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**GROWING AND HANDLING
DRY BULB ONION
IN THE CARIBBEAN**



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FOREWORD

The Common or Dry Bulb Onion (*Allium cepa* L.) is one of the few bulb crops used for food. It is popular as a vegetable, but is used more often as a seasoning. Onion is second only to tomato in world vegetable production and demand is generally inelastic.

In the Caribbean, over 8,000 tonnes of onions are imported annually at a cost of approximately EC\$11 million mainly from Netherlands, USA and Spain. Foreign exchange savings through import substitution is a priority for Caribbean governments, and onion shows potential for this purpose.

Onion is currently being produced in Antigua, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts, Nevis and St Vincent. Research is aimed at increasing self-sufficiency in onions in these countries. While intra-regional exports could also be considered at certain periods of the year particularly when the world market price for onions is high, it is doubtful whether extra-regional exports would be feasible.

The major constraints to achieving self-sufficiency have been seasonality of production, limited availability of water for irrigation in some countries, poor shelf-life of most short-day varieties and a host of pests and diseases which make onion a "high risk" crop for growers in the Caribbean.

The scale on which onion is grown varies from one country to another eg. in Montserrat, production is characterised by small plots 0.05-0.1 ha (0.1- 0.2 ac) in area, while in Barbados the crop is grown on a larger scale i.e 1-5 ha (2.5-12 ac) mainly by sugar cane farmers and specialist vegetable producers, but a few small farmers have started production during recent years. The production system varies from totally manual in St Vincent to partly mechanised in St Kitts to nearly fully mechanised (except for the harvesting operation) in Barbados.

Although the climatic conditions within the Caribbean region are relatively uniform, onions are sensitive to small environmental changes, even at a particular site from year to year, and varietal performance may vary slightly from country to country. It is therefore important to note that when new varieties are being introduced, they should be tested in small plots alongside proven varieties over at least two seasons before acreages are increased.

This bulletin seeks to bring together information gathered from a number of sources, including farmer experience over the past two decades to provide both large and small scale onion growers in the Caribbean with comprehensive production and post-harvest recommendations which are relevant to the prevailing environmental and economic conditions. The bulletin is divided into three sections:

Section I covers detailed recommendations for the production of the onion crop.

Section II describes the major aspects of post-harvest management of onion bulbs.

Section III gives general information on the maintenance of equipment and on pest and disease control methods.

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