

## Launching a new agricultural revolution

Agriculture, once the backbone of the Jamaican economy, has declined to the point where, today, it accounts for less than 6% of the economy. Yet, it employs 18% of the total labour force and is the sole means of livelihood for thousands of families in rural communities. As a result, incomes and living standards in rural areas are the lowest in Jamaica.

In the past, the agricultural sector enjoyed the benefit of preferential arrangements for its traditional export crops (sugar and bananas) and a protected domestic market for almost everything else. Our preferential arrangements are rapidly coming to an end and trade liberalization has opened up our domestic market to foreign imports.

The average farmer today, more than ever before, is struggling to survive. The rising cost of inputs, low productivity and depressed markets due to fierce competition spell disaster for the future of agriculture unless there are radical changes in our approach to the sector.

The most compelling challenges to agriculture are to raise the level of productivity through the use of technology and improved farming practices; and to provide better access to markets.

### **Our Pledge**

#### **9.1 Widescale application of technology to dramatically increase productivity**

- Aggressively promote the use of proven technology (e.g. green house, hydroponics, tissue culture etc.) to increase yield, improve quality and rationalize the use of scarce water.
- Provide training and technical support to ensure that farmers master the application of new technologies.
- Promote greater use of bio-technology through the National Research and Development Centre to improve the quality and marketability of farm produce.

## **9.2 Restoration of extension services**

Restore and expand agricultural extension services which have been severely depleted to ensure the effective transfer of technology and application of modern practices.

## **9.3 Improved pest and disease control**

Improve the capabilities for pest and disease control by stricter quarantine procedures and speedier detection and corrective practices.

## **9.4 Promotion of organic farming**

Provide technical and financial support for organic farming to exploit the growing international market for organically produced foods.

## **9.5 Promotion of exotic crops**

Promote the cultivation and export marketing of exotic crops including fruits, herbs and spice in a strategic programme integrated with the Brand Jamaica campaign.

## **9.6 Provision of refrigeration facilities**

Establish strategically located refrigeration facilities to extend the shelf life of farmers' produce and improve marketing possibilities.

## **9.7 Improved market intelligence**

Improve the gathering and timely dissemination of marketing information to provide farmers with the best options for marketing their produce

## **9.8 Improved selection, grading and packaging practices**

Provide training to farmers in proper selection, grading and packaging practices to more effectively synchronize farm production with market requirements.

## **9.9 Support for brokers**

Recognize the importance of brokers who serve as intermediaries between

the farmer and otherwise inaccessible markets. We will provide incentives for brokers to extend market reach and increase the demand for farmers' produce.

## **9.10 Incentives for agro-processors**

Provide incentives for agro-processors to extend the market for agricultural produce and provide greater predictability and price stability for farmers.

## **9.11 Affordable loans for farmers**

Increase the availability of low-interest loans to farmers through the PC Banks especially to ensure that they are able to meet the required capital investment to adopt new technologies.

## **9.12 Land titling process**

- Amend the Registration of Titles Act to simplify the registration of untitled land where the claimant has been in possession for a specified minimum period of time, ownership is not in dispute and can be confirmed by evidence.
- Establish Community Land Tribunals to consider applications for registration and, after adequate public notification, conduct hearings and, if satisfied that the right of ownership has been established, issue a Certificate of Ownership.
- Certificate of Ownership together with a surveyor's report and diagram would be sufficient to effect registration of title.

## **9.13 Irrigation expansion**

Improve existing and establish new irrigation schemes to increase the acreage of land available for high-productivity farming.

#### **9.14 Protection and strengthening of the livestock sector**

- Institute measures to protect and expand the livestock sector and improve productivity with a view to capturing a greater share of the domestic market.
- Provide the necessary protection to milk producers to mitigate the effects of subsidized imported milk solids.

#### **9.15 Expansion of aquaculture**

Expand the aquaculture industry, especially for the export market, and promote the production of new species to replicate the success achieved with the tilapia.

#### **9.16 Improved management of marine fishing**

Establish a comprehensive programme to improve the management of the marine fishing industry including:

- More vigilant efforts to stem illegal fishing in Jamaican waters.
- Careful monitoring of our fish population and stricter control measures to prevent over-fishing and the depletion of fish stock by regulating the size and weight of fish that can be harvested.
- Implementation of an environmental programme to stop the pollution of our sea water and the use of dynamite and chemicals to reap fish and reverse the damage being done to our fish nurseries and coral reefs.
- Provision of loans and training for fishers to equip them to operate beyond our coastal waters which are severely over-fished.
- Provision of safety gear, training and public education to ensure better standards of safety at sea.

- Improved refrigeration facilities at our major fishing beaches to preserve the catch to meet marketing cycles.
- Introduction of new, scientific methods for growing lobsters, shrimp, oysters, squid and other high-demand species under controlled conditions.
- Implementation of a programme to clean up and upgrade fishing beaches islandwide.

#### **9.17 Repositioning the sugar industry**

- Pursue, in the face of the drastic cuts in sugar prices being offered through our arrangements with the European Union, the divestment of government-owned sugar estates and factories with a view to ensuring the required capital investment and management to achieve world market competitiveness and/or the production of value-added cane derivatives such as ethanol and nutraceuticals.
- Utilize our allocation under the compensation fund being provided by the EU to enable cane farmers and sugar workers in those areas that may be dislocated by the divestment to enter alternative, high-productivity farming activities.

#### **9.18 Intensifying efforts to combat praedial larceny**

Reorganize, retrain, equip and redeploy District Constables to be a more effective force in combating praedial larceny.

