

MINISTER'S STATEMENT

OFFICIAL SIGNING CEREMONY USAID-FUNDED U\$3.2 MILLION GUSTAV AGRICULTURAL REHABILITATION PROJECT

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2009

Following the passage of Tropical Storm Gustav, while the overall damage to the agricultural sector was assessed at **J\$1.63 billion**, domestic production in the eastern end of the island, which was hardest hit, suffered losses estimated at **J\$316.1 million**. In addition, the farm access roads in the affected areas were severely damaged.

Against this background, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) responded to the Ministry's request for assistance with a grant of **US\$3.2 million**, which at current rates of exchange is in excess of **J\$278.4 million**.

Whereas we have invited you here today to witness the official signing of the grant agreement, in order to fast-track the post-Gustav recovery process, the Ministry sought and obtained permission from USAID to advance a portion of the funds, so as

to begin the replanting process, and to engage the National Works Agency, which will be conducting the road rehabilitation work.

To date, under the *Gustav Productivity Recovery Component* of the programme, we have completed the land rehabilitation and planting of some:

- 7 hectares (18 acres) of onion;
- 88 hectares (225 acres) of carrot;
- 6 hectares (15 acres) of red peas;
- 36 hectares (90 acres) of sweet potato;
- 4 hectares (10 acres) of dasheen;
- 9 hectares (24 acres) of hot pepper; and
- 7 hectares (19 acres) of irish potato.

These crops are expected to yield approximately **2,557 tonnes** of produce between April and August, 2009 respectively.

I, therefore, wish to express our sincere thanks to USAID for its support for this initiative, which will prove to be critical in moving domestic production to pre-Gustav levels - and beyond. Evidence of this was seen in the Ministry's 2008 fourth quarter figures, which showed a 14.4% increase in domestic crops, when compared to the same period in 2007.

In an effort to advance the ***Gustav Productivity Recovery Component*** of the programme, as well as the repairs to the farm access roads, the programme is being implemented by the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), which has been providing technical training sessions for participating farmers in best agronomic practices throughout the crop planting cycles. Additionally, RADA's technical team of engineers will provide oversight in respect of the farm road rehabilitation contracted to the National Works Agency.

Road Recovery Component

With regard to the farm road infrastructure repairs, approximately 99 km of affected roadways in St. Thomas; Portland; St. Mary; and St. Andrew have been earmarked for rehabilitation.

The USAID is providing **US\$1.9 million** for this component and the Ministry of Agriculture will provide **US\$185 thousand** for technical support, as well as the production of maps for the damaged roads in the affected areas.

Towards Food Security...

Given the unprecedented increase in global food prices, coupled with the attendant export bans being instituted by some of the larger food exporting countries, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has cited that this “represents a serious threat to the food security of developing, food importing countries, such as Jamaica”. Within the framework of this international crisis, it is appropriate once again for us to thank USAID for the support given to the agricultural sector in the post-Gustav Recovery Programme,

which will go a far way in assisting us to increase our production and productivity.