

# A model for postharvest extension in the Caribbean

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Most farmers sell at farm gate, choosing not to engage in any significant way activities after harvesting. Since tropical crops are highly perishable, losses in the region have been consistently high. Farmers can significantly improve their incomes if they seek to reduce such losses. To achieve this, farmers as well as others involved in postharvest activities must be empowered with the latest technical knowledge and modern skills. The special characteristics of those involved in further activities along the value chain as well as the nature of postharvest technologies demand an extension approach that is different from the traditional methods used to transfer production technologies. A model that seeks to promote extension for categories of clients based on the technical expertise available is proposed. When combined with the concept of clustering i.e., groups of farmers, processors, marketers, or exporters working with the same or similar commodities, this approach can be more effective. A system of mentoring and training to build extension staff capabilities is incorporated in the model for sustainability. Teaching activities based on the principles of experiential learning must have a stronger focus; discovery based activities in which learners are involved in action and reflection can bring about higher quality and more sustained learning. Such an approach, along with some of the traditional lecture/demonstrations is proposed. For this model of extension to be successful, it must be supported with increased training at all levels; tertiary level training for the development of postharvest Subject Matter Specialists and diploma level training to provide skilled technicians. Recommendations include curricula revision at all levels and both national and regional coordinated approaches for postharvest development in the Caribbean.