



Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture & Fisheries



Sectoral Presentation 2018

Hon. J.C. Hutchinson, CD, MP

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture & Fisheries

GORDON HOUSE

Tuesday, May 29, 2018



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by

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Mr. Speaker, having God in your boat doesn't mean you will not face any storm, but it means no storm can sink your boat. When you walk in faith, you will never walk alone.

Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a new wave of energy sweeping the agricultural sector in recent times. There are persons requesting lands to go into various agricultural enterprises, the likes of which, I have never seen before. These include both small farmers and large investors. With this heightened interest in agriculture, I say once again, we need to have a structured agricultural sector, starting from the base which is getting farmers organised into groups.

Registering with RADA

Mr. Speaker, before I get into my presentation, a question was asked about the registration of farmers and the member from North West Manchester was right. The requirement for the registration of farmers was totally outdated and not in sync with modern day agricultural practices. This has been changed and now an individual has to go to the Rural Agricultural Development Agency (RADA) office, apply to be registered as a farmer and if he is already cultivating, the extension officer will go and verify the land and have him registered immediately.

There are many persons just going into farming and therefore cannot be registered as a farmer. These persons would have to prepare the land for planting and have it verified by the extension officer who would then have the individual registered. They would then be eligible to get inputs from their Member of Parliament.

Those raising chickens will have to show the extension officer their chicken coop, which should be relatively secured from all predators. Then, they will be able to get assistance with chicken and chicken feed. These are some of the changes that have been made for the individuals.

Farmers' organisations with RADA must now have one meeting with a minimum of 15 persons, $\frac{3}{4}$ of whom must be registered farmers. They must send the minutes of the meeting, where their officers were elected, to the RADA office along with \$500 in order to be registered.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is seen by some as the bastard child of the economy. However, it is internationally recognised that for the economy to grow, agriculture has to grow. Over the years, agriculture has not been given the pride of place in order for it to achieve its full potential. First, there has to be a bipartisan agreement for the structural development of the agricultural sector. Data has shown that placing emphasis on agricultural organisations for the development of their agricultural enterprises has led to exponential growth in the sector. Having others determine the direction and output of these enterprises has, at all times, brought growth to a halt or even precipitated a decline in the sector.

A study by the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in collaboration with USAID outlined the structure to be adopted to bring about sustainable growth in our local Jamaican agricultural sector. Most developed countries have achieved growth as a result of a structured agricultural base with a central marketing and distribution complex as the hub.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture will now have to be taken more seriously by all stakeholders. Our farmers will now have to take farming as a business. Funds allocated to the sector have to be distributed in a non-partisan manner where there is accountability and transparency for all inputs. There are a number of initiatives that we are taking to enhance the creative minds of persons interested in being agricultural entrepreneurs.

School Gardens

Mr. Speaker, we are not only going to forge linkages with hotels, but we will be also forging linkages with the schools. We will once again be focusing on school gardens and a breakfast programme in schools. The Shadow Spokesman on Agriculture even pledged \$300,000 to the programme in his constituency.

Mr. Speaker, a committee consisting of representatives of the Jamaica 4-H Clubs, Social Development Commission, Parents Teachers Associations, RADA and business people will be established at every school with RADA spearheading the establishment of these committees as well as the school gardens. A member of the Jamaica 4-H Clubs will then chair the committee and provide oversight towards the sustainability of the project.

Breakfast Programme

The member from Central Kingston is well aware of the breakfast programme started a few years ago in N.W. St. Elizabeth. He even got a template of the structure of the programme. With the breakfast programme, farmers in the community would assist in providing most of the ingredients with the rest coming from the school gardens and persons in the value chain with products made from our locally produced raw material.

Mr. Speaker, emphasis is being placed on the breakfast programme because as the member from Central Kingston said, 40% of our students go to school without a proper breakfast. We have found that when provided with a nutritional breakfast attendance increases and there is a marked improvement in their grades.

There are 7 agro-processing incubators in 7 parishes throughout the island, **Mr. Speaker.** These incubators should be fully operational by the end of June this year and we will be encouraging the school committees to utilise these facilities to produce fruit juices and purée from the tons of fruits and vegetables that go to waste every year. We will then be able to provide our children with fruit juice instead of the ubiquitous bag juice.



Jheanell Wilson, Parish Social Services Home Economics Officer, Rural Agricultural Development Authority demonstrates operation of equipment at agro-processing facility in Santa Cruz, St. Elizabeth.

Farm and Crop Insurance

Mr. Speaker, we have developed the concept document outlining the mechanism for the off-budget financing of a crop loss and farm insurance programme. Stakeholder consultation has commenced and the second draft will be available soon.

Climate-Smart Agriculture

Mr. Speaker, 80% of the agricultural lands in Jamaica are in the hands of small farmers with holdings less than 10 acres. These small farmers are the ones who have been driving the agricultural sector over the years and bringing the growth to the economy. Most of these small farmers depend on rainfall for their cultivation.

We recognise the need for climate-smart agriculture, and so, we are encouraging our farm communities to identify areas where ponds can be dug and pond liners installed to harvest rainwater or even channel water from the roadways into these ponds where they can be gravity fed to farms below or pumped to higher elevations.

Mr. Speaker, plastic bottles are a nuisance to the environment. I have spoken to the principals of schools in my constituency to enter a hydroponic competition utilising these plastic bottles instead of the 4" PVC pipes. Crops such as cabbage, lettuce, scallion, thyme, etc., can be grown in these bottles. The school with the most creative concept will be used for demonstration and the concept used to promote backyard gardening. In the event of a hurricane, these stands can be moved and therefore secured.

The winning school will be rewarded.

Funding

Mr. Speaker, there are funds from the Productivity Incentive Programme (PIP) and the Community Development Fund (CDF) in the RADA account for some MPs which stay there for years and sometimes it is not until election time that the money is spent.

Our agricultural sector cannot grow in this manner. **Mr. Speaker,** as it relates to the Production Incentive Programme (PIP), some changes are going to be made to ensure the timely disbursement of the funds so farmers will have access to it in times of need.

The Agricultural Push Start Programme

Mr. Speaker, the Agricultural Push Start Programme has started and focuses mainly on youth and women, especially those who find it difficult to embark on their agricultural careers through their own means. It also assists those who wish to expand their agricultural activities. Irish potato and onion are the two pilot crops for this programme.

The Agricultural Push Start Programme is like a loan programme for those who do not have the finances to start their agricultural enterprise.

Under the Agricultural Push Start Programme, all the inputs are provided to the farmer up front. The farmer's input is his/ her sweat, equity in the form of land, preparation and other field duties, including planting, spraying, reaping, etc. The farmer will, in turn, sell to a designated purchaser who will make the deductions on behalf of the various input suppliers or RADA and pay the remaining amount to the farmers which is their profit. Newport Fersan and H&L Agro have agreed to be part of this programme.

Partnerships

Mr. Speaker, innovative initiatives such as the Push Start Programme rely on strong partnerships and I would like to salute all our partners and stakeholders both from the private as well as the public sector, who are contributing to the success of our endeavours. **Mr. Speaker**, I wish also to thank and congratulate our farmers' groups who are involved in our import substitution and other agricultural expansion programmes.

Mushrooms

In addition to Irish potato and onion, we are also now pursuing increased production in scotch bonnet peppers, strawberries and mushrooms. In fact, **Mr. Speaker**, just last Friday, I had the distinct pleasure of participating in PROPEL's Mushroom Stakeholders' Meeting held in Kendal, Manchester.



Mushroom stakeholders' meeting in Manchester on May 25.

Mr. Speaker, the prospects for mushroom cultivation are excellent. Jamaica stands to earn some \$41 million and provide much-needed jobs from the development of a vibrant mushroom industry.

Since 2007, there has been a steady increase in the importation of mushroom into Jamaica with concentrated consumption in the resort areas of the island.

Data for 2017 states that mushroom imports were 167,000 kg valued at US\$327,800 or approximately J\$41 million compared to 207,802 kg valued at US\$412,467 or some J\$51.56 million in 2016.

I wish to acknowledge and congratulate those groups who have recognised the huge potential in this market and are taking steps towards satisfying a portion of this market. Mushrooms are traded as fresh, canned and dried across the world and I have encouraged them to go even further into the value chain, producing other products such as:

- Mushroom seasonings;
- Medicinal mushroom products;
- Snacks- biscuit, chips, candy, etc.;
- Powered mushroom; and
- Cosmetics.

Farm Roads

Mr. Speaker, there are large acreages of Government land that are not being used because of the lack of access roads or poor road infrastructure. Most of these lands are productive agricultural lands situated in the major producing parishes.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is the good Lord's intervention that the two persons now in charge of the agriculture portfolio are from the two major agricultural producing parishes in the island.

Mr. Speaker, the constituencies of North East Manchester and North West St. Elizabeth have been at the mercy of previous PNP administrations as it relates to road works.



Students say thanks for the rehabilitated St. Toolies Road in Clarendon.

In N.W. St. Elizabeth, **Mr. Speaker,** production was so great at times that farmers had to start planting banana trees in the road. **Mr. Speaker,** these constituencies got no help from the Minister of Works then. What is happening now is that these constituencies have to be playing catch up to all the other constituencies that were well endowed with funds to assist with roads.

RADA Extension Services

Mr. Speaker, there is a severe shortage of RADA extension officers. Currently, there is an average of one extension officer to interact with over 1,000 farmers. This is totally unacceptable, **Mr. Speaker,** if we are to provide the technical service needed for farmers to increase production and productivity.

The Prime Minister has announced that there will be 1,000 persons employed as agricultural aides through the HOPE Programme. These will be persons between the ages of 18-35 years old. They will be trained, paid a stipend and be employed for one year in the first instance. These agricultural aides will assist the extension officers in carrying out their functions in their respective extension areas. Those functions will include registration of farmers, identifying crops and acreages cultivated by each farmer; assisting with estimating crop damage after a natural disaster, identifying farm families to be put on the PATH programme, assisting in coordinating the breakfast programme in schools and so on. The agricultural aides will be deployed in the areas in which they reside.

Agricultural Production Zones

Mr. Speaker, as we move agriculture forward, emphasis will also be placed on those small farmers who have been left behind.

To this end, we will be establishing Agricultural Production Zones. These are large areas where there is a concentration of farmers planting various crops. Within these areas emphasis will be placed on rehabilitation or establishment of a viable farm road network, water harvesting and technical training of farmers within these areas to increase their productive capacities. We will also be assisting them with inputs through the Agricultural Push Start Programme and an agricultural aide will be assigned to each production zone. We have already identified areas in St. Mary, Trelawny, St. Elizabeth, Portland and Clarendon as agricultural zones.

Technology

Mr. Speaker, technology must play a pivotal role in the development of the agricultural sector as a globally competitive and sustainable growth sector.



CEO Peter Thompson displays drone acquired by RADA.

The drone which RADA has recently acquired is a very versatile piece of equipment which is capable of identifying the different types of crops, calculating crop acreage, identifying nutritional deficiency in plants, deficiency of water in the soil, identifying plant diseases, identifying crop damage after a natural disaster, in a matter of hours even in the most remote areas, or areas inaccessible to relief personnel and also the curtailing of praedial larceny.

Mr. Speaker, we are hoping to get one drone for each parish by the end of the fiscal year. These drones will be effective in providing more accurate reports for data gathering.

Land Distribution

Mr. Speaker, one of the pitfalls of the system of land distribution to farmers, which we have seen over the years, is that some farmers have leased more land than they can manage and the land remains idle for many years and, in some cases, never used at all for the intended agricultural purpose.

In Spring Plain and Ebony Park Agro- Parks, Clarendon, we have many farmers who have leased land and the land has been lying idle for years. Many of these parcels of land are now being reassigned.

Mr. Speaker, going forward, anyone leasing government land will now have to put the land into agricultural production within 6 months or the lease will be terminated and the land reassigned. As we say, 'use it or lose it'.



St. Thomas farmer, Denesha Shepherd, shows off 30 lb pumpkin.

As I said before, **Mr. Speaker**, it is amazing to see how many persons, both large investors and small farmers, who are venturing into agriculture. Most of them express frustration with the length of time it takes to secure a lease agreement for agricultural lands whether privately owned or government-owned lands.

Some people have had to wait on their applications for over two years to lease land belonging to the Government while these lands remain idle during the period. Many of these persons have the finances to start production immediately, yet they have to wait long periods for their lease approval.

In order to expedite the growth agenda, we have decided to take an unconventional approach in having these persons occupy the lands before a lease is signed because we intend to have most of these government idle lands in production by the end of the year.

Mr. Speaker, we have been working with the National Land Agency (NLA) in a number of parishes, identifying idle government-owned lands. There has been commendable cooperation from the NLA officers and I must single out those in St. Mary and Portland who, along with their regional manager, have been most helpful and have even accompanied RADA staff along with farmers to identify these parcels of land.

Mr. Speaker, the process of putting farmers on these lands started from last year. Once the land is identified and its availability established, the farmers' organisation or individual farmer is screened by RADA and permission then given to begin clearing the land for agricultural production.

Mr. Speaker, just a brief synopsis of what has transpired so far:

- In the parish of Portland two parcels of land totalling some 800 acres were divided in mainly 5-acre lots for small farmers. 132 farmers were put on these lands. All the lots have been cleared and are now in full production without any assistance from the Government. All expenses were borne by these small farmers, including many of them fencing their holdings. The leases are now being prepared for these individual farmers. Having that lease in hand will enable the farmer to access funding to further develop his/her agricultural enterprise or to access waiver/concession on the importation of agricultural equipment as well as to get a 20% concession on the purchase of farm trucks/ pick-ups.
- In the parish of St. Mary, 82 farmers who are members of a farmers' organisation are now occupying 300 acres of land. The National Land Agency is presently arranging to have this property leased to the organisation.
- In the parish of Westmoreland, a large investor has cleared 170 acres and planted a variety of crops, including Irish potato, onion, papaya, pineapple, banana, etc. Twelve small farmers from the area were assigned 20 acres of the property to cultivate free of cost. This is his way of giving back to the community. The lease for this property is being prepared by the NLA and is well advanced.



*Irish potato plot in Darliston,
Westmoreland.*

Mr. Speaker, there are large acreages of idle government-owned lands in St. Ann, St. Mary, Portland and Manchester and these lands are in the process of being leased to small farmers and farmers' organisations

Mr. Speaker, this speaks volumes as to the potential development of agriculture under this Government. However, we are not satisfied with potential; we are about action not a bag of mouth. We are making sure that these productive lands are put into agricultural production before the concrete mixer comes.



Goat farmers, Carletous McGowan (left) and Christopher Burton, from Constitution Hill at the Small Ruminants Association Annual General Meeting in May.

Mr. Speaker, Minister Shaw recently announced that there soon will be 10,400 hectares available for crop and livestock production between the parishes of Clarendon and St. Catherine. These lands will be made available to both large investors and small farmers. The Small Ruminants Association has already indicated an interest in acquiring a portion of these available lands to establish a modern goat rearing facility.

Distribution Network

Mr. Speaker, at present, there is a glut of some agricultural produce in various parts of the island while other parts are experiencing a scarcity. Scallion is an example, where in south St. Elizabeth and south Manchester it is being sold for a maximum of \$40 per lb., whereas in Portland and St. Mary the going price for the same product is over \$100 per lb. in some areas. The lack of a structured distribution network for local agricultural production is the problem. We have started our Farmers' Market with the kick-off last Friday at the Ministry's Hope Gardens Complex. This is to take off some of the excess produce our farmers now have on hand.



Purchasing items at Jamaican 4-H Club's Farmers' Market in Kingston

Mr. Speaker, this issue brings into focus the importance of an Agro-Economic Zone, where all the produce grown by the farmer is marketed at the complex. The farmer enjoys a ready market at a contracted price. This agro-economic zone may be a public/ private enterprise as now exists in Hounslow, St. Elizabeth, with Grace Kennedy, or it can be a fully owned private enterprise. However, **Mr. Speaker,** we have to increase production of the various crops in order for the facilities in the complex to be provided with adequate throughput to make its operation efficient.

Mr. Speaker, agro-economic zones should be located at strategic areas throughout the island providing easy access for the farmer to market their produce. I will be putting forward a proposal for a Government entity to construct structures on some of these government lands to be leased to companies for the establishment of the agro-economic zones, where they have grading, packaging, processing, cold storage and drying facilities, with a retail outlet.

Properties that come to mind are Culloden in Westmoreland, Hague, Trelawny, Lyssons in St. Thomas, Gibraltar in St. Mary and the AMC Complex in Kingston. Private companies would construct and operate at Holland in St. Elizabeth, Montpelier in Hanover and Spring Plains in Clarendon.

Praedial Larceny

Mr. Speaker, praedial larceny is one of the main deterrents of persons wishing to enter the agricultural sector. The main subsector preyed upon by thieves is that of small ruminants - goat and sheep. Farmers complain that when a praedial thief is caught and he goes to court, the fine levied is minuscule compared to the cost of goods stolen. This may even encourage the thief to enrich himself in this way.

We are, therefore, examining the Agricultural Produce Act to propose that restitution is given to the victim of the offence so the thief pays an amount equal to the value of the agricultural commodity stolen if it cannot be returned. Interest should also be paid if any is incurred by delays. This is in addition to his sentence fine.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to thank God for His many blessings on us as a nation, especially on this Administration that has been given the herculean task of leading its people.

Jamaica cannot move forward without invoking the basic principle of respect, uplifting and empowering one another. I pray that we embrace the philosophy of 'together we can' and not be like quacking ducks in a mire of frustration but strive to soar as eagles towards a vision of a united Jamaica, with love, peace, happiness and prosperity for all.

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