

Ministry Paper /2015
Food Security Initiatives

1.0 Purpose

The matter for tabling is to provide an update on the Food Security Initiatives being undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

2.0 Background

The need for food security has emerged as a national priority, as global economic and environmental forces combine to threaten food supply and prices. In an effort to boost national agricultural production, the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries has been promoting the “*Eat What We Grow ...Grow What We Eat*” concept to encourage consumers to support more locally grown foods and farmers to produce more of what we consume. It is important to note that Jamaica spends just under US \$1 Billion each year on food importation. In this regard, the Ministry has implemented several strategies to reduce the food import bill. One such strategy being employed is the strategy of import substitution, where there is a deliberate effort to increase production of certain crops. Three (3) such import substitution programmes include the following:

- National Irish Potato Programme;
- Onion Production Programme; and
- Backyard Chicken Rearing Programme

The Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) which is the extension arm of the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, is the agency charged with the responsibility of providing technical assistance to farmers and the monitoring and reporting of activities under these programmes.

3.0 The Irish Potato Programme

Current Situation

Jamaicans consume some 15 million kg. of Irish Potato on an annual basis. The Irish Potato Programme is geared towards achieving 100% of the national demand by 2015. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MOAF) has been instrumental in leading this effort toward 100% import substitution. This initiative requires increased production and improved productivity, along with unified efforts of all key players in the agriculture sector including farmers, buyers, extension personnel and researchers. Access to high quality seeds, provision of high quality extension support, farmers' capacity building through training, use of best crop and pest management practices and market linkages are indispensable factors for the sustainable development of the Irish Potato industry.

Achievements

Since the initiation of the programme in 2009, the level of self-sufficiency in fresh Irish Potato has moved steadily from 32 % in 2008 to approximately 90 % in 2014, the highest level of import substitution since the programme started. During the 2013-2014 planting seasons, fall to spring some 912 hectares of Irish Potato were established by 2,494 farmers, yielding 10 million kg to date in all the major growing areas of Jamaica including Guys Hill belt, Christiana belt and other areas.

A special component of the programme targeted youths up to 35 years old and women that showed major interest, which resulted in 180 participants receiving grant assistance to plant some 40 hectares, yielding some 454,000 kg. Capacity building of the farmers was also a priority and some 2,500 participants were trained in various aspects of Irish Potato production, post-harvest management and group dynamics exercise. The 2014-2015 programme is expected to target some 1,210 hectares (fall, spring, summer crops) to include approximately 2,813 farmers. To date, 501 hectares of Irish Potato has been planted to include the youth and women component with a total of 1,390 farmers.

With a total of 912 hectares established during the 2013- 2014 period yielding some 10 million kg (22,046,228 lbs) of potatoes, the estimated dollar value to the economy calculated at an average farm gate price of J\$40 per lb. would be J\$881,849,120. The current Irish Potato Expansion Programme is expected to assist some 4,000 farmers with the assumption that each farmer would support a household of 5 persons. This would therefore mean a total number of 20,000 persons directly benefitting across Jamaica. In addition, there is an estimated 700 vendors and some 250 transport operators that benefit from the production. Therefore the total impact would be approximately 21,000 persons.

4.0 The Onion Production Programme

Current Situation

Onion is of economic importance in Jamaica. The condiment is required in the fresh market as well as the agro- industry. Approximately 10 million kg of onion are consumed in Jamaica annually. The Onion Production Programme is geared towards facilitating the sustainable development of the onion sub-sector, thereby reducing permanent dependency on imports, and achieving self-sufficiency in onion production.

The programme is managed by a Technical Working Group which comprises of representatives from various Divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries (MOAF). The group ensures that participating farmers are trained in the various aspects of onion production. Areas of focus include site selection, land preparation, pest and disease control, crop establishment, plant nutrition, irrigation, post-harvest practices, and marketing. The programme which is funded through a combination of grants, loans and private investments is also supported by buyers who enter into marketing contracts with the farmers.

Achievements

Under the onion programme, production is carefully monitored in an effort to prevent any glut that would result from importation. The Agro- Parks are playing a critical role in this effort in that they have proper infrastructure in place to include irrigation in the parishes of St. Thomas

(Yallahs, Plantain Garden River) St. Catherine (Amity Hall) and Clarendon (Ebony Park). Other traditional onion production areas throughout the island have also been targeted. The objective of the programme is to produce 40% of Jamaica's consumption by 2016/2017 and in ensuing years, an increased ability to meet local demand by one hundred (100%).

Various strategies have been employed not only to increase production but productivity as well. Some of these strategies include the provision of reliable irrigation where possible, proper weed management by preparing the land far in advance to minimize weed growth and the use of selective herbicides, precision planting by using mechanical planters, proper nutrition by ensuring soil analysis is carried out and encourage the utilization of high yielding seeds.

There has been great enthusiasm on the part of those involved in the programme and the possibilities which it offers. Farmers in the Yallahs area in particular, have increased their production by over one hundred percent (100%); moving from 10 ha. in 2013/2014 to 21.3 ha. in 2014/2015. For the 2014/2015 period, a total of 150 hectares of onion was targeted. Of this amount a total of 65.3 hectares has been established to date to include some 165 farmers. A youth and women component is proposed for the 2015/2016 period.

With a total of 69.2 hectares established in 2014 yielding some 691,300 kg of onions, it is estimated dollar value to the economy calculated at an average farm gate price of J\$ 50 per lb. would be J\$ 34,565,000.

5.0 Backyard Poultry Rearing

Current Situation

It is important to note that backyard poultry rearing is one of the most effective means of poverty alleviation. This form of production, which is an urban/rural practice, is usually undertaken by small holders and housewives to supplement their protein needs and overall income. It also adds significantly to the productivity of the agricultural sector and the sustainable livelihoods of farm families. RADA usually supports backyard poultry farmers through the Production Incentive Programme under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF).

Achievements

Backyard poultry rearing contributes significantly to the supply of poultry meat in Jamaica. Local poultry production in 2014 stood at 109.8 million kg, with the average contribution of non-contract farmers being 40%, of which backyard poultry farmers form a part. Over the last 3 years a total of \$132.5 M has been allotted under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to undertake agricultural projects. Projects undertaken to assist farmers are usually for both livestock and crop production with backyard poultry rearing being the most common. This has benefitted an estimated 20,000 farmers.

The MOAF envisages that if the Government invests J\$100M in Backyard Chicken Rearing, with an estimated 50 chickens per person the number of farmers impacted would be 7,927 and the amount of meat produced at 4 lbs per chicken would be 1,585,414 lbs. The estimated value to the economy is J\$293,301,625. Furthermore total impact to household with an estimated five (5) persons to a household would be approximately 40,000 persons.

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