Agriculture - Going For The Green

Agriculture in the Caribbean is changing. The demand for food is increasing but water is getting scarcer and has to be shared amongst more and more users. At the same time, there are more stringent laws about the use of chemicals, especially pesticides, irrigation and land-use. De-forestation, or cutting down and burning hilltop vegetation to plant crops, is a major issue. Also, there are more protected areas in some of the countries where agriculture is not permitted. There is considerable and growing consumer concern about price, quality and safety of food. The fear of pesticide poisoning has fuelled the trend towards organic farming. Agriculture is being increasingly closely scrutinised by government agencies and consumer groups, as well as environmental organisations that monitor unsafe or environmentally-destructive practices.

This does not mean that you should pack up and leave farming. In fact, the financial rewards from farming are increasing as the population grows and more opportunities open up in areas such as tourism.

Provided that you practice “smart” and environmentally-friendly farming, you have a double opportunity to go for the green – to grow more crops and at the same time increase your cash flow. Sustainable agriculture makes money and makes sense.

Things to avoid:
- Pesticides
- Water pollution
- Deforestation
- Unnecessary burning of vegetation
- Riverbank damage
- Dumping of waste in watercourses (especially from livestock)
What to embrace:
Sustainable agriculture:

Over the long-term sustainable agriculture will:
• Satisfy human food and fiber needs.
• Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends.
• Make the most efficient use of non-renewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls.
• Sustain the economic viability of farm operations.
• Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

The GEF-IWCAM Approach for Farmers:
• Develop and promote sustainable agriculture with wide stakeholder participation.
• Stimulate the development of best agricultural practices, taking into account the relation of soil conditions to crop choice, with the emphasis on soil conservation and fertility (including reforestation as a conservation measure).
• Implement measures to reduce soil erosion.
• Promote wastewater and solid waste reuse in the agricultural sector.
• Encourage sustainable forest production and reforestation.
• “Catch” or harvest rainwater.
• Stabilise river-banks or “riparian zones”.
• Practice soil conservation.
• Compost.
• Practice crop rotation.
• Use integrated pest management practices to limit pesticide use.
• Switch to more drought or flood-tolerant crops or livestock breeds.
• Modify irrigation techniques so that water is conserved.
• Adopt practices such as zero-tillage to conserve soil moisture.
• Change crop calendars or grazing times.

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