



Intra-ACP APP Caribbean Action

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PRAEDIAL LARCENY : the Domino Effect



Cattle tagged for tracking to prevent praedial larceny (Kevin Francis DSP Jamaica)

It is not uncommon for a complete truckload of goats or an entire field of pineapples to be stolen, or a pot of fish at sea to be harvested by praedial larcenists. Available statistics show that commercial crop farmers frequently lose more than 35% of their harvest and from time to time the entire harvest.

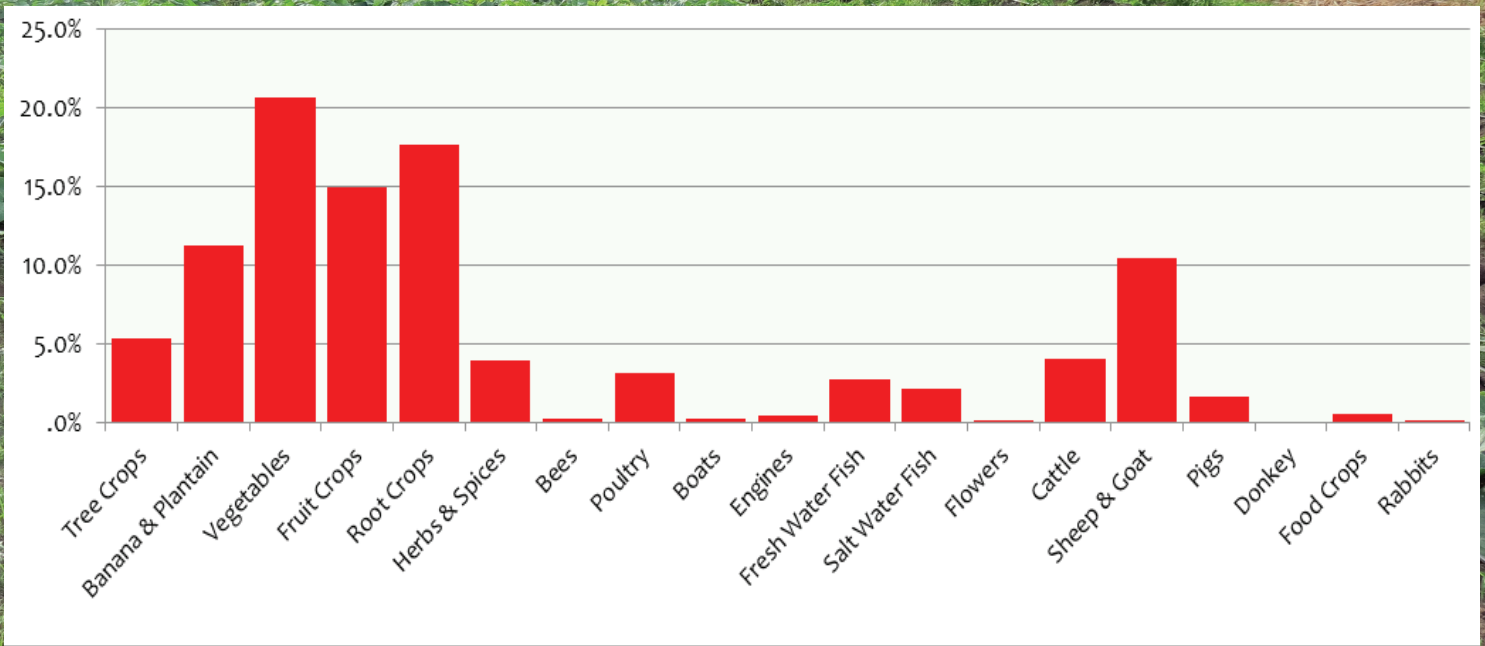
Kevin Francis, Deputy Superintendent of Police in Jamaica, agrees and observes that intelligence exists which shows that criminal elements are trading meat and other agricultural assets for guns across international borders and that proceeds from sale of stolen agricultural products are being used to finance criminal organizations. These facts highlight the truly serious nature of praedial larceny.

Being a farmer in the Caribbean is an important profession that contributes to the natural environment, health, social and economic well-being of a community and country. But it isn't an easy one! There are many challenges, roadblocks and unexpected events that present themselves on the road to success for an agricultural entrepreneur and his or her enterprise in the Region. Praedial larceny, which is the theft of agricultural produce or livestock from an entity, notably a farm, or during transport, is one of them.

In her 2010 report, 'Analysis of the State of Praedial Larceny in Member States of CARICOM', Dr. Barbara Graham reported that on average, 82% of farmers and fisherfolk are affected by

this crime in the Caribbean. Conservatively, praedial larceny results in the loss of US\$ 321 million dollars annually, or an estimated 17.9 % of regional agriculture output. The numbers alone are staggering and they don't even take into account "the future loss to agricultural productivity as high quality genetic material (livestock breeds and crop varieties) are stolen from breeding and experimental stations, respectively" or "the potential public health consequences and subsequent industry consequences when un-certified crops or livestock meats are integrated into the domestic food chain."

Praedial Larceny has a domino effect on society as a whole.



Most frequently stolen commodities (Analysis of the State of Praedial Larceny in Member States of CARICOM, 2010)

Praedial Larceny has a domino effect on society as a whole. As observed in the recent APP-supported Ministry of Agriculture Lands Fisheries, Forestry & the Environment (MALFFE) Grenada National Agricultural Plan, “praedial larceny proliferation is primarily driven by the increased demand for supplies in the domestic fresh food chains, where there are many opportunities for praedial activities to become a profitable business with its own set of dynamics in agriculture food distribution”.

Small and petty thieves, who have organized systems for theft and disposal of food, have become a part of what now appears to be a national system. Not to mention the loss of employment and production as farmers reduce output or leave the sector altogether due to the strain that this crime, combined with other agricultural challenges, puts on their incomes and consequently profits and livelihood. As such, what was once considered a petty crime, committed to put food on the table, has now become a major offence, impacting entire communities.

The first domino to feel the effect of praedial larceny is the primary producer, farmer and fisherfolk. To an extent, these producers in the Caribbean had learned to live with this crime as part of their business. In the past, unemployment and poverty had been the main drivers behind praedial larceny and the primary producer seemed willing to accept some losses. However, now that this crime has become ‘big business’ and is causing a greater threat to their livelihood, concern is becoming more evident.

Despite the significant impact of this crime, official statistics on the value of loss sustained by the farming community from praedial larceny are not always readily available. From an individual country perspective, it is estimated that Trinidad and Tobago suffered US\$11.3 million in losses over a six-month period in 2011 and Jamaica loses roughly US\$55 million annually. In developing their 2015-2030 National Agricultural Plan, the Grenada MALFFE indicated that praedial larceny continues to be an ‘intractable problem for the agriculture sector and threatens to erode farmers’ confidence in the sector resulting in reduced investments and consequently reduced output’. According to the MALFFE, an estimated 20 – 25% of national production is siphoned off by praedial activities. In the recently drafted, APP-supported Agricultural Policy and Action Plan, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), Commonwealth of Dominica, confirmed that there is evidence that some of the reported cases reached the Magistrate’s court. According to records from that country’s Police Force, an average of 84 cases of theft of agricultural crops and livestock were reported annually, between 2012 and 2015.

Perhaps if you are not a producer though, the full impact of this crime is hard to understand. Imagine that you have spent months working on an assignment at your own job. You will only get paid if you deliver the final product and so, you have tackled bureaucracy to secure funding, dealt with staffing issues, fixed technology glitches and implemented your disaster recovery plan to compensate for the unexpected tropical storm that interrupted your project.

Finally, after many late nights and personal sacrifice, your project is ready to deliver. You pay your staff, out of your own pocket, and go to sleep that night, ready to present the finished product in the morning. Only the next morning, you wake up to find that the entire realm of your work has been taken and presented by another company, who now reaps what should be the fruits and benefits of your time and hard work.

This is what it is like to be a victim of praedial larceny.

Sadly, these realities are leading circumstances that are making production activities even more difficult than they already are with challenges ranging from climate change to import competition. There are reports of abandoned crop and fish farms, and some farmers choosing to switch to less vulnerable crop types in order to improve their chances at some level of profitability. The financial risk, as well as the increasing use of violence in these crimes, have become major deterrents for producers to invest any more of their time and or money in agriculture.

“Farmers have reduced the acreage of their farms due to this crime”, says Dr. Graham. “Agriculture stakeholders in primary production might not be able to sustain or improve their operations at the current level of risk associated with praedial larceny”. This is where the next domino begins to fall. If farmers even just reduce acreage as a result of this crime, it means they will also decrease their number of employees. According to statista.com, in 2011 approximately 16% percent of employees in the Caribbean were working in the agricultural sector. The situation seems to have gotten much worse in 2016! Already, due to a variety of factors, agricultural employment in the Caribbean has fallen more than 10% in the last decade. This has impacted incomes and living standards, especially in rural areas. Consequently, it has led to an increase in rural poverty and the migration to urban locations in many places across the Caribbean.



Livestock at Saint Lucia farm. (Photo: Caribbean Associates Inc.)

Additionally, as production rates go down, the cost of food in the Region continues to rise, as well as the quantity of imports. The presence of strong, efficient and production oriented agricultural businesses in a country reduces foreign currency expenditure and could have an impact on reducing food costs by providing increased amounts of local products at national markets.

From health impacts, to income for local markets and transportation agencies in the Region, as well as an increase in organized crime, the influence of praedial larceny is far reaching as more dominoes fall. The Dominica MAF draft National Agriculture Policy and Plan echoed the conclusions in the sector, “that the negative impacts on the farmers and the consequential loss of interest or departure from the sector will continue unless urgent and effective measures are employed to deter potential thieves.”

The Analysis of the State of Praedial Larceny in Member States of CARICOM report recommended that countries must give credence to the seriousness of the crime of praedial larceny within its laws, as well as include tighter measures of enforcement and appropriateness of penalties. It emphasised the need for these measures to be realised over the short to medium term, and that they are executed in a manner that will contribute to acceptable, tolerable levels of praedial larceny over the longer term. Specifically, the report advocated for:

1. Employment generation projects in rural communities to lessen poverty and therefore reduce occurrences of praedial larceny.
2. Capacity building training for rural communities, focusing on young people in particular, to build skills for employability.
3. Country-by-country review of legislation to ensure that consequences are commensurate with the crime, including stiffer penalties and fines.
4. Increased awareness of new technologies for traceability, surveillance and deterrence, including electronic fences using solar power, DNA paints, cellphone apps and more.
5. Promotion of investment and incentives in technologies to prevent praedial larceny.
6. Capacity building for police constables in building a body of incontrovertible evidence, and empowerment of law enforcement officers.
7. Sharing of best practices among countries to build the best prevention programme possible, including information on technology being used in Suriname for livestock traceability once the project is completed and results obtained.
8. Promotion of Inter-ministerial dialogue.

Partnership with the protective services and the judiciary are particularly key in the fight against praedial larceny. In its draft Grenada National Agriculture 2015-2030, the MALFFE confirmed that a Praedial Larceny Prevention Programme was developed to examine all aspects of the value chain from farm to end user, to address the challenges in a holistic manner. Of importance, is that the implementation of this Programme will continue to be a joint effort between the Ministry, the Police, the Judiciary, Farmers and other stakeholders.

These consequences are significant in the eyes of agricultural development organisations. The Caribbean Action under the APP seeks to bring many organisations together to address agricultural issues with the goal of reducing poverty and increasing food and nutrition security. In this quest, it has recognized the significance of this crime and its impact on the agricultural and national economy in the Region. Strengthened policy has been identified as an important part of the solution. Accordingly, the APP is encouraging discussion and providing platforms for planners to exchange experiences and solutions to this and other critical problems in order to improve national and, where possible, to have harmonised regional policies and plans.

In his presentation to the APP's 9th Regional Planners Forum on Agriculture, in Trinidad in June 2016, DSP Francis spoke of the specific work being done in Jamaica to address praedial larceny. He said that farmers have shared their views on the problem. They listed dissatisfaction with the police; insufficient fines; corruption; improper storage facilities; and poor transportation methods for goods that are ready for market, as the main sources of the problem. To address this aspect of the problem, police use surveillance and observation, as well as the gathering of incontrovertible evidence to increase the chances of conviction. Some of the strategies employed to address these concerns include traceability, public awareness and education, legislative amendments, increased penalties, enforcement and compliance, as well as institutional strengthening. Performance indicators from Jamaica show promise, with significant gains in the conviction rate which is now over 90%.

These results are encouraging but clearly, more must be done to implement identical or similar measures across the Region to help

protect this important social and economic sector from the far-reaching impacts of praedial larceny. Small-holder farmers, who cultivate the majority of farms in the Caribbean, are a major focus of the APP. These are the farmers that are hardest hit by the crime of praedial larceny and for this reason it is viewed by the APP as an important issue to keep in front of Governments, policy makers, agricultural planners and development institutions.

Managing this blight is as critical to developing a vibrant and diverse farm sector as the attention being heaped on other elements that raise the level of risks in an industry already so vulnerable to natural hazards, such as, pests and diseases, variable weather and the effects of climate change. Ministry of Agriculture Planners at the APP's 9th Regional Planners Forum were encouraged to revisit the 2010 Graham study and review and seek their Governments' action to implement the recommendations which have not yet been implemented, including tougher measures on the end users and accomplices who consistently purchase stolen goods.



Evidence of praedial larceny in Jamaica (DSP Kevin Francis, Jamaica)

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