

BAHAMAS ANNUAL REPORT 2004

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

The Bahamian economy is heavily dependent on tourism and financial services to generate foreign exchange and create employment. Tourism provides an estimated 60% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs about half the Bahamian work force. The financial services sector accounts for about 15% of GDP. The agricultural and fisheries sectors account for about 5% of both GDP and employment. Exports from the fisheries sector account for about 27% of domestic exports while the agricultural sector contributes about 5%. Food imports account for about 80% of the country's food consumption.

1.2 The State of Agriculture and Rural Life in The Bahamas in 2004

There are several critical issues in the international and national context that impact agriculture and rural life in The Bahamas. These include trade liberalization and trade agreements, environmental issues in the management of natural resources, technological advancements, national policies, and the development of human resources.

In The Bahamas, the main urban centers are located on the islands of New Providence and, to a lesser extent, Grand Bahama. The rural communities are to be found mainly on the other populated islands, known as the Family Islands. On these islands, agriculture is a stabilizing social factor that supports the rural communities. Many persons who live in rural communities are engaged in agricultural activities and have been doing so for many years. Agriculture is also one of the main sources of income for persons on the Family Islands. Presently, the farming population is aging with the youth not showing much interest in pursuing farming as a career and migrating to urban centers seeking better economic opportunities.

This year, the rural communities sustained severe damage to all sectors caused by hurricanes Frances and Jeanne. Towards the end of the year, a severe disease, Citrus Canker, affected citrus cultivations on the island of Abaco. As a result, the performance of the agricultural sector and the level of rural life were negatively impacted.

1.3 The National Agenda

A National Agenda for The Bahamas was developed by a consultative process. The process was guided by the Ministerial Committee on Agriculture (MCOA) which was established to develop a Ministerial Declaration and Plan of Action for the rural sector and to monitor progress in its implementation. The MCOA initiated the process by canvassing stakeholder opinion on the problems and prospects for the development of the rural sector through the administration of a questionnaire. The responses were used to draft the Ministerial Declaration and Plan of Action. On September 20, 2001, a National Consultation was held to review the draft documents, which were finalized by the MCOA and presented at regional and hemispheric levels. The National Agenda for The Bahamas is based on these consultations and establishes the basis for the Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture's (IICA's) work in The Bahamas. The National Agenda is evaluated periodically and on that basis, Annual Work Plans prepared.

1.4 Results

The results obtained reflect the scope of IICA's strategic and supporting areas in The Bahamas, as well as the strategic alliances in which the Office in The Bahamas is engaged. However, the severity of the hurricane season on the rural sector of many Caribbean countries placed a strain on IICA's human resources and the IICA Office in The Bahamas had to provide support to rehabilitation efforts throughout the region. For example, project proposals were prepared to raise funds. One of these was successful and funds were procured for The Bahamas, Grenada and Jamaica. The office is also leading a regional team in the articulation of a system that will more adequately respond to the needs of the rural sector in times of natural disasters.

In the area of **Facilitating Competitiveness and Global Trade**, the Office is involved in the improvement of productivity in selected industries. To this end, a methodology was documented for conducting a Commodity Chain Analysis (CCA), a draft CCA for tomatoes was completed, a pre-feasibility summary for the tomato project submitted to the MAFLG and a market analysis establishing the demand for the product completed. A proposal for the conduct of a situation and outlook report was also drafted.

In the area of promoting **Food Safety and Agricultural Health (FSAH)**, the Ministries responsible for Agriculture and Health approved a Logical Framework for a Food Safety System and Terms of Reference (TOR's) for the National Food Safety Board (NFSB). Subsequently, Cabinet approved the TOR's for the NFSB. The composition of the NFSB has been determined as a first step to its establishment and putting the Food Safety System in place. In addition, The Plant and Animal Emergency Response Action Plans final draft reports were submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Local Government (MAFLG).

In the area of **Strengthening Rural Communities**, a workshop was held on the island of Eleuthera that informed farmers of the progress on the Bottled Tomato Project, some preliminary market research was conducted and groups interested in the development of the project were identified.

For the **Development of Human Capital**, improved methods of distribution of skills-related material, to better prepare the rural sector to deal with a changing global environment, were introduced. The Office supported and engaged in several education and training activities. Under the Strengthening Agricultural Quarantine Services in the Caribbean (SAQS) Project, risk analysis training was completed and a computer and risk analysis software were delivered to the Plant and Animal Health Inspection Unit of the MAFLG. Training in Black Sigatoka identification and control in The Bahamas was conducted on the islands of New Providence, Abaco, Long Island and Grand Bahama.

As part of the effort to strengthen the MAFLG/IICA Communication Center, the IICA Office staff along with personnel from the MAFLG and the Organization of American States (OAS) received training in Web Page Design and Maintenance and Basic Library Management Methods and Procedures at the IICA Office in Jamaica. IICA staff also received training in Information Strategies for Repositioning Agriculture in the Caribbean.

1.5 Inter-Agency Cooperation

The IICA Office co-sponsored a workshop on the Logical Framework approach for project design with the OAS and the Ministry of Education. There was frequent interaction with the OAS, the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the Inter American Development Bank (IDB).

1.6 Future Opportunities for Cooperation

Future opportunities for cooperation will continue to be in line with the National Agenda, which is updated from ongoing discussions with national stakeholders. Strengthening relations with national authorities, strategic partners and the private sector would facilitate greater effectiveness in carrying out future cooperation activities.

Opportunities for cooperation will continue in the development of the Communication Center and the distance learning project to improve the information flow to the rural sector; providing support to industries with the potential for improved competitiveness; and providing training to personnel in the office, as well as the public and private sectors.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Bahamas is an archipelago of over 700 islands and cays stretching from the southeastern tip of the United States of America (USA) to the northwestern side of Cuba. The capital Nassau, is located on the island of New Providence, the most densely populated island. The second most densely populated island is Grand Bahama. The other islands are called Family Islands and make up most of what can be defined as the rural community.

According to the Census of Population 2000, the population density on New Providence was 2,655.4 persons per square mile. This compares with 31.9 for Exuma and 2.2 for Acklins. The skewed nature of the population, due in part to rural-urban migration, has meant that few islands have the critical mass necessary for development on a sustainable basis. See Table 2.1

Table 2.1 TOTAL POPULATION AND POULATION DENSITY BY SELECTED ISLANDS 2000

ISLAND	POPULATION	DENSITY (PER SQ. MILE)
All Bahamas	304,913	56.7
New Providence	212,432	2,655.4
Grand Bahama	46,954	88.6
Abaco	13,174	20.3
Acklins	423	2.2
Andros	7,615	3.3
Cat Island	1,548	10.3
Eleuthera	8,114	43.4
Exuma	3,575	31.9
Long Island	2,945	12.8
Mayaguana	262	2.4
San Salvador & Rum Cay	1,028	11.1

The Bahamian economy is a stable macro economic environment characterized by low inflation. The proximity to the USA, a large economy with a favorable economic climate, supports its overall good performance. The economy grew by between 2 and 3 percent in 1998 and by 3.5 percent in 2000. Growth in 2001 was constrained by the low growth rate in the US and the negative impact of the events of September 11th, on the US economy. The economy grew by 2.3 percent in 2002, marginally in 2003 and by 3.0 percent in 2004. Economic growth in 2004 was led by further expansion in tourism output, accelerated credit support for private sector consumption and housing investments and, accompanied during the last three months of the year by added construction stimulus

from re-insurance inflows and the rebuilding efforts following Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne.

The Tourism Industry is concentrated on New Providence and Grand Bahama, but there has been an expansion in investment in tourism facilities in some of the Family Islands, notably Exuma. Tourism investment initiatives are also in progress on the islands of Bimini and Eleuthera. Visitor arrivals increased annually during the period 1999 to 2003 except for the year 2001, when there was a decline. See Table 2.2. The stop over sub-sector saw declines for the period 2000 to 2003. However, the cruise sub-sector experienced positive growth over the entire period. This did not result in a significant increase in visitor expenditure, as cruise expenditures tend to be much lower than expenditures from the stop over sub-sector. Overall visitor expenditures grew steadily during the period except for 2002 when it declined. Visitor expenditure peaked in 2003 at \$ 1.76 Mn. For the first three quarters of 2004, visitor arrivals showed an increase of 12.3 % over arrivals for the same period in 2003. It is projected that in 2004, visitor arrivals will have exceeded the five million mark for the first time.

Table 2.2 SELECTED TOURISM STATISTICS

Year	Total Visitor Arrivals (000)	OF WHICH			Stop Over	Cruise	VISITOR EXPENDITURE		
		New Providence	Grand Bahamas	Family Islands			Stop Over \$(000)	Cruise \$(000)	Total
1999	3,648	2,285	669	695	1,577	1,981	1,244	106	1,350
2000	4,204	2,686	676	842	1,544	2,513	1,464	115	1,579
2001	4,183	2,712	634	837	1,538	2,552	1,564	148	1,712
2002	4,406	2,584	636	1,186	1,513	2,802	1,484	148	1,632
2003	4,594	2,635	631	1,328	1,510	2,970	1,567	157	1,760

In the Financial Services sector, 2002 was marked by further structural changes to the banking sector. The Central Bank implemented new physical presence requirements and tighter regulatory measures affecting the provision of financial services. There was continued decline in the number of banks and trust companies operating from or within The Bahamas. The total moved from a high of 425 in 1996 to 356 in 2001 and further declined to 301 in 2002. This latter decline did not impact total assets among public institutions significantly, as the reduction in numbers affected managed licensees for the most part.

Despite the important role played by tourism and financial services, agriculture and fisheries are important economic sectors, especially in the rural communities.

3. THE STATE OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIFE IN THE BAHAMAS IN 2004

3.1 Recent Performance in the Agricultural Sector

The agricultural sector of The Bahamas consists of agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The former two sub-sectors fall within the ambit of the MAFLG and are regulated by separate departments. The other departments within the MAFLG are Co-operatives and Local Government. The latter has responsibility for Family Island affairs.

Fisheries is the major sub-sector of the agricultural sector in terms of contribution to domestic exports (27%) and is undertaken on commercial as well as non commercial bases. The main fishing grounds used by commercial operators extend to about 45000 square miles. The principal areas are the Little Bahama Bank in the north, the Grand Bahama Bank extending through the west, south and central areas and the Cay Sal Bank in the southwest. Additionally, shallow water banks are found adjacent to a number of the southeastern islands.

Government policies favour the exploitation of commercial fisheries by Bahamians and a number of regulations, aimed at preserving the resource for posterity are in place. The Department of Fisheries of the MAFLG regulates the industry and provides technical assistance as well as information on government support available to fisher folk.

In terms of performance, data for 2002 indicates an increase in the value of fisheries output from \$67.5 Mn in 2001 to \$102.7 Mn in 2002. Contributing to this increase were an increase in the catch of 17.3 % and an increase in price of 29.7 %. Approximately 66 % of the product weight and 90 % of the value are represented by crawfish tails. Export earnings amounted to \$99.5 Mn in 2002 with Crawfish exports accounting for \$95.8 Mn. Proceeds from the sale of fish and other marine products also increased in 2002. The fisheries industry is vertically integrated into processing. Plants which export are Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) compliant and this contributes to the overall good performance of the industry.

For land based agriculture, The Bahamas can be divided into three distinct geographic regions. The northern islands comprise New Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco and North Andros. The central portion includes Eleuthera, Long Island, Cat Island and Exuma and the southeastern region includes Acklins, Crooked Island, San Salvador, Mayaguana and Inagua.

The islands of the northern Bahamas are mainly pine forest and have an average rainfall of 62 inches per year. Land and sea transportation links are reasonably developed. Large

scale commercial and export agriculture are concentrated on these islands. There are generally fewer farmers on these islands compared to the central Bahamas and the average size of the farm tends to be larger.

Most of the farmers in the country are concentrated in the islands of the central Bahamas. They tend to have smaller farms and more diversified agricultural production systems that range from mixed farms to monocultures. Within this spectrum, there are semi-commercial and subsistence farmers.

There is a pronounced change in topography, vegetation and rainfall from north to south. While some form of agricultural production is possible on most of the islands, low populations, limited infrastructure and poor inter-island transportation have limited agricultural and rural development.

Within the livestock sub-sector, poultry, pork and mutton comprise the main industries and production is mainly for local consumption. The poultry sub-sector comprises broiler and layer producers and is the largest sub-sector in terms of dollar value but has the smallest number of participants. In the pork sub-sector a private sector entity established a 10,000 lb. capacity (one shift) pork processing facility to process a variety of value added products for the local market. It is anticipated that in time this facility will benefit local raw material suppliers as their quality improves to HACCP standards. In the mutton sub-sector, the Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation (BAIC) is spearheading an initiative to increase competitiveness in that area.

The value of the poultry sub-sector was estimated at \$20.92 million or 48% of total agricultural production in 2000. The layer industry is concentrated on New Providence and Grand Bahama. In 2003, production among the three largest producers was estimated to be valued at about \$7.80 million. The layer industry has shown steady increases in value of output since 1997 and produces enough eggs to supply the domestic market except during Easter and Christmas when imports are allowed. The broiler industry is concentrated on New Providence and Grand Bahama with smaller operations on Abaco and Long Island. Domestic broiler meat production has been facing pressure since the early 1990s from imports of leg quarters from the USA and from illegal imports of chicken. This contributed to the closure of one of the larger enterprises within the industry in the latter part of 2002. The value of output in the industry in 2003 was about fifty percent of what it had been in previous years. The MAFLG regulates imports of chicken into the country through a permit system. During 2004, the College of The Bahamas (COB), a private foundation and the MAFLG, joined in a public/private sector initiative that established a 16,000 Sq. Ft. computerised tunnel ventilated broiler facility. This is intended to be a demonstration model to be replicated, replace the traditional methods of production and lead to a more competitive broiler sub-sector.

The crop sub-sector is divided into export and domestic production. The export sector is concentrated on Abaco, Andros and Grand Bahama. Abaco and Andros export mainly citrus. Avocados and some vegetables are exported from Grand Bahama. Depending on prices and temperatures in Florida, exports of winter and leafy vegetables such as tomato,

cucumber and lettuce have an advantage. The USA is the principal destination for exports, although there is some re-export of citrus to Europe and Japan. In 1998 crop exports were valued at \$8.38 million or 42% of the total value of crop production. The value of exports has fluctuated since then, but peaked in 2003 at \$ 14.60 Mn or 65.2 % of the value of production. In late 2004 the citrus industry on Abaco was affected by the Citrus Canker disease. This will adversely affect exports unless alternative opportunities are found.

Table 3.1 provides details of the value of output from selected agricultural sub-sectors/industries during the period 2000 to 2003.

Table 3.1

Value of Output From Selected Agricultural Sub-Sectors/Industries, 2000-2003 (B\$'000)

SUB-SECTOR	VALUE			
	2003	2002	2001	2000
Crops	22,381	25,225	29,164	20,922
Broilers	8,615	17,065	17,148	17,834
Layers	7,765	7,398	7,095	6,479
Beef	40	47	66	76
Mutton	59	78	255	211
Chevon	36	52	68	73
Pork	704	884	912	957
Cascarilla	264	164	356	127
Ornamentals	8000	7000	7000	6730

Source: Department of Agriculture

3.2 Critical Issues In The International And National Context

The year 2004 saw a continuation of the focus on revolutionizing the approach within the agricultural sector. Although the tourism and financial services sectors are the two main pillars of the Bahamian economy, the agricultural sector in The Bahamas could be seen as a major contributor to economic growth and development. The development of the Bahamian agricultural sector is an ongoing process that has been faced with opportunities and challenges. Some of these challenges such as inadequate production systems, lack of information technology, poor infrastructure, environmental constraints, foreign competition and weak access to international markets are recurring. With the approaching trade agreements such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the proposed accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the agricultural sector will be faced with additional challenges.

Development initiatives for agriculture in 2004 were aimed at achieving higher levels of self-sufficiency in food production, improving food quality and security and expansion

into international markets. Initiatives included commercialized mutton production, tree propagation, winter vegetables, juice processing and a bottling plant.

Import substitution was emphasized during the period. The Bahamas is heavily dependent on imported goods with annual imports being approximately \$1.5 billion. Therefore opportunities exist for local production to match local demand more closely. For the mutton market, The Bahamas produces 130,000 lbs. annually with an annual demand of over four million lbs. Hence, a national production programme has been developed to expand and improve mutton production. Annually, major hotels and luxury homeowners import certain trees that can be cultivated and harvested for sale in The Bahamas. Hence, the cultivation of ornamental plants has been identified as a lucrative business opportunity for Bahamian entrepreneurs. Onion production has been experiencing continued growth and improvement in relation to meeting local demand through improved quality, storage life and better management techniques.

3.3 The Status Of Living Conditions In Rural Communities

Living conditions in the rural communities, considered here to be the Family Islands, may best be measured in the context of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals, which were established at the Millennium Summit of 2000. For these goals, the deadline of 2015 has been set to: a) reduce poverty by fifty percent; b) achieve universal primary school education; c) promote gender equality; d) reduce child mortality by two-thirds; e) reduce the maternal mortality by three-quarters; halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases; and f) utilize principles of sustainable development to reverse the loss of environment resources. These goals have either been achieved or are achievable within the time frame in the rural communities.

Apart from the specific actions being taken to achieve the Millennium Goals and the important role being played by the Local Government System, policies and programmes either underway or under consideration to encourage expansion of the tourism plant to the Family Islands; promote linkages between sectors such as tourism and agriculture; and diversify sources of income in the rural communities could go a long way towards goal achievement.

4. SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL AGENDA

The National Agenda for The Bahamas was developed using a methodology that was consultative, diagnostic and participatory. The process started in August 2001 when The Bahamas, like other IICA member countries of the Hemisphere commenced work towards National Consultation- 2001, whose objective was to prepare a National Declaration and Plan of Action for the Agricultural and Rural Sectors and as an input into Regional and Hemispheric Declarations and Plans of Action. In The Bahamas, the initial step was the administration of a questionnaire to stakeholders in the public and private sectors to obtain their views on the challenges, issues and opportunities that exist and affect the rural sector. The findings of this survey were considered in the drafting of the Declaration and Plan of Action. At the same time, the MCOA was established to guide the process. The MCOA is co-chaired by the MAFLG and IICA and is broad based, including in addition to the MAFLG and IICA, representatives of the Ministry of Health and the Environment, the Department of Lands and Surveys, Producer Groups and the Distributive Trade.

National Consultation-2001 was held on September 20, 2001 in New Providence and was attended by sixty persons including participants from New Providence, Grand Bahama and nine of the Family Islands. The issues raised influenced the final version of the Bahamas Declaration and Plan of Action. Those issues can be categorized under the following subject matter areas viz: a) Institutional modernization and reorganization; b) Financial resources; c) human resource development; d) policy formulation; e) infrastructure development; f) land reform; g) research activities; h) trade prospects; and i) labour availability. These issues and those raised in both the Caribbean and Hemispheric Declarations and Plans of Action define a framework of ideas, which the National Agenda addresses.

The draft National Agenda was formulated by the broad based MCOA and reflects the earlier consultations. In July 2003, the MCOA was reconvened to discuss the Annual Report for 2002, of the IICA Office in The Bahamas. In so doing, the MCOA deliberated on plan implementation and reaffirmed the continued relevance of the National Agenda.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Results were obtained in the five areas of Facilitating Competitiveness and Global Trade; Food Safety and Agricultural Health; Strengthening Rural Communities; Hemispheric Integration; and the Development of Human Capital. These results reflect the scope of IICA's strategic and supporting areas, as well as the strategic alliances in which the Office in The Bahamas is engaged.

5.2 Facilitating Competitiveness and Global Trade

In the area of facilitating competitiveness and global trade, a CCA methodology was adapted in 2003 from work carried out at IICA's Headquarters for use in The Bahamas. This methodology was employed in the conduct of a CCA for the Tomato Industry. The CCA was documented in April, 2004 and formed the basis for a pre-feasibility summary of the Bottled Tomato project, which was submitted to the MAFLG. The summary was considered in securing funding in the 2004/2005 budget for further work on the Tomato project by the MAFLG.

A proposal was developed for the conduct of a Situation and Outlook report on the Agricultural Sector and the development of databases after an indication of continued interest by the MAFLG in these two areas.

Discussions continued throughout 2004 with the founding members of the fledgling Bahamas Agricultural Producers Association, but no formal meetings were held.

5.3 Promoting Food Safety and Agricultural Health (FSAH)

The area of promoting FSAH, saw the culmination of the work of a steering committee with representatives from the MAFLG, the Ministry of Health and the Environment, the COB and PAHO/WHO, which established a working committee, comprising of representatives from the Ministry of Health and the Environment, the MAFLG and IICA, to design a Logical Framework for a National Food Safety system. The Logical Framework, as well as TOR's for a coordinating mechanism were completed, presented to the steering committee and approved towards the end of 2003.

In 2004, the Logical Framework and TOR's for the NFSB were approved by the Ministries responsible for Agriculture and Health. The TOR for the NFSB was subsequently approved by the Cabinet and the MAFLG has initiated the process of establishing the NFSB.

This important national food safety initiative was supported by a European Union (EU) funded project for the fifteen member countries of CARIFORUM which include The Bahamas as well as an IICA hemispheric initiative for increasing the participation and involvement of countries of the hemisphere in the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Committee meetings of the WTO.

The efforts of the year 2002 and 2003 to increase the involvement of The Bahamas in meetings of the SPS Committee continued in 2004. Three persons attended two meetings during the year. The attendees represented the ministries responsible for Agriculture and Health. Preparations for the meetings in 2004 reflected the new structure of the programme, which requires more active participation by participants, greater preparation before departure for the meetings and reporting on return.

Another EU funded project supporting the national food safety initiative is the SAQS project. SAQS is a project within the Caribbean Agriculture and Fisheries programme with a budget of 2.5M Euros. The main objective of SAQS is to upgrade national agricultural health services in the Caribbean to enable them to comply with the SPS rules of the WTO and FTAA. The SAQS project was introduced to The Bahamas at a one-day workshop that brought the public and private sectors together to discuss the importance of partnering for effective management of agricultural health services. Many of the activities under the SAQS project were undertaken in 2003, including a workshop to develop emergency response mechanisms for responding to outbreaks of diseases affecting animals and plants in The Bahamas. The outputs of that workshop were manuals setting out procedures for responding to outbreaks of animal and plant diseases. The draft manuals were completed in 2004 and submitted to the MAFLG.

Also under the SAQS project and as a follow up to discussions between consultants and senior officers of the MAFLG in 2003 on the need for cost recovery mechanisms for select quarantine services as well as the need for the establishment of a dedicated Risk Management Unit for The Bahamas, the MAFLG was presented with a computer and the necessary software in support of its efforts in risk management.

5.4 Strengthening Rural Communities

In the area of strengthening rural communities, the development of the Rural Sector is being addressed through continued work with the Bahamas Cooperative League Limited (BCLL) and the Department of Cooperatives of the MAFLG. The recommendations from a strategic analysis of Producer/Supplier Cooperatives completed in 2002 are the basis of further studies and actions. A case in point is the Bahamian Bottled Tomato project for which a proposal has been developed, a multi-disciplinary team assembled and work undertaken for the improvement of the production, processing and marketing of this traditional Bahamian product.

A workshop to inform tomato farmers and processors on the status of the Bottled Tomato project was held on the island of Eleuthera in March, 2004 and two groups were

identified for developing the project. The Cooperative Department of the MAFLG is working with these groups with a view to their establishment and strengthening. The MAFLG indicated an interest in establishing a facility where training of the small processors in safe food handling techniques can be undertaken, with a view to improving the product and eventually manufacturing a safe product if commercially feasible. A marketing study was completed by a local consulting firm in December, 2004. It indicates strong market potential for the product if it can be produced under improved sanitary conditions and packaged attractively.

Informal discussions were held with officials of the Ministry responsible for Tourism on a regional initiative that was submitted to the OAS for possible funding and which addresses the issue of agriculture/tourism linkages. In November, 2004, a Power Point presentation was made on the same topic to the Association of Caribbean States' 13th Meeting of the Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism, held in The Bahamas.

IICA supported the North Abaco Co-operative Society Limited in the development of a project for lobster farming using a more environmentally friendly technology (Moveable traps made of wood and wire rather than of concrete.) The project was submitted to the Small Grants Programme that is funded by the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute for consideration.

Because of the spatial distribution of the rural communities in The Bahamas, improvements in Information and Communication delivery are of great importance. The effectiveness of the MAFLG/IICA Communication Center has been improved with the upgrading of the equipment. The MAFLG continues to assign a Communication Specialist to support the work of the Center. The COB provided advice in the areas of categorizing, cataloguing and indexing of the documents at the Communication Center. The aim is to share information with other libraries in a network to be established which will include selected rural communities of the Family Islands.

5.5 Hemispheric Integration

In the area of Hemispheric Integration, the Office in The Bahamas is aware that the rapid changes in information and communication technology present new opportunities and challenges for the agricultural sector. They provide easy access to relevant information that is available around the world and facilitate the dissemination of information to entrepreneurs and agri-business stakeholders in the rural communities.

In 2004, IICA in The Bahamas continued the use of the Agricultural Information and Documentation System for the Americas (SIDALC) and took steps to be included in the IICA Library System (SIBIICA). SIDALC allows interaction between agricultural information networks and associations. It contains a metabase with information on agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean, known as Agri2000 and a catalogue of sources of information on agriculture, selected according to quality criteria. SIBIICA is a

cooperative effort that pools information resources throughout the institute and those that other international organizations or national entities share with IICA.

The MAFLG/IICA Communication Center is the instrument to effect these improvements and in 2004, continued to be engaged in categorising, cataloging and indexing the material at the Center. The following fields are being utilized: Title; Author; Description; Date Published; ISBN NO. ; NO. of copies and Abstract. When this is substantially complete, the information will be shared with other Libraries and other agencies in the Family Islands. The intention is to eventually create an information network and to have the Center become a repository for agricultural information that is easily accessed. Towards this end, staff of the office along with personnel from the MAFLG and the OAS received training in Web Page Design and Maintenance and Basic Library Management Methods and Procedures at the IICA Office in Jamaica. IICA staff also received training in Information Strategies for Repositioning Agriculture in the Caribbean.

The training in Web Page Design and Maintenance, which staff underwent in 2004, will enable the office to share information on its efforts with the wider hemisphere.

5.6 Developing Human Capital

For the development of human capital, training in Risk Analysis and Data Base Development and Management was completed under the SAQS project. A computer and risk analysis software were delivered to the Plant and Animal Health Inspection Unit of the MAFLG in 2004.

Training in Black Sigatoka identification and control was carried out on the islands of Abaco, Grand Bahama, Long Island and New Providence in August, 2004. Over 100 persons were trained.

5.7 Other

The request for a system to minimize the effects of natural disasters on the agricultural sector of the region was made by the newly elected President of the Dominican Republic and a regional team, led by this office, set out to develop a proposal. The process commenced in November and the proposal was completed in December for submission to the meeting of the Caribbean Heads of Government meeting in February of 2005, as part of the “Jagdeo Initiative”.

A request for a system to minimize the effects of natural disasters on the agricultural sector of Jamaica, was made by the Ministry of Agriculture of that country and a regional team, led by this Office, worked on the development of a Plan of Action to that effect. The process commenced in November, 2004 and will be finalized early in 2005.

6. INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

The IICA Office co-sponsored a workshop on the Logical Framework approach for project design with the OAS and the Ministry of Education. There was frequent interaction with the OAS, PAHO/WHO and the IDB.

7. FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Work in the future will continue the development of the Communication Center and a Distance Learning initiative to improve the information flow to the rural sector. Industries with potential for being competitive will be targeted and appropriate technology introduced in an effort to achieve the competitive potential. Maintaining high levels of food safety will be critical, as the main sector, tourism, can be adversely affected if citizens or visitors are exposed to food borne illnesses. Training of personnel within the office and in the public and private sectors will be continued.

Continued collaboration with the MAFLG, IICA's main strategic partner is crucial. The Department of Agriculture has assigned a senior officer to liaise with the IICA Office, thereby facilitating the flow of information and feedback on critical issues. Strategic relationships also exist with the Departments of Fisheries, Cooperatives and Local Government of the MAFLG, the Bahamas Agricultural Producers' Association, the BCLL and the BAIC. The latter three have the potential of becoming avenues through which the private sector can be reached. There is ongoing working relations with PAHO/WHO in the area of FSAH. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has also expressed an interest in collaboration in this area and is expected to provide support in establishing the feasibility of the Bottled Tomato project as well. Collaboration with the OAS will continue with regard to the implementation of the Summits process.

Partly because of the focus on the tourism and financial services sectors, the resources available to the agricultural sector are limited and the archipelagic nature of The Bahamas makes the provision of appropriate infrastructure to link the islands and facilitate development a particularly daunting challenge. Therefore, leadership at the national and rural sector levels have to take advantage of existing opportunities; provide the appropriate institutions and policy environment; promote a holistic and integrated approach to rural development; optimise the use of factors of production; and establish horizontal links to strengthen areas of weaknesses in their approach to the development of the rural sector.