

**Address by
The Hon. Roger Clarke
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries
JIFSAN Train-the-Trainer Programme in Good Agricultural Practices
Knutsford Court Hotel, Blue Mountain Suite
Monday, February 18, 2013**

Salutations...

Ladies and Gentlemen, the government of Jamaica is committed to providing sufficient quantities of safe and nutritious food for our people and to compete in an increasingly competitive global market. It is paramount that all of us understand international food safety quality management systems, such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), among others that are germane to our food security and capacity to trade.

The issue of food security is one of the main pillars of the government's thrust at economical growth and development. This is clearly stated in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries' food and nutrition security policy. The availability of safe food not only improves the health of our people, but is a basic human right.

It is estimated by the Center for Disease Control that each year in the United States, food-borne contaminants cause approximately 9.4 million

food-borne illnesses, 56,000 hospitalizations and 1,350 deaths and against this background, and to protect human health, President Obama on January 4, 2011 signed into law, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). The FSMA falls within the purview of the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) whose mission it is to protect public health by ensuring that the United States food supply is safe, secure, sanitary, wholesome and properly labeled.

The FSMA, among other things aims to ensure that the United States food supply is safe by shifting the focus of Federal Inspectors from responding to contamination, to **prevention**. Thus, there will be increased frequency of inspections, expanded records access, mandatory recall and all exporters of food to the United States must demonstrate that their food is safe and are required to be FDA registered and must be able to determine the source of their commodities (traceability).

While we have been able to successfully export conch to the European Union (EU) and were able to acquire and maintain EurepGap/GlobalGap certification for our exporters of banana to the EU, in Jamaica, food safety is challenged on several fronts.

Firstly, many of our fresh export facilities are not HACCP certified and there is sufficient documentation with respect to Good Manufacturing Practices and Sanitation Standard Operation Procedures (SSOPs).

At the farm level, there is a lack of proper record keeping. Additionally, while the true measure of microbial hazards, and the food-borne illnesses they cause are not known, they are becoming increasingly important for public health.

And with respect to chemical hazards, we will recall that in 2012, several yam shipments were detained/rejected for pesticide levels exceeding the maximum residue levels (MRL's) set by the United States authorities. This represented a loss of over Ja \$41m to several of our exporters.

Ladies and gentlemen, the signing into law of the new Food Safety Modernization Act is perceived by some to be “high-handed and barriers to trade”. I wish to disabuse anyone of these thoughts, since the reality of the situation is that the USA itself suffers from several million food-borne illness, thousands of hospitalizations and deaths annually caused by food-borne contaminants – and thus to protect human health, the Food Safety Modernization Act, became law.

In any event ladies and gentlemen, the USA is our largest and closest market and the American consumers, presents real opportunities for our food products as they have a sizeable income.

It is to be noted that in 2011, Jamaica's exports of agricultural products (fresh and processed foods) to the USA, totaled 36.7 million kg, at a value of US\$76.6m (Ja\$6.6 billion) (STATIN) and every effort must be made to avert any fallout in the agricultural sector and by extension, the national economy.

To this end, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries established in 2011 a Food Safety Modernization Act Committee, and to date, several important initiatives have been undertaken. These include:

- 5,000 farmers **sensitized** about food safety and requirements of the new FDA FSMA Act and local food safety standards.
- Targeted groups of 200 farmers and 20 fresh produce exporters **trained** in personal hygiene (Food Handling Clinic, administered by the Ministry of Health), safe and effective use of pesticides and Good Agricultural Practices for targeted crops (yam, dasheen, hot pepper, pumpkin and callaloo).

- Four farm clusters – Walkerswood, St. Ann, Sheffield, Westmoreland, Springfield, St. Thomas and Askenish, Hanover, have been earmarked and work is underway for improved on-farm sanitary infrastructure (toilets, pesticide storage, hand-washing stations and field sheds).
- Contracts for infrastructure rehabilitation (sanitary conveniences and electrical repairs) to the value of \$18.4m at the Agricultural Marketing Complex (AMC) have been awarded. This is the start of a 3-year plan for the renovation of the AMC complex to meet international food safety standards.

I must remind us, that in February, 2012, the FDA conducted inspection of three of our export facilities and none were issued with an FDA-483 (inspectional observation form), indicating that they had passed the inspection. We have been notified of additional FDA inspections for this year and the Ministry's FSMA committee is doing its part to assist exporters in being compliant.

The work of the committee has been substantially buttressed by the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) who has partnered with the Ministry in implementing a National Food Safety Compliance for the

Export Market Pilot Project, valued at Jamaican forty eight million, nine hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars (\$48,968,000.00).

The project involves (inter-alia) “capacity building and institutional strengthening towards the US Food and Drug Administration Food Safety Modernization Act.

This JIFSAN (Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition), Train-the-Trainer programme in Good Agricultural Practices, is itself joint between the Ministry and JSIF and aims to improve the competence of Ministry and RADA officers.

I am pleased to note that the FSMA committee and JSIF have widened the target audience for the training and thus, among the 50 participants to be trained, individuals will comprise farmers, exporters, Food Storage and Infestation Division, Bureau of Standards, Ministry of Health, Pesticides Control Authority and the Scientific Research Council. This broad participation is indeed welcomed and augers well for Jamaica, as we seek to improve our food management systems.

Ladies and Gentlemen, food safety is everybody’s responsibility and I wish to thank our several partners who are working with the Ministry.

Firstly, we recognize the FSMA National Task Force, with Secretariat at the Bureau of Standards; they are charged with the responsibility for the coordination of activities which will ensure Jamaica's preparedness to satisfy the United States Food and Drug Administration requirements. Mention must also be made of our collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Jamaica Exporters Association who have provided/facilitated relevant training programmes.

The Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture is acknowledged wholeheartedly as they continue to assist us in development of our crop, livestock and apiculture GAPs and Good Manufacturing Practices Manuals.

To the Food and Agriculture Organization, profound appreciation to the many programmes they implement for farmers to comprehend GAPs.

Finally, I wish to publicly request the continued support of our USDA and FDA representatives in enhancing our food safety capacity. You will recall that under Section 305 of the new FSMA, there is a regulation which speaks to "Building Food Safety Capacity of Foreign Governments" and we wish to highlight to you that immediately we are available for such assistance.

Specifically and following on the work of the FSMA committee, several pesticides for the control of yam post-harvest diseases have been evaluated. A number have proved efficacious, but are not approved by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and in this regard, we will be soliciting your assistance as we make representation to the EPA for having other pesticide options, besides Botran which is the only chemical approved to date.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I am confident that the JIFSAN Train-the-Trainer Programme in good agricultural practices will be of significant benefit to Jamaica in improving the quality and food safety of both primary agriculture and value-added products and with all of us working together, **our shared goal of assuring food safety ensuring global competitiveness will be realized.**

Roger Clarke
Minister

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