



# Agriculture in the Carib Territory

*by Regina Joseph*

The Carib Territory, like most of the communities in Dominica, is still dependent on agriculture for the livelihood of its residents. However, since the decline in the banana industry there has been a major shift from agriculture to other areas to provide the necessary income that the industry no longer provides.

The Kalinago people brought their farming skills with them when they came to this island, along with all the useful plants that were available to them. Thus potatoes, corn, bananas, pineapples, several varieties of beans, cassava, pepper, tobacco and many other species found their way to this island.

The type of agriculture practiced was simple.

Small plots of land were cleared by slashing and burning the trees. Simple tools were used to plow the ground or make mounds for the seeds or cuttings. Several varieties would be planted to ensure sufficient ground cover to prevent erosion. After the crops were harvested, another plot would be cleared, allowing the first plot to be reforested naturally.





The general care of the gardens was left to the women. They were responsible to cultivate, harvest and prepare the food while the men were out travelling, fishing or hunting.

This type of agriculture did very little damage to the natural environment, as it was meant only to provide food for the family and a little surplus for trade. This practice continued to the early part of the nineteenth century. In the meantime new crops, such as coconuts, breadfruit, sugar cane, citrus fruits and other exotic plants, were introduced to the island and accepted by the Kalinago people.

The development of agriculture in what is now the Carib Territory has come a long way with few changes to the traditional system. However, with the coming of the banana industry in the fifties, the opening of a new road in the Carib

Territory in the sixties, and the implementation of farm diversification program, the Carib Territory changed from subsistence farming to one of the most productive areas on the island.

There has been a corresponding improvement in the quality of life as the returns from the sale of bananas, copra and other produce were used to build or improve homes, educate children, and buy medication and basic necessities.

There have been attempts to organise farmers in the Carib Territory. The objective for the formation of the Carib Farmers Association was to look after the interest of the farmers and facilitate marketing, training and financial support for its members. However, the association was not able to meet its objectives and phased out of existence.



Attempts at forming a farmers' cooperative met a similar fate.

The Roots Farmers Cooperative, the Sineku Farmers Cooperative, and the Crayfish River farmer group are all examples of failed attempts at organising the farmers of the Territory into a vibrant body that would transform farming to a level that would deliver a better quality of life.

The Carib Territory once had the highest number of small farmers in the banana industry, with farming plots as small as half an acre to six acres. Today, only about ten percent remain, trying desperately to meet European Union general agriculture practice standards that have become compulsory to remain in the industry.

Those who have left find occasional employment in road maintenance and repairs, or in the tourism industry.

The farmers in the Carib Territory are continuously planting and maintaining their larousnan, which is very traditional in basket making.

The livelihood of farmers in the Carib Territory is livestock, fishing, farming and weaving.

The farmers practice good agriculture by protecting the rivers and the trees, especially the gomier trees used for building of boats.

The farmers also protect the soil against erosion by building counter drains, as well as planting buffer zones for windbreak. The farmers in the Territory appreciate their way of life — they grow what they eat and eat what they grow. On Saturdays the women farmers sell their ground provisions to other farmers and the hucksters as well as in the market.

Farmers are discouraged from using chemicals which destroy not only the soil, but also the health of the growers and consumers.

The way forward for the farmers in the Carib Territory is to go the natural way, by growing more organic foods.

Five hundred years after Columbus, the Carib farmers have survived and continue to be significant contributors to Dominica's agriculture.

