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New Report Predicts Pricing Trends

BY HENDRICKS

Vegetable prices around Market Square in Kingstown generally fell during February due to unseasonable rains, according to the February report of the St. Vincent Marketing Intelligence Unit.

The report, the first of its kind, was based on similar weekly reports and surveys conducted by the Unit. The Unit hopes to establish these reports as a routine.

The report states that the market in February was "plentiful in supplies of most vegetables, especially cabbage, carrots and tomatoes", and it remarked that the quality of the produce is currently quite high.

For example, the report noted that the price of tomatoes fell from \$2.30 per pound to \$1.50 per pound, cabbage from \$2.17 to \$1.66, and carrots from \$1.83 to \$1.18.

Based on those markets trends, the report predicts that supplies will remain high, and therefore prices low, through at least mid-March. It expects prices to begin rising thereabouts as the dry season kicks into gear.

The exceptions to the "large supply, low price" rule of the month were cucumbers and okra. The surveys showed that cucumbers increased in price from \$1.37 to \$1.75 during the month, and okra was often so scarce there wasn't enough around to survey.

The author of the report, Peter Helgren, marketing Intelligence Officer, spends a fair amount of pages explaining what the Unit is all about, its origins and its goals. As the Unit just began operation in late January, Helgren has

spent much energy in rallying support for the unit's activities among the merchants, farmers and consumers in Market Square.

Helgren notes in the report that, "The goal of the Unit is to promote and encourage the orderly development of the fresh produce market by providing up to date information on wholesale and resale prices, production information and export quantities." Though he also admits that at present only resale prices are collected due to the small size of the Unit's staff.

The report sets April as a goal for publishing weekly wholesale prices.

June as a goal for weekly export figures and hopes to eventually provide information on crop varieties.

Under a section of the report titled, "How to use the information"; Helgren wrote, "By observing trends and changes in the market prices the farmer can make better decisions about planting and harvesting produce." In other words, farmers will be able to plan their crops around what consumers are paying the most for at given times of the year.

In turn, the report predicts consumers will have a more constant supply of produce and fewer gluts and shortages.

The report is not all sweetness and sunshine however. It states that prices on ground crops, like yams and potatoes, and tree crops, like oranges and mangoes, are not available, because those crops are traditionally sold

by the heaps, making it difficult to determine price per pound.

"Until a method is found to determine price per pound, the report states, "those crops will have either missing or incomplete price information."

And the report attempts to distance the Unit from established marketing organizations by stating, "It is not a government

dominated Unit," and by noting that the Marketing Corporation provides only office space and some funds.

"It is for the people and relies on the people for its success," the report says of the unit. "The success or failure depends upon the willingness of farmers, traders and vendors to cooperate and unify in their effort to bring order to a disorderly market."