, then sold them to shops and supermarkets throughout the UK (Clegg, 2002).

The nature of the Geest–banana farmer contract was controversial, however (Grossman, 1998; Trouillot, 1988). The controversy centred on the establishment of the prices paid to the farmers for their fruit. Such contracts normally set prices at the outset, but the Geest contract allowed for prices to be determined retroactively, dependent upon market conditions in the UK. Thus, the farmers 'sold' their fruit to Geest without knowing what their remuneration would be for that shipment. In 1996, Geest was purchased jointly by Fyffes and WIBDECO (Windward Islands Banana Development and Exporting Company; Anderson *et al.*, 2003) which continue until today to play key roles in Eastern Caribbean banana exports.

Despite the banana farmers' price uncertainties, the Eastern Caribbean banana industries flourished throughout the 1960s,

1970s and 1980s. During that time, the islands emerged as independent countries and the UK joined the European Community (EC, later the European Union or EU) in 1973. The creation of the EC in turn led to the 1974 signing of the Lomé Convention, a treaty between EC members and many of their former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP). Lomé's keystone was its preferential treatment of many commodities exported by ACP states

to the EC. Clearly a neo-colonial arrangement, ACP states nevertheless welcomed its guaranteed markets and non-reciprocal nature. Theoretically, at least, most of the benefits flowed in one direction, from the global North to the global South.

Several changes began to emerge during the 1990s that threatened the stability provided by the region's banana industries (Table 1). One particularly notable change was the

Table 1 Timeline of major international weather and political events unfavourable to Windwards' banana exports

1979:	Hurricane David ravishes the Windwards, fells trees which block roads and paths to farms, and destroys banana farms.
1988–92:	After Europe's decision to create a single market (for all goods, including bananas), many Latin American, Caribbean and African countries expand their banana industries anticipating increased export opportunities to an expanding European market. They expected future quotas to be based on quantity in their recent export history. As global production expands, prices that had been relatively high, especially in Europe, fall.
1991:	Maastricht Treaty signed and mandates creation of the Single European Market upon its ratification in 1993.
1993:	European Council approves Council Regulation 404/93, establishing a controversial licensing system for EU banana imports: individual country quotas for the 12 'traditional' ACP exporters of bananas to the EU (including 7 Caribbean states), and the contentious 2 million ton tariff quota limit for 3rd country bananas (99 per cent of which came from Latin America). Costa Rica, Colombia and three other Latin American banana exporters file complaint to the GATT against 404/93.
1994:	The GATT decides in favour of the complainants but the EU ignores the decision; the GATT has no real authority to enforce its decisions.
1995:	Tropical Storm Iris then Hurricane Marilyn devastate the Windwards' banana farms; the EU allocates their banana quotas to other countries during the nine month recovery period.
1996:	Ecuador files a complaint against 404/93 before the newly formed WTO, and the US joins Ecuador and enters the dispute for the first time.
1997:	The WTO rules in favour of the complainants and orders the EU to change banana import policy to comply with WTO regulations.
1998:	The EU stalls and ultimately presents a 'new' policy that is little changed from the first one. The WTO rejects the new policy and authorizes Ecuador and the US to levy sanctions against the EU.
1999:	The US levies trade sanctions against the EU but Ecuador does not, fearing greater harm from the sanctions than from the banana policy.
2000:	Lomé IV expires and is replaced by the weaker Cotonou Agreement, which has no Banana Protocol or guaranteed market shares for the 12 traditional ACP banana exporters to the EU.
2001:	The banana dispute is finally settled with an agreement among all parties, though unfavourable for the Caribbean ACP states, as it phases out their trade preferences with the EU in 2006, and replaces them with a 176 euro/ton tariff on Latin American bananas. This is the essential 'handwriting on the wall' that enhances the downward spiral for the Windwards' banana industries since in the mid-1990s.

Source: Wiley (2008).

deepening of the EU, with the creation of the Single European Market (SEM) in 1993. This in turn changed the conditions under which ACP exports, particularly bananas, entered the EU. The SEM ended the 12 separate systems under which individual EC states could import bananas from former colonies as institutionalized in the Lomé Convention, purchase them from Latin America's lower cost producers, and/or produce bananas internally, usually in overseas territories.

The conversion to the SEM meant that such a fragmented international system could no longer continue since products would be able to freely cross the EU's internal boundaries. Instead, the EU adopted Council Regulation 404/93 as its new banana importation policy, implementing it on 1 July 1993. The regulation established an annual 2 million ton import quota for Latin American bananas. It also provided a guaranteed quota for each of the 12 'traditional' ACP banana exporters to EU member states, and a limit to the quantity of EU banana production that would be eligible for subsidies under the Common Agricultural Program. Finally, the regulation implemented an import license system that favoured EU firms over outsiders, including the three major North American fruit multinationals – Chiquita, Del Monte and Dole (European Council, 1993).

A storm of protest, primarily from Latin American banana producers, greeted the new EU policy. Their protests coincided temporally with the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations that led to great changes in the international trade system, all of them oriented towards facilitating freer trade and broader processes of globalization. Significant among the changes was the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, an organization with stronger trade rules enforcement powers than those of the GATT. This had great ramifications for the global banana trade. Several Latin American states filed complaints against Council Regulation

404/93 with the WTO in 1996. They were joined by the US, as the home base of the three affected fruit multinationals. Caribbean banana-producing countries were not even permitted to be present when the WTO in 1997 ruled in favour of the US and the Latin American producers (Payne, 2008: 230). In 2001, the EU finally agreed to phase in several policy changes that led to the end of ACP preferences by 2006 (Table 1). As detailed in Myers (2004) study of the global banana industry, the WTO's insistence upon equal treatment for all countries exporting bananas to Europe ends up favouring bananas with the lowest shelf price but also with the greatest social and environmental costs. A more extensive treatment of the banana trade dispute can be found elsewhere (Josling and Taylor 2003; Wiley, 2008).

As the international banana dispute raged on during the late 1990s, negotiations began for the renewal of the Lomé Convention, which was due to expire in 2000. The WTO banana case had a great impact on those negotiations, ultimately leading to the demise of Lomé itself and its replacement by a weaker Cotonou Agreement that did not specify ACP trade preferences for commodities like bananas (ACP Secretariat, 2000).

The ongoing battles in Geneva, Brussels, and other key nodes in the global political economy took their toll on Windward banana farmers. The small family farmer model of banana cultivation was not competitive on world markets. It was shielded from competition by the Lomé Convention and its trade preferences. The removal of preferences has decimated the Eastern Caribbean banana industry, which at its peak employed more than 35,000 farmers but now employs well below 4,000 (Table 2). Exacerbating these problems was the trend towards higher quality standards demanded by EU consumers that led to frequent changes in the packing system employed in the Eastern Caribbean, and in particular, the introduction of boxes in the 1980s which farmers had to purchase

Table 2 The decline in Windward Island banana farming

		1992	1998	2008
Dominica	Value [†]	EC\$82m	EC\$37m	EC\$18m*
	Farmers	6,555	3,533	767
St. Lucia	Value	EC\$187m	EC\$92m	EC\$65m*
	Farmers	9,500	6,061	1,450
St. Vincent	Value	EC\$110m	EC\$56m	EC\$33m*
	Farmers	8,000	7,048	1,700

Source: WIBDECO 2001; Anderson *et al.* (2003), Titus *et al.* (2008) and FAOSTAT (2009).

[†]Note: The Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$) is fixed to the US dollar at 2.7 to 1. On 29 January 2009: 1 US dollar = 0.6986 British pounds, *Data are for 2008.

to pack their bananas. These improvements in quality transferred more of the work, responsibilities and costs to the farmers themselves. Farmers were confronted with the loss of their guaranteed market share in the UK, while subjected to competition with large plantations in Latin America whose workers were abused and poorly paid, and to higher quality standards demanded by EU agencies and consumers.

The arrangement just described illustrates how neoliberal policies have shifted a greater share of the burdens and risks, and a diminishing share of the benefits, to small farmers. Throughout the Caribbean, small farmers have been damaged by so-called free-market approaches to trade and to food security. Caribbean agricultural exports as a whole have been decimated by international trade policies, while cheap food imports particularly from the US have simultaneously flooded the region. In this way, neoliberalism has abruptly reversed the Caribbean's long-standing status as a net agricultural exporter. Indeed, the US Department of Agriculture recently identified the Caribbean as the world's most food import-dependent region (Weis, 2007: 112). The US runs a trade surplus with the Windward Islands, much to the consternation of farmers and their allies, as this food purchasing agent explained: 'The ships that bring our imports from the USA return empty. Those ships should be carrying bananas and other St. Lucia exports to the United States' (Aurelian, interview).

The international agricultural policies' negative impacts on the Caribbean is perhaps most acute for the Windwards' small farmers, whose heretofore 'dignified livelihoods' have been undermined (Weis, 2003). These trends have led many observers to simply dismiss the Windward small farmer as an anachronism. Our interviews with farmers (described in the following) encourage a different interpretation, of social and economic contributors desiring to continue to work the land, feed people and earn a decent living from agriculture. The Windwards still have a substantial farming population, however negatively affected it has been in recent years. Unlike in many 'developed' regions, traditional and local knowledge of the land and plants is still widespread. The possibility of an agricultural rebound is present, however precarious, and despite the fact that many farmers have already given up. More inclusive development policies can help to revive a sector that offers healthy local and exportable food and dignified livelihoods for the many farmers hoping to continue, and others that might join them under the right conditions.

On top of all the other concerns with the industry and its British market, the price of bananas in Great Britain has plummeted over recent decades (Table 3). The drop is attributable to increased global banana production, more open trade flow across European borders and a higher volume of low-priced Latin American bananas available

Table 3 UK banana prices

1990	1.14 British pounds/kilo
2001	1.08 British pounds/kilo
2007	0.68 British pounds/kilo

Source: Media reports.

in Europe. All totaled, the price for bananas in Britain fell by 59 per cent between 1990 and 2007 (and even more in real terms); at the same time production costs continued to rise for Windward farmers (CBEA, 2008). The price drop has had a massive negative effect not only on income from conventional banana production, but also on that of the emerging Fair Trade industry in the Windward Islands, which cannot command a premium too much higher than the mainstream alternative.

Facing the demise of their most important industry, Windward governments began more serious efforts in the 1990s to diversify their agricultural sectors and other aspects of their economies. However, our analysis of Dominica's diversification efforts in the 1990s likened it to a shatter-shot approach. Government seemed to be promoting far too many non-traditional exports at once, rather than focusing efforts on the most promising ones (Wiley, 1998).

Overall, the search for alternative crops and other exportable products has proven to be a monumental challenge. This is particularly because of the high degree of dependence on bananas and the fact that no new commodity would come with an international transportation and marketing system in place to replace that associated with bananas. It is also because of the neoliberal hyper-competition for export markets with other global South producers, most of which have had much lower wage standards than the Windwards (Klak, 1998, 1999).

The current efforts towards diversification, in effect ceding much of the banana industry to international corporations, have the support of many elected officials, farmers and industry stakeholders in the Windwards.

However, these developments have hardly played out smoothly in recent years, and not without considerable and continued efforts to resuscitate the banana industry.

2 Current Windward banana battles

Our empirical research during the summer of 2008 took place nearly a year after Hurricane Dean ravaged the Eastern Caribbean, almost completely destroying the region's estimated 970 hectares of bananas. Growers made a dramatic comeback, however, carefully rebuilding their farms with government and outside financial assistance. Nine months later, Dominica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent were again producing bananas at pre-hurricane levels. The main export avenue for the bananas from all three countries is now the British Fair Trade market.

Despite this short-term recovery, the institutional context for bananas has been highly unfavourable to Windward farmers over the longer term. Recent changes in the organization of the banana industry have sparked new controversies and uncertainties among stakeholders at every level. As one St. Lucian farmer lamented, 'There is a lot of war.' We next review the conflicts and interplay between industry's main players, and explain the emergence of and controversy over Fair Trade as the industry's new organizational model.

There are at present four primary players in the islands' banana industry: (a) the farmers; (b) the successors to the banana growers associations (BGAs: the St. Lucia Banana Company (SLBC); the Dominica Banana Producers Limited (DBPL); and St. Vincent's Banana Action Committee); (c) the registered Fair Trade certifier, the Windward Islands Farmers Association (WINFA); and (d) the regional marketer and distributor, WIBDECO, which is jointly owned by the BGAs and their governments (Anderson *et al.*, 2003).

The BGAs never had a stellar performance record (Payne, 2006; Striffer and Moberg, 2003). Anderson and her co-authors (2003: 138) summarized the critique this way:

The BGAs have been plagued by enormous debts, unfocused management, lack of direction, excessive costs, inefficient and expensive boxing depots, and high-cost overhead structures.

Our interviews in both Dominica and St. Lucia found that farmers are hardly more satisfied with the BGAs' successor organizations. In Dominica, this is partly due to the fact that the largest shareholders are not the farmers but rather local businesspeople. We asked the director of DBPL about DBPL's ownership structure, and he tried to reassure us that shareholders are 'mostly farmers and private citizens' (Emanuel, interview). Numerically this is probably true, but it is important to note that a small number of businesspeople control the vast majority of DBPL shares. Therefore, such profits as were being earned were being amassed by people not directly engaged in the banana industry. DBPL's minimal interest in Fair Trade is likely attributable in part to the fact that the corporation's shareholders view Fair Trade as less profitable because of the costs of the social premium, which pays for community development projects. It is also notable that the Dominican government also holds DBPL shares and gets to designate two of its nine members of the Board of Directors.

In St. Vincent, the need for an institutional body to support and organize the banana growers led to the creation of St. Vincent Cooperative Banana Association in 1934. This was later reorganized to form St. Vincent Banana Growers' Association (SVBGA) in 1953 (Reid, 2000; Striffer and Moberg, 2003). The government replaced the heavily-indebted SVBGA with a Banana Action Committee in 2002.

In St. Lucia, the picture is more complex, because more than one banana production company emerged from the old St. Lucia Banana Growers' Association (SLBGA). The principal successor – the SLBC – has been viewed by farmers as having very corrupt leadership. The farmers literally revolted

against the management during the summer of 2008. Its strong suit, in contrast to the situation in Dominica, is that most of the shares in the corporation are held by the farmers themselves (Moses, interview).

During the past 20 years, WIBDECO has viewed the BGAs and their successors as becoming less and less useful. They have been seen as limited in their influence and their ability to innovate because of their narrow business plans. WIBDECO, for its part, has sought to target new export niche markets for bananas and compete in the cut-throat global market. The Fair Trade bananas were first exported from Dominica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent in 2000. WIBDECO has worked in stages towards fulfilling the contracting standards of Fair Trade, which ultimately required switching the contracts from the BGAs' successors to a Fair Trade-registered organization, in this case WINFA. This final step was initiated in the summer of 2008. On 16 June, WINFA signed the sales and purchasing agreement with WIBDECO, but the BGAs' successors did not acquiesce.

According to the President of WINFA, Marcella Harris, her agency sought to collaborate with the BGAs' successors to make the necessary transition period smooth for all banana industry players (Harris, interview). St. Lucia's Fair Trade Coordinator felt similarly that the goal was to improve banana exporting for all players, and 'not destroy the SLBC' (Lynch, interview). The BGAs' successor companies felt otherwise. Negotiations rapidly dissolved into a volatile political brawl. The BGAs' successors expressed outrage over the airwaves towards WINFA's perceived aggression, brought lawsuits against WIBDECO for its consolidation efforts, even refused to sell boxes and fertilizer to the newly contracted Fair Trade farmers. The SLBC secured a temporary court injunction attempting to prevent WIBDECO from terminating its banana supply contract. Harris believes that these tensions and political conflicts arose from simple misunderstanding:

Many stakeholders were unaware that the transfer of contracts from the BGAs' successors to WINFA was an eventual requirement associated with exporting through Fair Trade (Harris, interview).

However, the Coordinator for the National Fair Trade Organisation of Dominica, Amos Wiltshire, sees the conflict and its impacts as deeper. He argues that DBPL's goal was to continue as the signatory to the banana export contracts and was leveraging for power by withholding services to farmers. As a result, there was what Wiltshire calls a period of 'field starvation' from April through June of 2008 when farmers had no access to boxes, fertilizer or chemical treatments (Wiltshire, interview). A period of dysfunction such as this can have devastating impacts. If leaf spot, for example, is not regularly treated, entire fields of bananas can be lost, and the abandoned trees can further spread the disease for years (Allport, interview). The political fighting has also taken a toll on banana farmers' confidence in the companies and government officials managing their industry. These problems, when combined with the skyrocketing oil prices during the fall of 2008 and following Hurricane Dean's devastation, pose the most daunting challenges yet for the Windward banana industry.

The Windward Islands' adoption of the British Fair Trade banana market followed logically on the loss of the preferential access to the EU market, and for Dominica, was driven by the UK's largest supermarket Tesco. When Tesco became a Fair Trade retailer, it targeted bananas from 'the Nature Island' of Dominica, which adopted the Fair Trade standards so that they could sell under Tesco's 'Nature's Choice' label (Emanuel, interview; Moberg, 2005: 10). Since then, other British supermarkets including Sainsbury's have also begun to prominently feature Windward Fair Trade bananas.

Fair Trade has become, essentially, a scaled-down niche market strategy applied to bananas, hardly a substitute for what had

long been the principal export commodity of three of the four Windwards. Despite Fair Trade's narrow market limitations, there is no other guaranteed market for Windward bananas, or any other exports for that matter. The limited options available help to explain why even the successor organizations to the BGAs have recently been working towards getting Fair Trade certification. And while Fair Trade is now the primary export channel, other channels are at last being more aggressively pursued in this crisis moment. The silver lining associated with the crisis is that it has at last forced a more aggressive approach to export market diversification, according to DBPL's Director (Emanuel, interview).

It is far from guaranteed that the recent restructuring of the Windward banana industry will help revive it. Fair Trade promises stricter environmental standards, contributions to the community infrastructure through the social premium and a more stable and higher-priced niche market for its contracted farmers. These features have led observers to celebrate the new arrangement as a grand success (Lamb, 2008; Torgerson, 2007). However, Fair Trade has been unable to reverse the longer-term neoliberalization of the industry whereby Windward farmers have been asked to absorb a greater share of the costs while their earnings continue to fall. The exodus from bananas continues in the Fair Trade era, as thousands of farmers have abandoned the banana industry over the past 20 years (Table 2). Each country now sees emigration as an inadvertent development path, as increasing numbers of people leave and send back remittances to support family members. What follows next is a report on the banana industry based on interviews with farmers and agricultural stakeholders in Dominica and St. Lucia. The farmer interviews provided an unusual opportunity for the direct producers to articulate their stories and perspectives, and to explain how they are surviving in what, for many, has become a post-banana world.

IV Empirical research methodology

This research seeks to understand the challenges faced by Eastern Caribbean banana farmers, given recent changes to international trade agreements governing banana exports, and the evolution of neoliberal development policy. An appreciation of the impacts of these forces at a local level can come from detailed discussions with the banana farmers themselves. The researchers sought to establish a robust and ethical data collection methodology with which to find farmers distributed throughout the banana regions of Dominica and St. Lucia, to obtain their permission, and to conduct in-depth interviews. Interviews with public officials complement those at the grassroots, but are not governed by the human subjects protocol and restrictions described in the following.

1 Ethical research protocol and interviewee confidentiality

This project has followed a strict protocol for conducting ethical research that involves human subjects, as established by our university Institutional Review Board. This board follows national guidelines for ethical research articulated by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative or CITI (<https://www.citiprogram.org/aboutus.asp?language=english>). By complying with these guidelines, the researchers seek to ensure informed consent, avoid subjecting interviewees to any undue stress and protect their confidentiality.

Each interviewee received a written description of the research project, the confidentiality protections and contact information for the researchers and for the university review board in case of any interest in follow-up.

We are required to protect the farmer participants in this research by ensuring that our data cannot be traced back to individuals, while at the same time communicating the details of our findings. This presents a formidable challenge when conducting research in such intimate and dense social

networks as Caribbean farming communities under economic duress. Our investigation of local economic activity discovered banana farmers engaged in illicit activities including drug trafficking and violations of the Fair Trade agrochemical and child labour regulations. Such illegalities are important to an understanding of political and economic forces at play but, for the sake of ethical and effective research, we must make certain such information cannot be traced back to individuals or groups of farmers. Our interviewees showed us immense generosity and frankness, and we honour the trust placed in us by protecting their confidentiality as we report our findings.

2 Selection of Dominica and St. Lucia as case studies

The present study of the banana collapse follows on the authors' empirical work on development issues in Dominica and St. Lucia since the 1990s. Our long-term interest has been to track and assess the development policy transformations and sectoral trajectories of these two countries and their economies. As we have previously asked (Klak, 1998; Pantojas-García and Klak 2004), how do current development policies in these peripheral mini-states respond to external changes? And relatedly, what are the impacts and responses to these changes at the grassroots level of producers and their communities?

The economic sector priorities articulated by their governments have shifted dramatically over time. Only a few years ago, during an earlier phase of neoliberalism, the Eastern Caribbean governments' stated development priorities were on such export-oriented activities as non-traditional agricultural products, maquiladoras, data processing and offshore services. Each of these failed to deliver the predicted foreign-exchange earnings. Other countries of the global South have featured larger firms paying lower wages with lower environmental standards and better international transportation connections (Klak, 1999, 2008).

The Windward Islands are currently undergoing another major shift in economic priorities precipitated by the loss of the preferential banana export market in Europe. Thus, the research reported in this article aims to understand more fully the impacts of this export loss on the banana producers and their rural villages that have undergone steep decline. This detailed study of bananas in Dominica and St. Lucia complements and is informed by similar work in St. Vincent (Grossman, 1998; John, 2006; Torgerson, 2007). The present work on bananas also complements other recent research in Dominica on a range of rural development topics including land security, ecotourism, sustainable development, NGO and village organizing, and environmental quality (Klak, 2007, Klak and Flynn 2008, Mullaney 2009).

While Dominica and St. Lucia bear many similarities, particularly owing to their shared colonial and neocolonial histories described earlier, they also offer some social and economic differences (Table 4). The differences can help us to better understand the banana crisis in terms of its impacts and the responses to it. In sum, St. Lucia is relatively developed economically and more committed to conventional tourism (Anderson *et al.*, 2003; Reynolds, 2006). These economic features are likely to provide St. Lucian farmers with a few more non-agricultural alternatives to bananas than in Dominica, which is greener, more agriculturally reliant and closer to

the land (Honychurch, 1995; Klak 2008). Dominica's agricultural focus, with bananas as the centre of it, led Payne (2008: 317) to label it the 'quintessential banana island'. For either country, however, there are many reasons (discussed further in the following) to keep agriculture alive, despite recent trends.

3 Methods used to sample banana farmers for interview

Attempting to interview a representative sample of the thousands of Eastern Caribbean men and women that have grown bananas for export during recent decades is a daunting task. As the industry has contracted, thousands of banana farmers have sought work in urban areas, or left their home island entirely. Several interviewees indicated that many of the banana farmers they knew from the 1980s and 1990s have since moved away.

Between May and July 2008, we conducted 155 interviews – 114 in Dominica and 41 in St. Lucia – with both current and former banana farmers. We sought out farmers primarily in the rural regions where banana farming has historically been concentrated, and therefore which have been most negatively affected by the recent industrial contraction. Of these interviewees, 38 were Fair Trade farmers, of which 33 were in Dominica and 5 in St. Lucia. We spoke with as many farmers on the two islands as our research time would allow. Our other longer term research activities in Dominica made it possible for us to locate

Table 4 Social and economic comparison of Dominica and St. Lucia

	<i>Dominica</i>	<i>St. Lucia</i>
Life expectancy	75	73
Per capita income*	8,300	9,190
People per sq. Km.	96	319
Per cent arable	Less	More
Average farm size	Smaller	Larger
Banana exports	Less	More
Economic diversity	Less	More
Tourism sector	Smaller	Larger

Source: PRB (2009).

Note: *GNI PPP per capita (US\$); numbers are for 2008.

and interview more farmers there, but we found it invaluable to do at least a smaller set of interviews in St. Lucia for comparison and contrast. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes when farmers were particularly terse or busy, to 2 hours or more when farmers provided guided tours of their holdings.

We asked farmers open-ended questions regarding the ways in which they have responded to the sharp economic decline, and the ways in which agricultural policies affect them. Farmers were selected for interview as opportunities presented themselves. We stressed to all our contacts in banana farming regions that we were interested in speaking with anyone with banana farming experience, whether or not s/he currently exports bananas. We also stressed that we wanted to obtain a diversity of perspectives: we wanted to talk to relatively small and large farmers, those close to roads and those farming land without motorable access, male and female, old and young, Fair Trade or not. Many farmers were interviewed right on their farms and several of those were located off motorable roads. Other farmers were interviewed where they congregate. For example, farmers interviewed at Consolidated Foods Ltd, St. Lucia's major food retailer that buys and prominently displays foods from more than 500 domestic farmers, came from a variety of farming regions.

St. Lucian and Dominican farmers speak a French-based Creole even though the official language is English. Virtually all interviewees were conversant in English, so it was unnecessary to translate more than a few words from Creole. For those few

interviews conducted primarily in Creole, a bi-lingual translator was available to assist the interviewers.

The interviews of farmers were complemented with a host of policy-maker and stakeholder interviews in both Dominica and St. Lucia. These stakeholders included banana industry officials, government agricultural administrators, Fair Trade organizers and, in Dominica, Carib Council members (the Carib Territory has partial autonomy from the central government, Mullaney, 2009; see Appendix for a list of interviewed agricultural stakeholders). We also interviewed school principals in agricultural regions, hucksters (Dominica's small-scale food exporters) and other village leaders, all of which have been close to the banana industry. These interviews were even more open-ended than those done with farmers, in order to accommodate the particular expertise and vantage point of each stakeholder regarding the banana crisis and the institutional and farmer responses.

V The banana farming experience:

Key interview results

Eastern Caribbean farms tend to be small, averaging just a few acres each (Table 5). Most of the farms in the sample that are larger than 10 acres do not exceed 15 acres. Even those farms usually encompass mountainous terrain, so that productive fields are small. While the gentler topography of St. Lucia allows for slightly larger landholdings than Dominica, the most common farm size in both countries is between two and five acres (Table 5). Despite the limited acreage, for several decades until

Table 5 Interviewee farm size*

Acres	St. Lucia (n = 41)		Dominica (n = 114)	
	Former (n = 25)	Current (n = 16)	Former (n = 63)	Current (n = 51)
<2	2	0	6	6
2–5	12	8	41	28
5.5–10	2	2	15	11
>10	9	5	1	5

*Two farmers did not state their acreage, so the total is less than 157.

the WTO ruling and the banana crisis, these small farmers had dignified livelihoods by producing from this land. A St. Lucian farmer captured a sentiment farmers often expressed, and concerned with their nurturing bond with bananas and the land: 'I love to work on my field. Especially the kind of treatment I give my bananas, I love it. I can't stay away two days.'

One other trend in the farm size data is notable. The similarities in farm size between former and current farmers in both countries (Table 5) suggests that it is not simply that neoliberal policies, with their preference

towards larger scale producers, are driving out the smallest farmers. Virtually all Eastern Caribbean farmers are relatively small by international standards, and recent policies have had a widespread negative effect. All of these smallholder banana farmers are at a structural disadvantage in an export market, for global neoliberal economic policy has systematically supported increasingly larger industrial, corporate agriculture.

The age distribution of our interviewees (Figure 1) suggests some of the socio-economic factors at play in the industry. Very few young

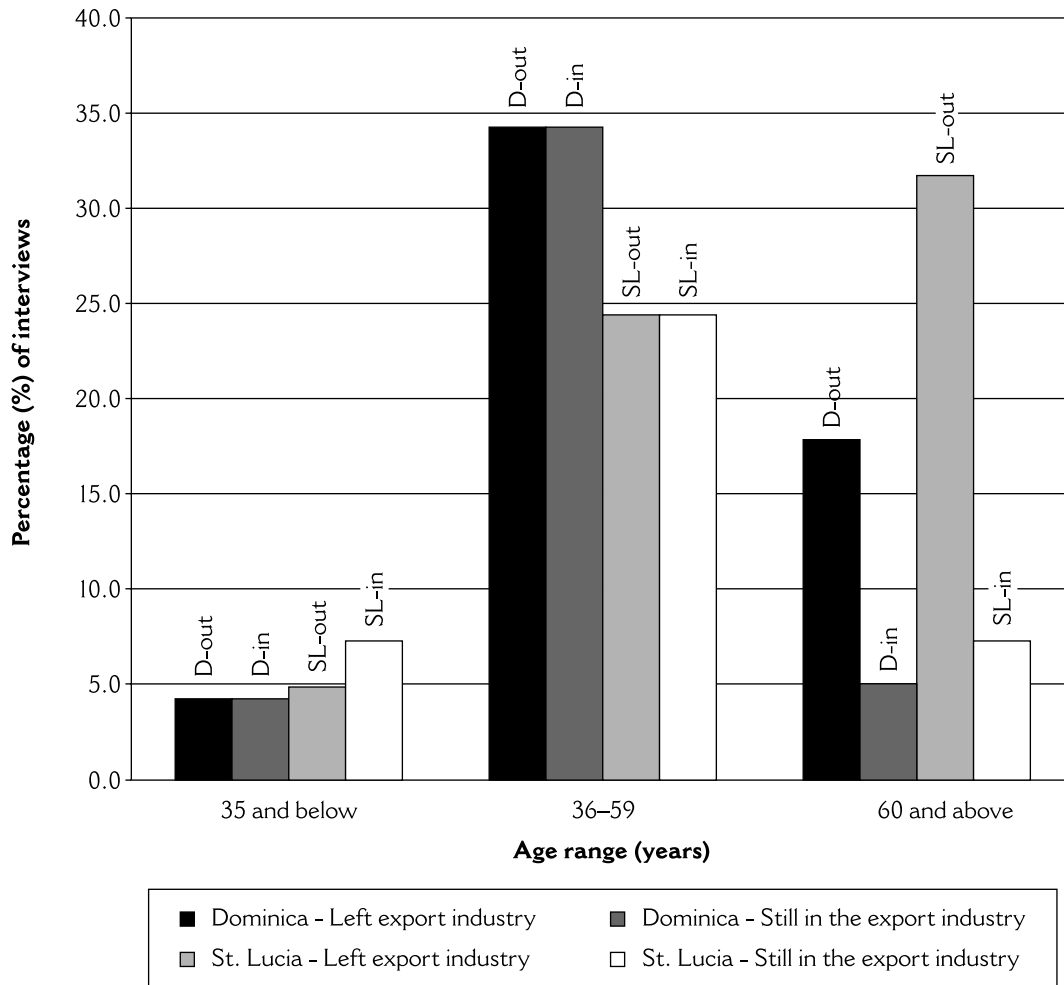


Figure 1 Age distribution of interviewed banana farmers

men and women are venturing into bananas. The dearth of banana farmers under 35 years old testifies to the industry's dire situation. While veteran banana farmers we interviewed described at length how rewarding a career it can be, the current low prices and market uncertainties have effectively dissuaded the younger generation. On both islands, most current and former banana farmers are in the middle age range. Dominica has a higher percentage of middle-aged farmers, possibly due to a somewhat wider range of job opportunities available in St. Lucia to which farmers can move. Dominica has been more banana-dependent during recent decades.

Among farmers 60 years or older, we found that the vast majority in both countries had left the banana industry (Figure 1). In a country with strong social welfare programmes for the elderly, this pattern might indicate a retirement trend. In our interviews, however, the concept of retirement was rarely mentioned. Dominica and St. Lucia have no pension programme for independent farmers, who tend to work until they are no longer physically capable. And while there is no doubt that banana farming takes an increasing toll on the elderly, the absence of national pension plans or social security means the need for cash income continues as one ages in the Eastern Caribbean. The patterns in our data which shows farmers leaving the industry is more likely indicative of the industry crisis than of aging farmers moving to less strenuous occupations. The creation of a social safety net would empower farmers to make retirement decisions with dignity, and also reward them for decades of contribution to the national food base and the economy. Instead, the increasing costs and challenges of the banana industry, combined with falling incomes for the past 20 years, has been driving farmers out (Figure 2).

Regarding why banana farmers have decided to leave the industry, our data reveal a variety of challenges, some of which are consistent, and others differ significantly, between the two islands. In both countries,

the marked reduction in income from banana exports in recent years appears to be the dominant factor driving farmers from the industry (Figure 1, column a). Out of the 88 ex-banana exporting farmers interviewed in both countries, fully half of them pointed to declining income when asked why they left the industry. Declining incomes was slightly more often mentioned in St. Lucia than Dominica. This may be because St. Lucian farmers are more sensitive to income reductions, because they have a few more income-generating options than their Dominican counterparts. A Dominican farmer who has exported bananas since 1987 captured several of these trends: 'I get less money every year, [but] bananas is all I know. I won't hold my breath, but I'm continuing for now. I don't have a choice, but I'd never tell my children to take up bananas.'

In St. Lucia, with its somewhat greater range of employment opportunities, the lack of available workers for banana farmers to hire is particularly severe, though it is a frequently mentioned factor in both countries (column b). Labour shortages have long plagued banana farmers, but the problem has likely worsened in recent years with youth disinterested in farming and with massive outmigration, particularly from the countryside. Dominican farmers who left the banana industry were more likely than their St. Lucian counterparts to have cited diminishing returns for increasing labour requirements as a reason for exiting (column c).

The islands' physical contexts differ in ways important to banana farming (Table 4). As a result, it is far more common for Dominican farmers to complain that they were not able to get their bananas to port reliably due to inadequate (or non-existent) roads or lack of transportation (column d). A considerable number of former farmers in both countries pointed to the increased cost of inputs as a reason for their exit from the industry (Figure 2, column e). In the array of challenges discouraging farmers from growing bananas, a significant number of our interviewees also mentioned

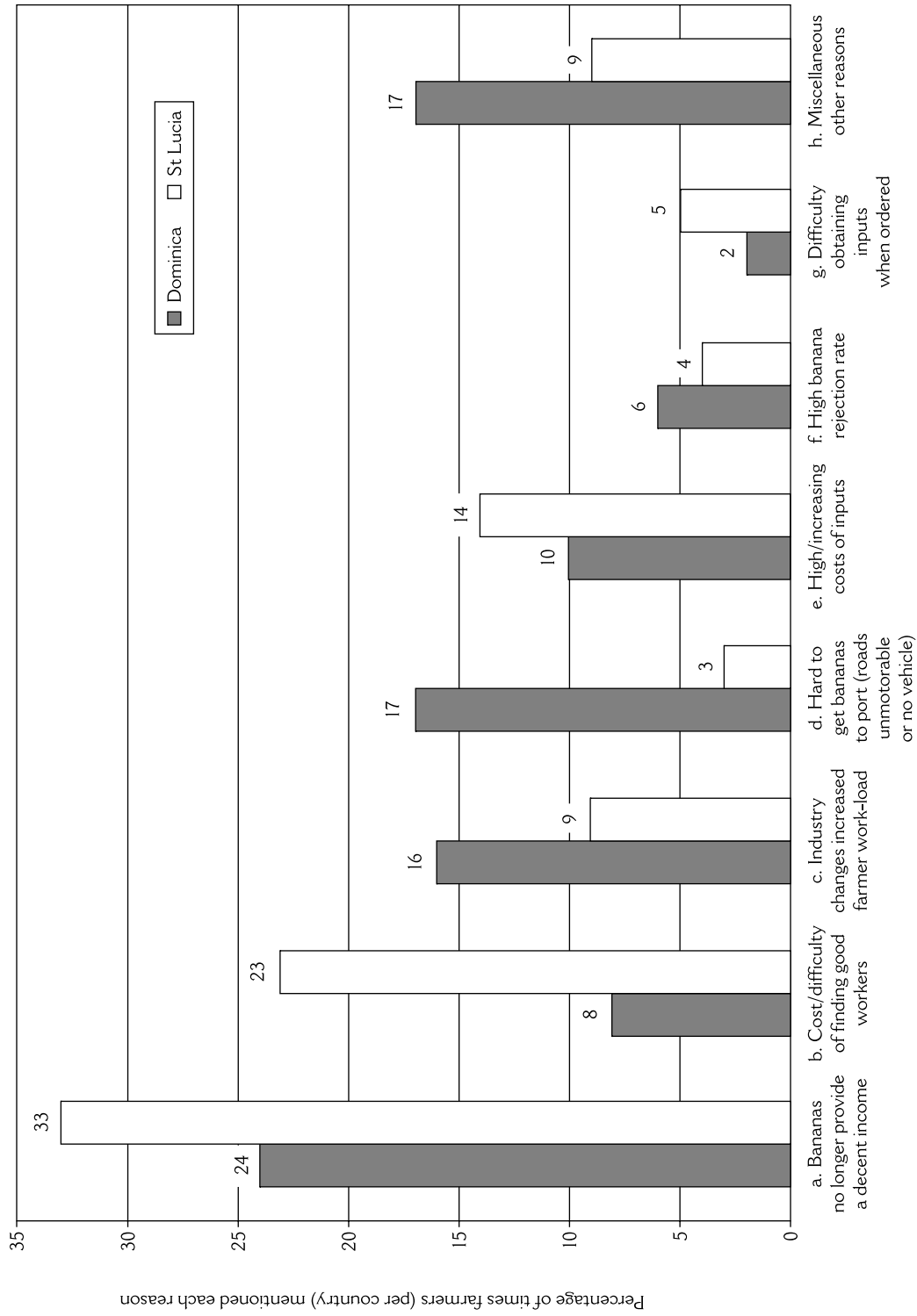


Figure 2 Reasons for leaving banana export industry*^{so}

*Note: Each farmer was able to mention more than one reason.

the high rejection rates of harvested bananas (reflecting stricter European import standards; column f), a lack of access to agricultural inputs (due to import restrictions as well as the political conflict between the banana industry players; column g) and the strikingly high rate of work-related injuries among banana farmers, included among miscellaneous reasons (column h).

Figure 3 shows when interviewees left bananas, and complements Table 1 that summarizes the key dates in the recent history of the banana trade environment. Together these illustrations can help to address the question of the extent to which farmers have left bananas in direct response to specific changes in the international trade environment.

Figure 3 shows that before 1979, just one farmer left the industry of the 72 interviewees who were exporting bananas then. The 1970s were a time of stability, security and satisfaction for banana farmers. From 1979 to 1983, some farmers began leaving. Hurricane David was devastating but was tempered by efforts to assist farmers in re-planting bananas and other crops. The hurricane also prompted the beginning of efforts under Dominica's Prime Minister Eugenia Charles to diversify the crops grown by banana farmers, although there has been only minimal success to date (James, interview).

Since around 1984, farmers in Dominica and St. Lucia have been leaving the industry at a relatively consistent rate (Figure 3). The temporal pattern for the two islands is similar. The relatively constant temporal pattern associated with farmers quitting bananas suggests that it is not caused directly by the timing of specific major external events such as the WTO ruling. Nor are farmers meeting and collectively deciding to leave *en masse*, despite the intense communications in the rural parts of these small countries.

Rather, our results show a steadily climbing trend in the percentage of farmers exiting banana industry as individuals decide to leave.

Farmers' commitment to bananas is strong, but it is not indefatigable. They don't exit when they reach a retirement age, but bananas are hard work for decreasing rewards, and they extract a heavy toll over years on farmers' health. Interviewees cited a combination and an accumulation of longer term negative factors, such as declining prices, increasing workload and deteriorating health, as reasons for leaving (Figure 2). Many farmers told us they had wanted to stay in and were resilient, but eventually had to abandon the industry. The negatives have accumulated to eventually overcome the positives in their personal calculations.

Another consistent theme emerging from our interviews is multi-tasking. Even back when bananas were more lucrative, Windward farmers have been creative and skilled multi-taskers. Few of our interviewees are now or ever have been devoted solely to bananas, or even just to agriculture. Farmers seldom specialize in just one trade, and instead creatively piece together income from various sources. In Dominica, their sources of income earned simultaneously with bananas include but are not limited to selling crops to hucksters, construction, painting, mechanics, repairs, taxi and bus services, and odd jobs. In St. Lucia, farmers also work in other industries, such as security, especially in tourism, construction, repairs and odd jobs. It was not uncommon for a farmer to tell us about the three or more ways in which s/he earned income. This multi-tasking is an adaptation that extends back to the colonial period, when making ends meet required self-sufficiency, a great range of competencies, and flexibility to adapt to sudden external changes (Richardson, 1992). Adaptability has historically helped Windward farmers survive in a volatile and often hostile international environment. Their diverse skill sets will help them cope with their limited options available to them in the post-banana context that is emerging.

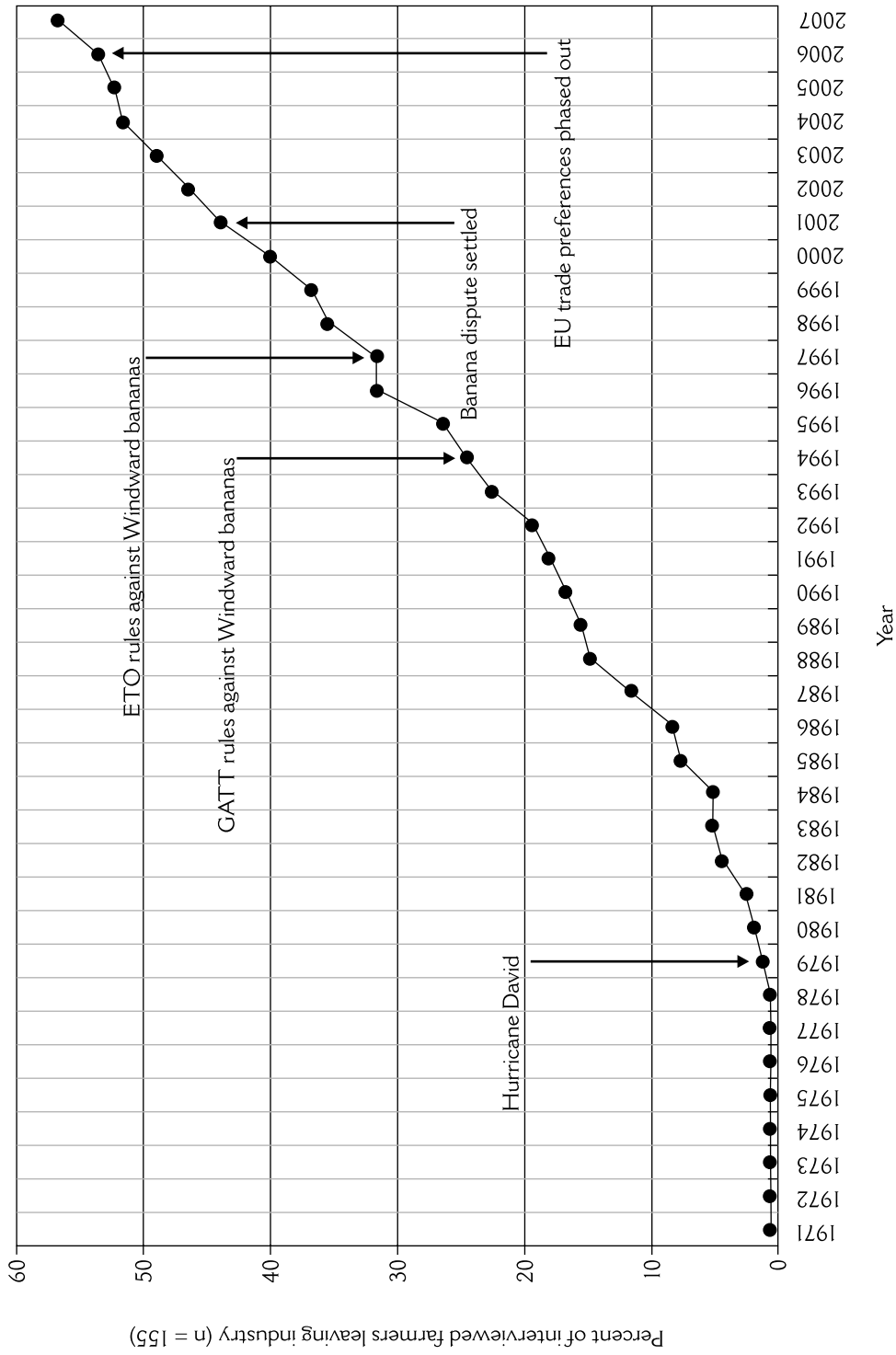


Figure 3 Age distribution of interviewed banana farmers

VI Farmers' views of development policy

Next we assess the extent to which inclusive neoliberal development policy is actually inclusive in terms of the perspectives and needs articulated by small Eastern Caribbean farmers. Our data come mainly from two questions asked to farmers: (a) To what extent does government policy support you as a farmer? (b) How could government policy better support you as a farmer?

1 Views on current policies

Farmers in Dominica and St. Lucia argued passionately that the current political economy does not offer them an opportunity to make a living. For example, one Dominican with over 20 years in the business stated that his long-term experience demonstrates the failings of the system. Whereas he used to be able to support a family of six by exporting his bananas, farming has become an increasing struggle in recent years: 'Now I sell more bananas, but I make less money than I used to.' A former banana farmer in St. Lucia similarly described his experience this way: 'Bananas became less profitable – it no longer paid well..... Costs went up, prices went down.'

While Eastern Caribbean farmers regularly lamented corruption among individual company and government officials, many also look beyond individual actors in the banana industry to identify broader forces at play in the political economy. Quite a few farmers, while making no explicit connection to theories of development, articulate perspectives that resonate with dependency theory. They evoke key concepts including structural inequality and capital flight, and describe the active underdevelopment they experience through engagement with the global market. For example, one Dominican who stopped exporting bananas in 1988 recounts why he had to leave the banana industry: 'I was just putting money in someone else's pocket who I don't even know. If my family got the money from my sweat I would still do it, but I won't work as someone

else's slave. Slavery has been abolished, but they have fancy techniques to keep us enslaved.' He later explained that, by 'they', he meant those who profit from Caribbean banana exports, including the export companies, retailers and banana industry stockholders.

Indeed, many farmers expressed similar dependency theory-compatible frustration at bearing such great risks while receiving so few benefits. A Dominican farmer who currently contracts with Fair Trade points to the economic and technological treadmills currently trapping farmers in a vicious cycle of diminishing returns: 'When we have to keep paying more and more for the things we buy, but get paid less and less for what we sell, something is wrong.' A St. Lucian farmer, also still in bananas, articulates a clear understanding of structural aspects of the industry and relates them to the limited respect for farmers: 'The disrespect of farmers by the society, by the world, by the market, nobody respects farmers.....The people who purchase the bananas don't respect the person who provided it for them.....Every loss goes to the farmer. Nobody else experiences a loss..... My dream is to establish an organization with lawyers, doctors, everybody to look into these things [the problems with the industry today].'

As Eastern Caribbean farmers identify the multiple problems they see with the structure of the banana industry, they consistently suggest that government has a central role to play. This contrasts pointedly with the market-focused and private-sector approach of the IFIs. One interviewee currently farming bananas in a marginalized hamlet of the Carib Territory argues that state involvement has the potential to channel market opportunities for the benefit of small farmers. She laments that the current approach to development leaves them without adequate income, and places responsibility squarely on the state's shoulders: 'If the government supported farmers more, helped them get the supplies they need and their share of the profits, then people would still

be in bananas because there is money there.’ According to this perspective, government support could give Dominican banana farmers a competitive edge.

Neoliberal theory often presents the state as an inhibitor of development, and encourages private actors to replace government while eliminating regulation of economic activity (for example, Dominica, 2006). However, the experiences of Windward farmers illuminate the damage done to vulnerable social systems when government withdraws. The farmers with whom we spoke argued passionately that the state must play a much more significant role in facilitating local development. Some farmers told us the state used to do more. As a woman from northern Dominica recounted, her declining livelihood during 37 years exporting bananas has correlated with decreasing government support for farmers: ‘I would like to see the government put in place a way to get enough inputs to the farmers, sufficient

boxes to sell all of our fruit, and better prices.’ St. Lucian farmers similarly would like government to play a role in helping farmers with inputs. As one farmer laments: ‘Inputs too expensive. There should be a price subsidy to help us. I paid EC\$80 a bag for fertilizer last year. This year, I pay EC\$160 a bag. Boxes are now EC\$5.20 each. We used to get these free from the company.’

Our overall findings with regard to government support that farmers have received (Figure 4) reflect the foregoing sentiments: most banana farmers feel essentially abandoned by government. Those few that don’t feel that way are captured in this St. Lucian farmer’s view: ‘Government here does a lot. It provides incentives to farmers to keep young people farming.’ Notably, only 3 per cent of Dominican farmers, and 7 per cent of those in St. Lucia, reported receiving any government support during normal operations (Figure 4) – hardly an evidence of an inclusive neoliberalism. As one

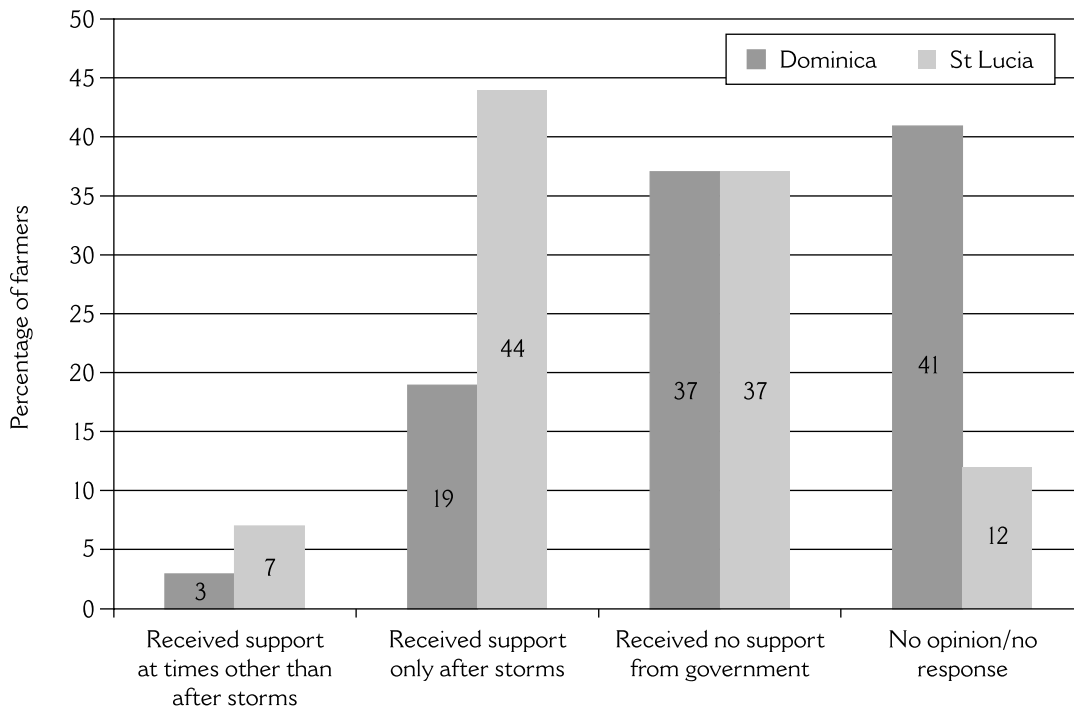


Figure 4 On Government’s Support for Banana Farmers

St. Lucian, a 40-year veteran of the industry, explained, farmers only want 'government to give us what we deserve'. Farmers relatedly bemoaned the cut-backs in recent years in the number of experienced agricultural extension agents.

Many farmers made impassioned and critical comments towards government agricultural policies. A woman who grew bananas in Dominica for 7 years before becoming a nurse describes the situation as follows: 'I think [the government] should be better organized, they talk all this but never get anything done and never ask us what we want them to do.' Another Dominican woman with 28 years experience in growing bananas articulated sentiments about government weakness that many farmers expressed:

I don't think the government has much control over what the industry does, the corporations make all of those decisions. I wish the government would stand up and fight for us, but I don't see it.

In addition to demanding effective representation, she contends that her economic interests are in direct conflict with the corporations that currently dictate the international banana industry. Statements such as 'the government isn't paying attention' and 'the government never helped me' were also common in our interviews. Another Dominican woman, who stopped exporting bananas over 10 years ago after crushing disappointment with the industry, says she had given up all hope for government support, while also making parallels to slavery: 'I look to God for help now, I never again vote for a man to whip me on my back, I finish with them.' Although inclusive neoliberalism emphasizes the importance of listening and responding to those at the grassroots, it does not appear to translate into effective practice in the Eastern Caribbean.

The principal exception to the farmers' view that the state does not help them is support they receive in the aftermath of hurricanes. Most notably in St. Lucia, farmers reported

their governments have disseminated aid. This assistance for storm damage has mainly come in recent years from external donors such as the EU and British supermarkets. It is also worth noting that the interview responses may not reflect other ways in which the government is supportive of agriculture that may not be directly perceived as such by farmers. Government efforts on road maintenance, port facilities and at generating external markets may not be fully appreciated as agricultural support at the grassroots level. Nonetheless, these farmers conveyed the clear impression that they are not a government priority. Despite the influence of neoliberalism, however, most farmers in St. Lucia and Dominica still hold their government accountable in the struggle to confront political and economic challenges.

Although a greater share of St. Lucian farmers indicated they had received government support beyond aid for storm reconstruction (Figure 4), St. Lucians expressed negative sentiments about government policy as often and as strongly as did their Dominican counterparts. Even farmers who have received direct benefits in the aftermath of hurricanes emphasize that government does not listen to farmers' operational concerns, and that government does not do all it could to help the agricultural sector. After exporting bananas for over 26 years, one St. Lucian man recently left what he saw as a failed industry. Though he had regularly received government support after storms, he described feeling disrespected: 'As a government, you should see the interests of your people as the top priority... I would never personally go begging to them.' Windward farmers suggested that the benefits distributed seemed token or stop-gap rather than part of broader government agricultural support programme.

Other interviewees extended their arguments about government accountability and responsibility to encompass social services. For example, one Dominican farmer described her loss of livelihood after a devastating

work-related injury, for which she received inadequate hospital care and no pension or government assistance: 'We work so hard and support our country but when we cannot work anymore... [The government has] abandoned me... those of us who have worked so hard have no security. They don't help those who need help. To get help you must show you have already.' Stories like this one suggest a social contract between citizen and state, but one that is now breached.

As noted earlier, Fair Trade bananas is an alternative export option being pursued by most Windward farmers still in the industry, and many outside observers have praised the new arrangement (Lamb, 2008; Torgerson, 2007). However, Windward farmers themselves are less sanguine and have met Fair Trade with some hesitancy. This is in part due to the higher initial costs farmers incur to become certified and the continual inspections required of farmers under the threat of decertification. Further, Britain's Fair Trade market has not been able to absorb even half the quantity of bananas farmers have available for sale (Wiltshire, interview). Additionally, Fair Trade has not reversed the longer term increase in input costs for farmers. As one St. Lucian farmer explained, 'I haven't seen too much good from Fair Trade. We're still suffering the same things as [before].'

With incomes so low, even the social premium has generated some dissent over the fact that it helps the community as a whole, but is earned by only a few members of it. While one Dominican Fair Trade farmer found 'great benefits' in the social premium, he doesn't like 'spending social premium money for things the government should be paying for'. A St. Lucian farmer who had recently quit exporting through Fair Trade explained his concerns this way: 'My concept about bananas, I plant and harvest bananas, and the earnings should come to me. You can't have Fair Trade telling me what the social premium is to be used for – things like bus stops.' Another Fair Trade farmer summarized a more general concern

often heard regarding the future of Windward bananas, Fair Trade or not: 'signs are not encouraging'.

We found few differences in outlook between farmers exporting through Fair Trade and those who are not. The views and perspectives of Fair Trade farmers are highly volatile. They change in response to the constant flux of conditions and rumours within the banana industry. While farmers display a strong sense of loyalty and passion for the land and for bananas, we have not found the same level of loyalty and passion for Fair Trade participation. One farmer's comments on Fair Trade echoed both an annoyance and a compliment we heard several times over: 'Fair Trade has so many rules, but I'll keep trying with bananas. They're trying their best. Without them we would have left bananas long ago.' Fair Trade farming in the Windwards is still in its infancy. So far, Fair Trade has not been able to bring back dignified livelihoods to Windward farmers. In other words, it has been unable to overcome, and achieve substantial autonomy from, the international trade environment that produced the Windward Island banana crisis (Moberg, 2005). Unless this trend is reversed, farming will continue to decline.

2 Policy recommendations

When we asked farmers what they would like government to do in support of agriculture, most were thoughtful and outspoken. It was clear that they had been contemplating the issue. Most interviewees were quick to provide several recommendations and had clear ideas as to how agriculture can make a more positive contribution to national development. While farmers on both Dominica and St. Lucia described similar negative experiences regarding government support, or lack thereof (Figure 4), there are also parallel trends in their policy recommendations (Figure 5). Farmers most commonly and consistently expressed a desire for the government to work to make agricultural inputs more available and

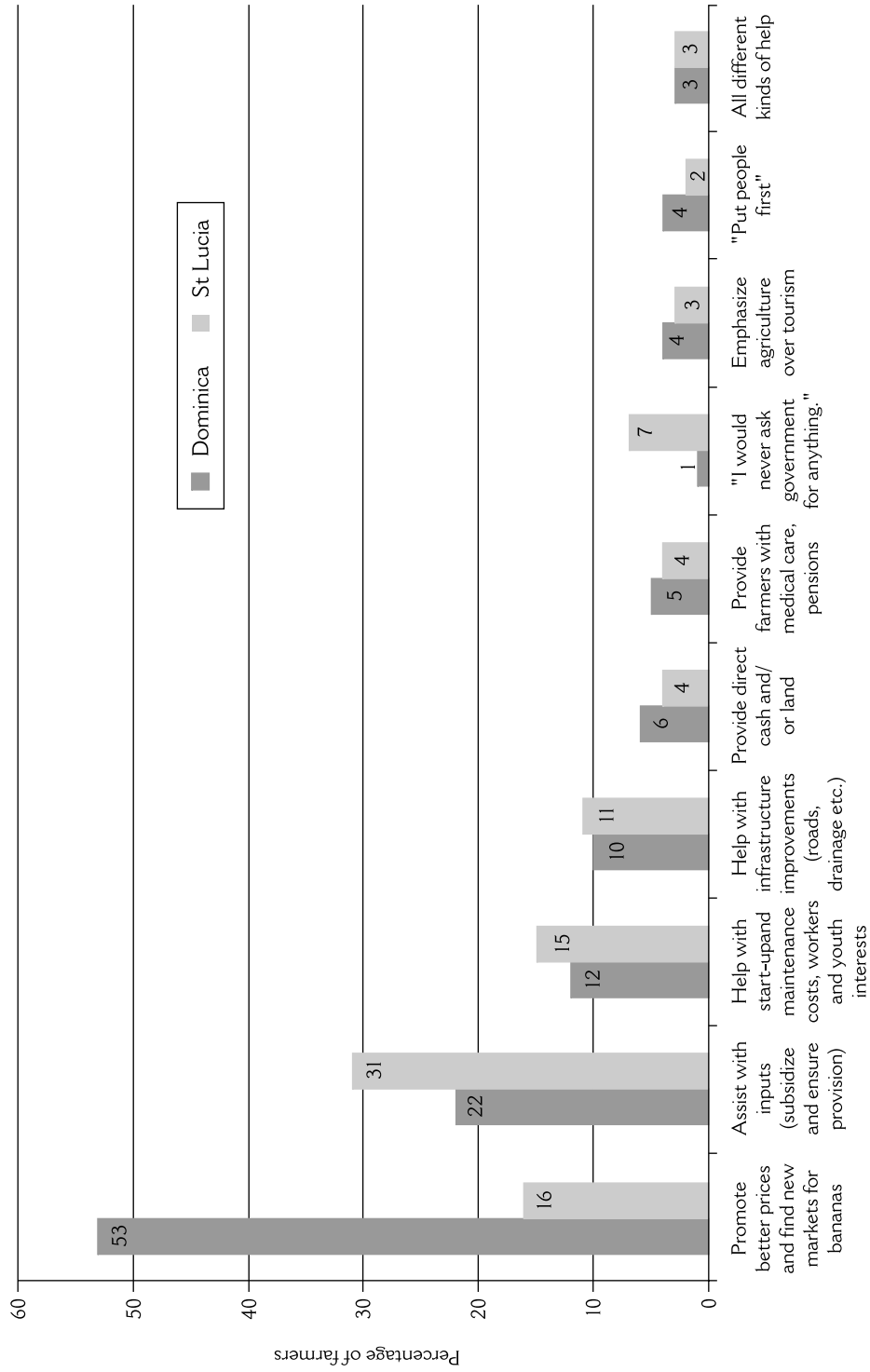


Figure 5 Policy priorities farmers recommend to government*

*Note: Each farmer could mention more than one priority.

affordable, prices more stable and reasonable, and export markets more secure, diverse and ample.

Farmers articulated policy priorities that could go a long way towards reversing the biases against agriculture. One St. Lucian farmer depicted the situation this way:

That government we have there, they was supposed to be for farmers but the Prime Minister [Compton] died. This government now just pushing tourism like the last government.....They just floating around agriculture like they don't know what they doin'. They don't have a real program..... 90 per cent of the hotels in the country are all-inclusive and they pay overseas and where the money going? That money ain't reaching St. Lucia.....They should marry tourism and agriculture together and help to feed the nation.

Another St. Lucian farmer succinctly identified the following policy priorities: 'Do better for the farmers. More money for the crops, better conditions, better arrangements to sell crops, better markets, better arrangements with hotels.'

We can draw together the policies and programmes that the small farmers and other rural stakeholders we interviewed suggested are needed to support agriculture. We again found considerable consistency in their articulated recommendations. The consistent responses suggested a notable degree of unity in rural areas, even across political party preferences. These recommendations for Eastern Caribbean agricultural policy, arranged from local to global scale, they are as follows:

1. Support youth to choose farming
2. Provide more farming production support
3. Reduce farmers' burdens and risks
4. Enhance agriculture–tourism linkages
5. Prioritize agricultural development
6. Maintain remaining EU–ACP trade preferences
7. Diversify Eastern Caribbean export markets

None of these suggestions is particularly new or surprising. Policy-makers can often be heard advocating many of them. But the fact that most rural people firmly believe that the government does not support agriculture in these ways only underscores the point that rural voices and concerns are neglected. The Acting Director of the Dominica Ministry of Agriculture said of his Ministry: 'We haven't had a strong involvement in the banana industry' (Allport, interview). This would need to change if national development policy were to be inclusive for small farmers. The recommendations contrast with the prevailing top-down and externally-driven development policies, and look closer to a succinct statement of an authentically inclusive development policy for the rural Eastern Caribbean.

VII Conclusion

This article has examined how Eastern Caribbean small farmers see themselves and the agricultural and policy system surrounding them during the banana crisis. Eastern Caribbean farmers and the agricultural landscape around them have been decimated by neoliberal development and trade policies. They feel that their governments have abandoned them.

Given the steady increase in costs and steady decline in income and market security, many Windward farmers not surprisingly have given up. It's too easy from a global North perspective that places so much emphasis on technology, efficiency and scale to write them off as backward and marginal, and to see their demise as inevitable or even natural (Weis, 2003). Neoliberal hegemony has encouraged such thinking (Harvey, 2005; Peet, 2007). Eastern Caribbean farmers are hard working and competent, and they are capable of achieving greater export levels if provided development policy support. Farmers' expressions of bonds to the land and to bananas punctuated our interviews. As one St. Lucian farmer put it: 'I have my

own land. You wouldn't leave the land bare.... I have a passion for bananas that I learned from my parents.' Another explained that banana farming 'keeps you healthy. Working hard, you stay young.'

These farmers lead us to believe in the viability of small-scale agriculture if supported by policies. We believe that, rather than to allow farming to fully collapse, it makes more sense that agricultural landscape be revived through authentically inclusive policies. Small farmers and the associated village communities have for decades formed the economic and social bedrock of the region. There is bitter irony in the logic of the global food market: as food shortages increase, tons of produce rot on the banana and other fruit trees and in the fields of the Eastern Caribbean because export opportunities are so limited. As a WIBDECO spokesperson aptly warned: 'It is a disastrous policy for any country that has the capacity to produce food to ignore their agricultural sector' (Lawrence, interview). Renewed investment in Windward farmers and their markets could yield wide-ranging benefits, but it is no small task to reconstruct an agricultural sector after it has seen such contraction, and that runs up against the rules of global neoliberalism.

Our interviews with farmers offered insight into recent development policy as it is experienced on the ground by those said to be targeted by the World Bank's poverty reduction strategies. They are among the people to whom development policy ought to be accountable, and their testimony poses a formidable challenge to the inclusive neoliberal regime. Farmers declared repeatedly that current development priorities are in fact undermining their livelihoods, and that they were not receiving the support and assistance that they deserve. Moreover, many farmers clearly emphasized that they hold their government at least partially responsible for the deteriorating conditions with regard to their social and economic welfare. This view from the grassroots is a direct contradiction of

the central neoliberal prescription to reduce the role of the state in order to facilitate private enterprise.

Our discussions with farmers suggest that the World Bank and IMF's 'inclusive' version of neoliberal development policy is still far too top-down and one-size-fits-all to adequately address local needs. For the rural small farmers that the IFIs have identified as an impoverished target group (Dominica, 2006), development policy is disconnected. These Eastern Caribbean findings are not isolated; note the parallels to one of the model countries for inclusive neoliberalism, Uganda: 'The irony is that in the local Ugandan context, where there are many simple things the local state can do to support agricultural production, the focus in poverty reduction is almost entirely elsewhere' (Craig and Porter, 2003: 66). These same authors aptly characterize the problem of universal neoliberal policies applied in local contexts as 'the tunnel vision inherent in inclusive liberal frameworks applied at a distance' (Craig and Porter, 2003: 66).

Given the tensions between the market logic of neoliberalism (even its inclusive version) and the social logic of inclusion, effective measures of accountability would be needed in order for the IFI's new strategies to amount to anything more than rhetoric. We hope that this research has served to highlight some of the gaps between inclusive neoliberal development policy and the views and needs of small farmers, and has helped to suggest a better way forward.

Appendix: Agricultural Stakeholder Interviews

All interviews were conducted by the authors in Dominica and St. Lucia. The name of each interviewee is followed by a professional description and the interview date.

Allport, Richard. Acting Director, Dominica Ministry of Agriculture & the Environment. Interviewed in the Office of the Ministry, 12 June 2009.

Aurelian, Francis. Purchasing agent, Consolidated Foods Ltd. (CFL).

Interviewed in Roseau Valley, St. Lucia. 22 June 2008.

Baptiste, The Honorable Moses Jn. Member of Parliament for the Vieux Fort North district and agriculture spokesperson for the Saint Lucia Labour Party. Interviewed in Vieux Fort, Saint Lucia. 1 July 2008.

Browne, The Honorable Abraham. Member of Parliament for the Grand Fond district of Dominica. Several interviews in 2008 and 2009.

Delice, Donna. Quality Control and Produce Selector, Consolidated Foods Ltd. (CFL). Interviewed at the CFL depot, Saint Lucia. 27 June 2008.

Demille, Dunston. Perishables Managers, Consolidated Foods Ltd. (CFL). Interviewed at the CFL depot, Saint Lucia. 27 June 2008.

Emanuel, Errol. Director, Dominica Banana Producers, Ltd. (DBPL). Interviewed in Roseau, Dominica. 5 June 2008.

Harris, Marcella. President of WINFA (the Windward Islands Farmers Association), the Eastern Caribbean's registered Fair Trade certifier. Interviewed in Roseau, Dominica. 9 June 2009.

James, Manley. Head of Extension, Dominica Ministry of Agriculture & the Environment. Interviewed at Agricultural Ministry Office in Roseau, Dominica. 3 June 2009.

Lawrence, Fremont. WIBDECO Communications Officer. Interviewed in Castries, Saint Lucia. 25 June 2008.

Lynch, Cornelius. Coordinator, Saint Lucia National Fair Trade Organization. Interviewed in the Mabouya Valley, Saint Lucia. 1 July 2008.

Wiltshire Amos. Coordinator for the National Fair Trade Organisation of Dominica. Several interviews in 2008 and 2009.

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