

**Address by Hon. Christopher Tufton, M.P., Minister of Agriculture
at the
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The world is just emerging from the most serious food crisis since the Great Depression. For net food importing countries, it exposed our vulnerability to imported foods and effectively destroyed the concept of “cheap foods”. The crisis has now focussed attention on the agricultural sector as strategic for national development and survival. Indeed, there is now a convergence of views that every country must seek to produce a critical mass of the food it consumes, in the interest of food security and rural development. We cannot afford to lose this momentum, as indeed the prospect of feeding the world’s burgeoning population in the near future is a matter of concern. Based on UN figures, the world’s population is poised to be increased by 37% to 9.2 billion by 2050. To be able to ensure food security for the 9.2 billion people, food production will have to be doubled, and this within the context of the additional challenges of climate change and global warming.

The FAO estimates that to effectively respond to this challenge poor countries must invest on an annual basis, some US\$44 billion in the sector compared to the approximately \$8 billion in investment today, a 5-fold increase.

The government has a responsibility to create the enabling environment for development of the agricultural sector. This enabling environment involves the provision of critical infrastructure and services such as irrigation, extension service, research and development, and food health and safety systems. These services and infrastructure are largely public goods in nature. Governments must also demonstrate the political will to carefully manage trade policies to allow for the development of local agriculture. Beyond these initiatives, however, it is the private sector that is the main actor in the sector. In the Caribbean we must overcome the traditional perception of agriculture as a welfare activity. This attitude has stymied real investment in the sector. At the same

time, we have to be cognizant of the issues that are of importance in order to stimulate greater levels of private investments.

As you seek to address such matters as finance, credit and risk management, marketing within the framework of regional trade arrangements and research and development, innovation and technology transfer the State must play its part in mitigating some of these concerns. For example, it is well known that the nature of agricultural production is very risky. This risk however, can be significantly reevaluated if the State brings to bear its extension, research and business advisory service to farming enterprises. When this is the case, we expect our financial institutions to adjust the price of credit on offer to these enterprises. Research has to be refocused and address practical problems relating to improving productivity and there must be a critical link between research and extension and training. In this regard, collaboration between countries is critical, as experiences can be shared.

Despite the proliferation of regional trade agreements, and the attempts to increase the liberalisation of global agricultural trade within the WTO framework, agriculture remains one of the most protected sectors in the more developed countries. This speaks to the strategic importance of agriculture in those economies. There is recognition that protection of livelihoods and rural development are critical variables, which must be taken into account in global agricultural trade. Governments therefore have a political responsibility to manage trade policies judiciously, so as to build local capacity in agriculture and give our farmers a chance to survive. Indeed, this principle has been appropriately articulated in several other international agreements such as Agenda 21 and the Barbados Programme of Action. The Government therefore has a responsibility through its trade policy to create an environment through which local agricultural enterprises can thrive.

Here in Jamaica, the State has made tremendous investments in boosting the capacity of our extension service to provide quality technical support to our farmers. We have similarly increased our capacity in the area of marketing to provide information and intelligence to both farmers and end users. Through the creation of a **Centre of**

Excellence for Advanced Technologies in Agriculture, we have created a new platform for collaborative research among government, academia and the private sector to address real issues of production and productivity. We are also spending billions of dollars in proving public irrigation infrastructure as well as post harvest and food health and safety services. We are committed to value chain development. It is also the case that we are actively collaborating with financial institutions, to provide better access to credit for our farmers. The time is right for the private sector to come on board.