



MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, COMMERCE, AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Statement by the Hon Audley Shaw, CD, MP

Minister of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries

On Response to the Drought Impacting the Agricultural Sector

July 2019

Mr Speaker,

As has been discussed in this Honourable House and also in the public domain, our country is now facing the challenges of drought conditions, resulting from what is now emerging as the cyclical effects of global warming and climate change.

This is being experienced across the island and is impacting not only domestic water supplies, but is also affecting the agricultural sector.

I wish, therefore, Mr Speaker, to bring to the attention of this Honourable House the current impact of the dry spell on the sector and the response of the Ministry, aimed at mitigating the impact on the sector and on the livelihood of our farmers.

Current Dry Spell

Information available to us at this time, Mr Speaker, based on an assessment by RADA's technical team, is that there has been less than required rainfall in all parishes. An estimated 5,600 farmers have been affected with estimated losses of 500 hectares. The crops mostly affected include vegetables, condiments, fruits, cereal roots and tubers.

Additionally, 99 farmers in the parishes of St. Andrew and St. Thomas have sustained an estimated loss of \$20.9 million as a result of bush fires. The crops impacted are coffee and fruit trees, as well as farm buildings, goats and pasture lands.

I wish to extend greatest sympathies to our farmers and their families who have already being affected, even as others continue to prepare for what lies ahead.

Let me assure our farmers that our team of officers from RADA is on the ground and the Ministry is paying the keenest attention to this situation.

And, let me thank the farmers for their continued commitment and resilience in light of the threat to their livelihood posed by these conditions.

Food Prices

Mr Speaker, as it relates to the availability and cost of produce we can advise that currently, as is expected at this time, there is a trending increase in prices of agricultural food items to include vegetables and tubers. However, there will be no need for any large-scale importation of these items as our valued farmers have been responding to the need for increased production and, with the assistance being provided, are expanding production in our irrigated areas.

Mitigating Efforts

Short term

Mr Speaker, the situation at this time is dynamic, but our officers are out in the field collecting information, monitoring the situation and providing assistance, even as we speak.

Through RADA, the Ministry is spending \$15 million to assist farmers. A proper assessment is being done to determine further assistance or interventions.

Under the Ministry's Production Incentive Programme, \$19.95 million is being allocated via the Members of Parliament to provide inputs to farmers islandwide. MPs in the rural parishes are being allocated \$350,000 per constituency, while MPs in urban constituencies are being allocated \$250,000.

Medium and Long term

Mr Speaker, as we should be aware, the Ministry is now engaged in a number of long- term strategies to address the challenges associated with the phenomenon of climate change, even as we seek to increase agricultural production in a sustainable way.

These strategies include, Mr. Speaker:

- The build out of the irrigation infrastructure as exemplified by the Essex Valley Agriculture Development Project, with the aim of reducing the water-related challenges being faced by the over 700 farmers of Essex Valley, St Elizabeth.
- The improved irrigation systems on about 700 hectares of land is to include the development of a climate-resilient off-farm

irrigation system consisting of six irrigation wells and restoration of approximately 30 kilometres of farm/community roads.

Work is currently well under way on the Essex Valley Project with

- 4 of 6 wells drilled
- Land Surveying fieldwork completed

We are confident that the Essex Valley project will unleash a new wave of agricultural development in Essex Valley and bolster the agriculture growth targets of the country.

The Irrigation Development Programme is part of Government's overall strategy to improve agricultural infrastructure.

We are also addressing small-scale irrigation needs of our farmers across the country and, indeed, recently, thanks to JSIF and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), we handed over drip irrigation systems to benefit some 300 farmers in South St Elizabeth.

And, Mr Speaker, it is also through a grant of approximately £17.5 million from the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Fund (UK-CIF), administered by the CDB, that the Ministry will be developing and initiating the development of arable lands in St. Catherine and Clarendon under the proposed South Plains Agricultural Development (SPAD) Project.

In addition, I am making formal approaches to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the UN Green Climate Fund for assistance in identifying small portable drip irrigation systems to assist our small farmers. I am also putting together an ambitious National Fruit Tree Planting Programme that will lead to a more dynamic fruit industry for local consumption and export, as well as assisting in our reforestation efforts at the same time.

July 30, 2019