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The author has recently submitted a Ph.D to the University of Southampton UK which considers the political, economic and legal interactions that have shaped the United Kingdom banana trade since its inception. The author was fortunate enough to visit the Caribbean for an intensive period of research and would like to continue his research interest in the region, in the future.

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The Development of the Windward Islands Banana Export Trade: Commercial Opportunity & Colonial Necessity

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Abstract

With the future of a large scale Windward Islands banana export trade now in serious doubt, the paper considers its development in the decade prior to the Second World War; and more importantly in the post-war period when bananas from the Windward Islands were first exported to the United Kingdom. The paper examines the interest group dynamic of corporate and government cooperation in the development of a new agricultural export industry, and explains why attempts to develop a banana export trade on the Windward Islands were not undertaken in a coordinated and structured manner. The paper assesses the first efforts to develop a banana export industry on the Windward Islands in the 1930s, and how that set the scene for the large-scale developments of the 1950s. The paper then considers the early post-war commercial attempts to develop a banana export industry on the islands, and the attitude of the United Kingdom government to such undertakings. Further; an assessment is made as to why after many years of false starts a properly integrated approach was finally taken in regard to the Windward Islands banana industry, involving both private enterprise and government support.

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Introduction

With the future of a large scale Windward Islands banana export trade now in serious doubt, the paper considers its origins, with particular emphasis on the role of commercial and government interests in actively encouraging the development of a new agricultural export industry in the region. The paper assesses the early efforts to establish a banana industry on the Windward Islands (Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia, and St Vincent) in the years prior to the Second World War, and why these met with only limited success. The paper then evaluates the industry's reconstitution after the cessation of hostilities, and considers why despite early British government scepticism over the viability of the banana export trade in the Windward Islands, the industry was to develop rapidly and become the region's most significant export commodity over the next fifty years.

The early attempts to establish a banana export trade on the Windward Islands

As far back as 1890 reference was made to the possibility of exporting bananas from Dominica. H. A. Alford Nicholls, at one time the Principal Medical Officer of Dominica and a practical agriculturalist, wrote a paper on *The Cultivation of the Banana in Dominica*. However, it was not until the early 1920s that proper consideration was given to a banana export trade in the Windward Islands, when commercial interest was shown in developing the trade on Grenada and Dominica, to supplement the traditional export crops of these islands (West India Committee Circulars, 18 January 1923; 15 March 1923; and 17 January 1924).

The potential of a banana export trade in the region was only realised with the involvement of the Swift Banana Company on St Lucia. The interest shown by the Manchester based company precipitated the start of serious banana cultivation in 1923, when a nursery of Gros Michel bananas was developed on the island. The first shipment of bananas from St Lucia was made in July 1925, when 500 bunches were shipped on the s.s. Guiana from Castries to New York (West India Committee Circular, 13 August 1925). Banana exports from St Lucia continued on a regular basis, so by the end of 1926, 46 209 stems had been exported, the vast majority of which were shipped to the more accessible United States market (Colonial Report, St Lucia, 1927, p. 10).

However, by 1927 the industry was already in trouble with the banana plants being attacked by Panama disease, the banana borer, and the weevil beetle. As a consequence, banana production fell to such a level that the Swift Banana Company could no longer maintain its interest on the island, and although ad hoc banana shipments were subsequently made, the trade quickly fell away. As the West Indian Sugar Commission reported, "The Collapse of a banana company which had started operations and had induced a large number of planters to grow this fruit will make any revival of the growing of this crop extremely difficult" (HMSO, 1930, p. 53).

At the beginning of the 1930s, attempts were made to establish a banana export industry on Dominica, and a number of shipments were made on vessels of the Leyland Line to Liverpool under lease to A. C. Shillingford and Company (West India Committee Circular, 16 February 1933). However it was not until the Canadian National Steamship Company began to ship bananas under the auspices of a Trade Agreement between Canada and the West Indies that the climate for banana exports from St Lucia, and from elsewhere in the Windward Islands began to improve.

The Canadian Banana Company and the revitalisation of the banana export industry

The revival in the banana trade after the failure of the Swift Banana Company began in 1933, when the Canadian Banana Company, in collaboration with the Canadian National Steamship Company, began to show an interest in shipping bananas from the islands, after attempts had been made to strengthen the fundamental base of the industry. The failure of the previous attempt to establish a viable banana export trade in the Windward Islands, precipitated a more pro-active response by the colonial authorities.

There was a realisation that with the traditional industries on the islands under increasing pressure from foreign competition, the banana industry, if properly managed, could be useful in mitigating losses elsewhere in the agricultural sector. For example, a programme of research was conducted by the Empire Marketing Board Officers attached to the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad, on the transport and storage of bananas. While a campaign of banana extension was undertaken, which included the provision of disease free plants, inspection and treatment of diseased areas, and attempts to improve the grade and overall quality of bananas produced.

With the government investments made, the Canada Banana Company agreed contracts with the banana associations of Dominica, Grenada and St Lucia in early 1934, and of St Vincent in 1935. The contracts were for the shipment of Gros Michel bananas to Canada for a period of five years. However, despite the opportunities that were now available to the Windward Islands for resuming banana exports, there was concern in the Colonial Office over the role of the Canadian Banana Company, as it was owned by the American United Fruit Company. But the Colonial Office had to accept the presence of the United Fruit Company in the Windward Islands at that time as there were no other viable commercial alternatives. However, there was a fear that the dominant position of the company might prove unsatisfactory in

meeting the economic and political needs of the Windward Islands, as the powerful role of the United Fruit Company in Jamaica's banana industry had been an ongoing issue of contention since the turn of the century (CO 318/414/4).

Indeed, the more important concern for the Colonial Office was how trade developments in the Windward Islands might affect the delicate balance of interests in the Jamaican banana export trade. The United Fruit Company was at this time trying to undermine the position of the Jamaica Banana Producers Association in the Jamaican trade. The Jamaica Banana Producers' Association had been established in 1927 with the support of the UK government, in an attempt to challenge American corporate power in the British colony. In 1934 the Jamaica Banana Producers' Association was in economic difficulties, and it was feared that as the vast majority of Windward Islands banana exports were destined for Canada, these bananas would be in direct competition with exports to Canada organised by the Jamaica Banana Producers Association. A Colonial Office memo, highlights the dilemma, "... competition in the Canadian market is bound to be resented by the Jamaica Producers" (CO 318/414/4). The position of the Jamaica Banana Producers' Association was eventually secured as the result of a UK government appointed banana commission, and the banana export industry on the Windward Islands began to expand (see appendix).

The onset of war and the end of the Windward Islands banana export trade

Although by the end of the 1930s the banana industry had established itself in the Windward Islands, the endeavour had not been entirely successful, with some islands performing better than others. However, the dependency on the Canadian Banana Company was all important, and when the shipping situation became precarious with the onset of war, the Canadian National Steamship Company was eventually forced to discontinue its service, with the consequence that large scale banana exports from the Windward Islands ended in 1942.

Small amounts of bananas were sometimes carried on general purpose ships, but as Jamaica was also sending some of its bananas to North America, the opportunity for the Windward Islands to sustain their interest in the banana trade was greatly constrained. An indication of the situation in St Lucia at this time can be seen in the Report on the Agricultural Department, which stated, "Only two shipments of fruit were possible during the year (to Canada); small quantities were also exported to Barbados. Owing to employment offered at the US bases and the cessation of shipping facilities, very little attention has been paid to this crop for some time ...The virtual abandonment of cultivation has naturally resulted in a significant increase in the incidence of Panama disease.." (1943, pp. 3-4).

In order to assist the Windward Islands during this period of economic hardship, the UK government made money available to the banana associations for the benefit of the smaller growers, providing no further planting took place. The scheme ran for the duration of the war; and it was stated that the funds, "enabled the industry to be maintained and aided in solving the food problem" (West India Committee Circular; November 1944 and CO 852/594/4). Indeed, the support provided to the industry in the Windward Islands was to prove of great significance in the post-war years, as once the war was over the expertise and experience of banana production on the islands was to provide the basis for commercial interests to once again investigate the possibilities of exporting bananas from the region.

The re-establishment of a Windward Islands banana export trade

After the defeat of the Axis Powers in the summer of 1945, despite the Windward Islands not having an established shipping service, attempts were made to resume banana exports. A number of small-scale shipments were made between 1945 and 1948, involving companies such as A.C. Shillingford, the Grayson Shipping Line, and the Alcoa Shipping Line. However; it was not until 1949, that a regular banana shipping service was established, once again solely on the initiative of private interests. But in time this led in time led to the establishment of a new source of bananas for the United Kingdom market

The Tropical Fruit Company, which had imported bananas from the Canary Islands into Ireland prior to the Second World War found that post-war, because of high demand for the islands' bananas from Spain

and the increasing costs of production, it could no longer access bananas from this source. As a consequence, the Managing Director of the company, Ernest Foley, attempted to find an alternative banana source, and his brother who was working in Trinidad, suggested that there were islands in the West Indies eager to obtain a contract to export bananas.

In consequence, during 1947 Foley visited the Eastern Caribbean in search of a new banana source. One of the islands he visited was Dominica, and Foley decided that a banana export business could be developed there. Foley who had good contacts with a number of shipping companies, believed that organising shipping to transport the fruit from Dominica would not be a problem (pers. comm. Patrick Foley). In association with Geoffrey Band who had a fruit import business in Liverpool, steps were undertaken to establish an export industry on the island, under the auspices of Antilles Products Limited.

In early October 1948, it was announced that, "Antilles Products Limited to purchase Lacatan bananas for the next 15 years" (The Dominica Tribune, 9 October 1948). Once provisional agreement had been reached to ship this new variety of banana that was less vulnerable to Panama disease than the Gros Michel, Foley and Band approached the Colonial Office in an attempt to persuade them to convince the Crown Agents Shipping Department to allow UK government cargo to be shipped to Dominica and other West Indian Islands on the vessels chartered by their company. Antilles Products hoped that with such an agreement the viability of their undertaking would be enhanced, by an assured two-way trading link. However; the Crown Agents Shipping Department turned down the request, believing that the existing arrangements with the Conference Lines were in the best interests of the colonies. The Conference Lines provided a regular service, with rebates on their freight charges which saved the West Indian Islands a considerable amount of money (CO 852/902/3).

In general there was little enthusiasm for the Antilles Products' undertaking within government circles. In one Colonial Office communication in March 1949, it was stated, "we were glad to hear that there is little likelihood of any large areas of new land being put into banana cultivation, which would be embarrassing later if the scheme did not go ahead as well as its promoters hope it will... We are not too happy about the long term prospects for the export of bananas" (CO 852/902/3).

Despite such scepticism a draft contract was agreed in June 1949, and finalised in December; "for the purpose of export during a period of fifteen years ... subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter contained and the Company agrees to purchase from the Association all the said Puerto Rique (Lacatan) bananas grown in Dominica and accepted at the Company's Receiving Stations" (Contract signed between the Dominica Banana Association and Antilles Products Limited, 30 December 1949, p.2, paragraph 2, see CO 852/1148/3 and Antilles General Minute Book, pp.5 and 10).

The first shipment of nearly 9000 stems of bananas departed for Dublin and Antwerp on 18 July 1949, on the M.V. Brarena of the Belgian Fruit Line. The majority of the fruit was distributed in Ireland, while some was sold in Belgium. A number of future shipments were sent to Sweden and Holland (The Dominica Tribune, 8 April 1950 and CO 852/1148/3). Antilles Products did not ship bananas to the UK, as they had no contract with the Ministry of Food to do so. At the time banana exports into the UK were overseen by the government, a role which was to last until March 1953.

The Colonial Administration in the Windward Islands, and the Colonial Office in London, although doubtful of the success of the banana trade did acknowledge, "that the time is ripe to give a lead by taking steps to resuscitate the industry" (Letter from Administrator of St Lucia to the Governor of the Windward Islands, 18 July 1949, CO 852/90213). For St Lucia an undertaking was given for both local and Colonial Development and Welfare funds to be used for the importation of banana plants, and the establishment of a nursery on the island (CO 852/902/3). However; despite such assistance there were tensions between Antilles Products and the colonial authorities, particularly concerning the role of the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC).

The CDC was a semi-autonomous government agency with the remit of promoting the economic development of the British colonies, and to supplement the work conducted under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. Individual colonies would suggest schemes to the CDC, and if the

CDC considered them to be viable would initiate action, either on its own or in association with private enterprise. However, the role of the CDC was viewed as controversial in some quarters. It was seen as being overbearing, demanding too many concessions for its involvement, and having a political agenda with a tendency for exploiting rather than maximising the welfare of those in the recipient countries. Such were the prevalent criticisms when the CDC first showed an interest in Dominica in the summer of 1949.

Some of the problems arose from the intervention of the Administrator of Dominica, E. P Arrowsmith who was uncertain of the long term prospects of developing a banana trade on the island. Rather it was suggested "that he was much interested in the development of the citrus industry for the manufacture of concentrated juice and he was encouraging the growers to invest any profits that they might make out of bananas in the citrus industry". Arrowsmith further hoped that the CDC could be interested in developing a citrus concentrating plant on the island (CO 852/902/3).

The Administrator did make a formal approach to the CDC, although the plans now entailed the development of a hydro-electric plant and a cold storage facility on the island. However the terms and conditions laid down by the CDC for its involvement proved to be unacceptable to the Legislative Council of Dominica, particularly when the CDC threatened that without their presence on the island there would be no road programme. A programme which had been agreed before the CDC began to show an interest in the island. As was stated, "the CDC is a body created to develop the Colonies and not to exploit colonial peoples" (The Dominica Tribune, 27 August 1949).

The Colonial Secretary was called upon to intervene, although the standing of the Colonial Office was not particularly high at the time. There was a belief in Dominica that the CDC together with the Colonial Office had thought the island too small for significant assistance, and had only become interested in Dominica once Antilles Products had committed themselves to the island's development. The situation became worse in September 1949, when a proposal put forward by the Colonial Administration to be considered by the Dominican Legislative Council, called for an increase in the export duty of bananas by around 150 per cent (The Dominica Tribune, 17 September 1949). Although the proposal was eventually shelved, this was seen by many on Dominica as an attempt to end Antilles Products involvement on the island, leaving the government supported CDC to take over the banana interests.

A further issue that did not help relations between Antilles Products Limited and the CDC was the CDC's refusal to countenance the growing of bananas on its land adjoining the Woodford Hill Estate, which the company had purchased for the growing of bananas. One of the problems for Antilles Products was that Dominica was not producing enough fruit for full shipments to take place, which in turn undermined the company's viability. As a consequence, Patrick Foley approached the CDC and attempted to persuade them to develop bananas on their land, but they refused (pers. comm. Patrick Foley).

By this time the CDC had constructed the hydro-electric plant and a cold storage facility for their citrus operation on the island, after having met some of the concerns of the Dominican Legislative Council. There was some citrus on the island prior to the CDC's involvement, but because of their two investments the CDC had to increase citrus production to make sure the two projects paid their way. It can be seen that the CDC, rather than shaping its role to fit the requirements of the agricultural situation on Dominica, built the infrastructure first without properly assessing if such a need existed. When it became clear that such spending was ill conceived, the CDC in order to validate its policy had to develop the citrus business, even though alternative projects may have been more worthwhile. It is ironic that throughout these troubles the colonial authorities had little confidence in the future of the citrus export industry on Dominica either (CO 852/902/3).

The first large-scale Windward Islands banana shipments to the UK

Despite the high expectations, Antilles Products had problems in chartering vessels for the trans-Atlantic voyage, and occasionally were unable to export any bananas at all. The Belgian Fruit Line Service then ceased altogether because of increasing freight rate costs, and as a short-term measure arrangements were made in November 1949 to load two Ministry of Food ships from Jamaica. Such shipments were possible as Jamaican banana volumes were below historic levels, which meant spare shipping capacity was

available. In addition, the vessels were fast enough to pick up bananas from Dominica without endangering the supplies loaded in Jamaica (CO 852/1148/3).

The origins of a Windward Islands banana export trade to the UK was thus based on a fortunate combination of factors, rather than on a long-term assessment of the needs of Dominica and St Lucia (from which a small volume of bananas was now being shipped to Dominica for export) by the UK government. In addition, it is ironic that weakness in Jamaican production allowed bananas from the Windward Islands to first enter the UK, a banana source which in time was to cause a dramatic change in the balance of supply, challenging the primacy of Jamaican bananas in its traditional market

With the Ministry of Food providing such a service, Antilles Products made every effort to persuade the Ministry to buy the whole exportable banana surplus from Dominica and St Lucia on the same terms as the Ministry's contract with Jamaica. As a way of trying to convince the authorities to agree a contract, Ernest Foley and Band gave the Colonial Office the impression that Antilles Products would develop a banana business to rival that of the United Fruit Company. The Colonial Office, in turn, doubted whether Antilles Products could do what it said, and in such a situation, "the argument for substituting a British controlled organisation for the United Fruit Company would not appear to be sufficiently strong to counteract the disadvantages of losing the latter's goodwill" (CO 852/1148/3).

The Ministry of Food were not prepared to agree a long-term contract as it felt that Dominican and St Lucian production at the time was insufficient to warrant the shipment of supplies to the UK. Such an outcome was not welcomed by the Governor of the Windward Islands who wrote, "The vague hope that, when ships can be filled and cost of freight reduced the Ministry of Food is likely to be interested, takes no account of the present situation and the future of a vitally important pioneer industry in two Treasury controlled Colonies is in jeopardy... I do not think the local difficulties or the issues at stake have been fully appreciated" (CO 852/1148/3). Again, the comments highlight that the UK government seemed to be less than fully committed in supporting the development of a banana industry on the Windward Islands, despite the fact that a number of the islands traditional industries were in decline, including those of sugar, nutmeg, limes, arrowroot and cotton.

However, by the beginning of 1951 with banana production and exports from Dominica and St Lucia increasing, 3000 tons (223 800 stems) had been shipped in Antilles Products' first year of operation, the Ministry of Food agreed to purchase Windward Island bananas for shipment to Northern Ireland, and then more widely in the UK as volumes increased. Although significantly the contract did not extend to the provision of a regular shipping service. The first shipment under the Ministry of Food's contract came in April 1951 on the s.s. Genale (Antilles Products Ltd. General Minute Book, AGM 29/6/50 and The Dominica Tribune, 28 April 1951).

In addition, the UK government began to develop schemes in Dominica in an attempt to encourage a greater number of peasant farmers to grow bananas. In July 1952, a scheme jointly financed by the government, Antilles Products and the Dominica Banana Association to develop banana demonstration plots for peasant farmers was established (Annual Report on Agricultural Development, 1952, p.8). While, in St Lucia over 120 000 plants were planted in 1949 and 1950 (Colonial Report, 1949-1950, p.26 and Windward Island Annual 1955, p.34). Nevertheless, the development of the industry was still disappointing. Antilles Products continued to have difficulty in chartering regular shipping, and there remained a reluctance on the part of farmers, particularly the more successful ones, to grow bananas in larger volumes. The UK government was also still uncertain over the potential of a banana industry in the Windward Islands.

The impetus for expansion: a change in the ownership of Antilles Products

When Geoffrey Band resigned from Antilles Products Limited in 1952, the company had to find a new UK distributor. As a consequence, Ernest Foley who had long-standing ties with Elders and Fyffes, asked whether they would be interested in handling the distribution of Windward Islands bananas in the UK. However; Elders and Fyffes were not interested, believing that the islands were ill-suited to producing bananas on a large scale (pers. comm. Patrick Foley). With Elders and Fyffes not wanting to become

involved, John van Geest, a Dutch businessman who was developing a fruit and vegetable business in the UK, took shares in Antilles Products in December 1952, becoming a director of the company in July 1953 (Antilles Products Ltd. General Minute Book, pp.90 and 98). In addition, a new company was created in January 1953 called Antilles Imports Limited, based in Liverpool, which oversaw the distribution of Windward Islands bananas once they had arrived in the UK (Companies House, 00515647).

By the Spring of 1954, the issues of double taxation, the continuing shipping problems, and the poor levels of banana production led the shareholders based in Ireland, who constituted the majority interest in Antilles Products, to consider their position. There was a general view that there was no real future in the Windward Islands, and so preparations were made to sell the company to Lord Vestey, head of the Blue Star Line (Antilles Products Ltd. General Minute Book, p. 110, pers. comm. Patrick Foley and A F Rodriguez). On hearing this at a specially convened shareholders meeting, John van Geest made an offer to purchase the company, although not before confirming his intention by telephone with contacts in Holland. John van Geest took control of the Antilles companies in late June 1954 (Companies House, 00515647). The name of the Antilles Products company was changed to Geest Industries (B.W I.) Limited in September 1954 (Antilles Products Ltd. General Minute Book, p. 116).

By September; John van Geest had also finalised negotiations with the respective banana associations of the four Windward Islands for exclusive rights to ship and market all the bananas that the islands could produce. Both Dominica and St Lucia were established banana exporters, while Grenada and St Vincent had only started exporting bananas to the UK in late 1953 (Colonial Reports: Grenada, 1953 and St Vincent, 1953). Underpinning John van Geest's involvement was the belief that the banana industry in the Windward Islands could develop further. Although Geest Industries at the time did not have the infrastructure in the UK to handle a large volume of bananas, John van Geest had a feeling that despite Elders and Fyffes' apparent domination there was a gap in the market which could be exploited (pers. comm. Ray Hillbourne).

The commitment on the part of van Geest to ship and market all the bananas that the Windward Islands could produce was really the turning point in providing the necessary impetus for expansion. Once again, it was the role of private initiative in the banana export trade, rather than government action, which led to its further development. Indeed, it was only after van Geest had committed himself to the Windward Islands banana industry, that the UK government began to take an active interest.

In the folklore surrounding John van Geest's involvement in the Windward Islands it is suggested that the UK government actively encouraged his participation, both financially and diplomatically. However; I have found no evidence to support such a contention. The chronology of van Geest's purchase of the Antilles companies seems to indicate that it was a decision made quickly, with little forward planning. Further; the telephone call to the Netherlands perhaps reveals the true source of any financial support that was forthcoming. It is unclear who John van Geest spoke to in Holland, but it is likely that he contacted either his family, his city financiers, or perhaps even the Dutch Royal Family.

The Dutch Royal Family is mentioned in this context because John van Geest was seen by them as a favourite son (pers. comm. Herbert Hart). It is said that during the Second World War, the Dutch Royal Family, to prevent their financial assets from falling into the hands of the Nazis, gave John van Geest the role of overseeing them. Apparently, as van Geest did such a good job in this regard, the Dutch Royal Family were pleased to support his ventures whenever assistance was requested (pers. comm. Patrick Foley). Despite these high level connections, it cannot be said with certainty that van Geest's purchase of the Antilles companies was as a result of such contacts. Nevertheless, the telephone call is important as it seems to indicate that John van Geest did not receive any special assistance from the UK government in the build up to the acquisition.

Developing colonial commitments: financial assistance for Windward banana production

Once John van Geest had committed himself to purchase all bananas of exportable quality, and to sustain a regular shipping service to the UK, the UK government became much more inclined to support the venture. As the Governor of the Windward Islands stated, "I consider it important as a matter of

economic and general policy that the banana industry of St Vincent should be rapidly expanded. It appears that the signing of the contract between Geest Industries Limited and the St Vincent Banana Growers' Association Limited, has provided the necessary impetus for expansion" (Letter to Colonial Secretary, 11 February 1955, CO 1031/1559). The economic benefits of such an expansion were also recognised, as the Governor's Deputy wrote in early 1954, "Rapid expansion is most desirable as a measure of economic development as a means of reducing the present dependence of St Vincent on grant-in-aid assistance from HMG" (Letter to Colonial Secretary, 24 February 1954, CO 1031/1559).

As a consequence, substantial financial assistance was provided by the UK government, in the form of grants and loans for items such as the importation of banana suckers, the creation of nurseries, disease control, fertilisers, and for the training of agricultural officers in methods of banana cultivation (Colonial Reports (St Lucia), 1953-54 and 1959-60; CO 1031/1558; CO 1031/1559; and CO 103/11563). In addition, a Price Adjustment Scheme was established to ensure that banana prices were relatively stable and high enough to encourage farmers, in the Windward Islands, as well as in Jamaica, to expand their production to satisfy growing consumer demand in the UK. It is palpable that once John van Geest had committed himself to ship and market all the bananas that the islands could produce, the UK government's whole approach changed. The government began to realise that the banana export trade could provide the means for economic development in the Windward Islands, thus reducing the amount of direct government financial assistance given to the region, while providing the UK with a valuable source of bananas.

This combination of private enterprise and government assistance led to a substantial increase in banana exports from the Windward Islands during the latter part of the 1950s. In 1954, total exports from the Windward Islands amounted to 19 700 tons, while by 1959, exports had reached 88 500 tons (Tripartite Banana Talks Report, July 1966, Annex One). As a consequence of the increase in exports a more integrated system of cooperation was needed between the islands to deal with all aspects of the trade, thus in 1958 the Windward Islands Banana Growers' Association (WINBAN) was established. The development of the Windward Islands banana export trade first by Antilles Products Limited, and then extended by John van Geest, was to prove a defining moment in the history of the UK banana trade, as it ended Elders and Fyffes' and Jamaica's dominance of the UK banana market.

Conclusion

The establishment of a banana export industry on the four British colonies of the Windward Islands was one that was dependent on both commercial endeavour and government support. The early attempt to establish the industry during the 1920s was constrained by the seemingly weak financial base of the Swift Banana Company, and the poor conditions that existed on St Lucia for banana cultivation, a problem that the colonial authorities did little to mitigate. However; it is important to recognise that the process of establishing a banana export trade has always been based on learning from past experience. Thus, when attempts were made to resurrect the banana export trade on the islands in the 1930s, there was a realisation from both the commercial and government interests that a degree of cooperation was needed if the endeavour was to take off. The development of a banana export industry on the islands in the years prior to the Second World War proved to be quite successful, but the continuing problems of disease, and the wariness inherent in the relationship between an American owned company, and four British colonies, held back production.

The beginnings of the modern Windward Islands banana export trade again were rather inauspicious. The problems of the past had made the colonial authorities sceptical of the potential of re-establishing a significant banana export trade on the islands, and therefore for a substantial period the Antilles Products company struggled to make any significant headway. Indeed, despite the transformation that was eventually to be seen in the agricultural make-up of the islands, the colonial authorities were slow to appreciate the possibilities of a banana export trade, and if the private interests had not been so persistent in their undertakings, the important role these islands' bananas have since played in the international economy may never have been realised.

Windward Islands banana exports 1934-1959

(Thousand Stems) Conversions: 74.6 stems = 1 Long Ton = 1.0160 Tonnes

	Dominica	St Lucia	St Vincent	Grenada	Total
1934	33.0	18.4	1.0	16.0	68.4
1935	63.0	60.4	5.8	53.0	182.2
1936		108.6	35.6	155.7	
1937		111.0	65.2	151.6	
1938	140.0	100.7	58.3	106.3	405.3
1939			39.5	108.3	
1940				84.6	
1941	70.0	58.0	-	70.0	198.0
1942	18.0	2.2	-	20.0	40.2
1943	4.0	0.1	-	13.0	17.1
1944	4.0	-	-	8.0	12.0
1945	4.0	0.1	-	3.0	7.1
1946	4.0	0.1	-	4.0	8.1
1947	7.0	1.5	-	10.0	18.5
1948	15.0	2.0	-	16.0	33.0
1949	121.0	0.1	-	18.0	139.1
1950	350.0	2.4	-	23.0	375.4
1951	517.0	20.1	-	14.0	551.1
1952	857.0	36.0	-	24.0	917.0
1953	1135.0	143.0	5.0	30.0	1313.0
1954	1360.0	306.0	27.0	109.0	1802.0
1955	1335.0	456.0	106.0	92.0	1989.0
1956	1803.0	795.0	341.0	67.0	3006.0
1957	1398.0	974.0	1207.0	569.0	4148.0
1958	1683.0	1150.0	1538.0	948.0	5319.0
1959	2049.0	2514.0	2138.0	1155.0	7856.0

Sources: Colonial Reports; Reports on the Agricultural Departments; McFarlane, 1964.

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