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Marketing Intelligence Unit Info Unit

By the Information Unit of the Ministry of Trade and Agriculture.

Beginning this month in St. Vincent, a new organization that will attempt to match produce buyers to farmers has begun operations.

Known as the "Marketing Intelligence Unit", this organization will survey prices of various produce on a weekly basis, and will provide farmers with a list of what is selling for how much. The same list will provide consumers with a list of what is available at what price.

Backed by both the Ministry of Trade and Agriculture and the Marketing Corporation, the unit is coordinated by Pete Helgren a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Helgren explained that the unit will do several things:

"Firstly, we're looking to give the farmer the best possible price for his produce. Right now he doesn't plant with any particular market in mind and he's never really sure of what kind of price he's gonna get.

On the consumer end the unit is going to help by reducing gluts and shortages so that consumers can count on a constant price throughout the year. That way the consumer

isn't paying \$2 for tomatoes now and then \$5 in August."

Helgren conducts his surveys by going through groceries and Market Square, writing down prices as he goes. He creates a composite for the week, that can be compared to other weeks.

Some of the produce survey include string beans, cabbage, cucumber and tomato. The unit's first report, released last Friday — (Feb. 10) after only the second survey was already hinting at the potential of the unit as a disseminator of marketing information.

That report, for example, could show that the price of string beans had increased from \$1.75 to \$2 in just one week but that the prices of many other goods dropped slightly.

Cabbage dropped from \$2.17 to \$2.10; cucumbers from \$1.37 to \$1.10; and egg plant from \$1.38 to \$1.

The report was researched enough to claim that tomatoes and sweet peppers are the best buys of the week, and could forecast that prices this week should, "Remain steady to slightly lower, the exception being cucumbers, which were relatively scarce on Thursdays."

The Ministry of Agriculture has agreed to

run the report once a week on its "Farmer's Diary" radio program on RSVG 705 at 6:10 a.m. as one means of promoting the unit.

Helgren said there has been a fairly good reaction to him in Market Square, with most people being helpful. But he added some people "are a little suspicious of me going around and collecting prices all morning long."

His presence will be to their advantage, he tells them, because over time his work will be able to help market-keepers find — more ready sources of produce at better prices.

Currently the unit is collecting only retail prices, but in the near future it hopes to collect wholesale prices, production quantities and export market demand figures. Helgren hopes all that information will help farmers, traders and consumers with buying and selling fresh produce.

Helgren gives credit for originally proposing the unit to Elizabeth Stevens, a former Peace Corps Volunteer, who worked in the Ministry's Information Unit until last December, when she left to attend college in Costa Rica.

"This will basically bring more order to the market," Helgren predicted.