

Speaking Notes

European Union-Sponsored ACP Workshop on Best Practices in the Production of Fruits, Vegetables, Herbs and Spices October 23, 2008

Salutations...

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would first like to use this opportunity to thank the collaborators of the *All ACP Agricultural Commodities Programme*, under whose auspices today's workshop falls:

- the Common Fund for Commodities;
- the Food Agriculture Organization of the United Nations;
- the International Trade Centre;
- the UN Conference on Trade and Development; and
- the World Bank

for their intervention at various levels to improve the livelihoods of our farmers. In addition, I am very pleased to see that the strategy adopted to achieve this, is **'the value chain approach'**, through targeted crop production and productivity improvement, together with market development; targeting agro-processing and agri-tourism linkages.

Ladies and gentlemen, in our bid to reposition the agricultural sector, the Ministry has taken a systematic approach, using these very same

strategies, in order to create an enabling environment for long-term sustainability.

It is, therefore, not an accident that the crops targeted - roots, tubers, fruits and vegetables - for the two field exercises which took place last week as a precursor to this workshop, are among those which the Ministry is currently promoting in our drive to build local productive capacity and to improve productivity levels.

-----we initiated and completed a study which has identified 12 crops in high demand, both for consumption and for processing. We have looked at a crude measure of productivity for these crops, by analyzing yields per hectare. We have also examined the overall productivity decline in the past 15 years, which is recorded at approximately 17%, while production has declined by some 30%. To reverse this trend, we are looking at a research and training agenda, which will allow the farmers to benefit from the technological advances being adopted worldwide, to support productivity improvement in the 12 crops identified.

Market Integration

-----we have just completed a comprehensive market analysis to identify and categorize our end-users. We have segmented the market

into: the hospitality sector, agro-processors, retailers and exporters. We have looked at the import data to determine what is being brought into the country, and where it is routed, in order to ascertain the form in which the respective markets require the various products. This information will now be fed to the farmers to enable them to schedule their production to targeted markets - thereby building local production capacity in a systematic manner.

Establishment of a Centre of Excellence

We are, therefore, in the process of establishing a Centre of Excellence, with funding assistance from the Spanish government, to coordinate all aspects of research being conducted in Jamaica, and to develop a practical agenda to train farmers in the field to implement 'best practices', so as to enhance their production and productivity capabilities.

Organizing Farmers' Group

In order to create an enabling environment for the structured and sustainable production the Ministry has been advocating, we have been working with farmers to organize them into productive groups. Over the last year, we have facilitated the establishment of approximately 400 farmers' groups. These community-based groups are registered with

RADA as *Production and Marketing Organizations*, and their members are currently receiving training in ‘good agricultural practices’, as well as marketing support.