



**Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and
Fisheries**

PRESENTATION - SECTORAL DEBATE 2020

By the Honourable J.C. Hutchinson, CD, MP

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

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***Theme: A Road Map to Sustainable
Agricultural Production & Food Security***

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Mr Speaker, I am very pleased this afternoon to address this Honourable House on the subject that is nearest and dearest to my heart – Agriculture.

Mr Speaker, I wish to immediately reiterate my own commitment as well as the commitment of the Government to sustainably transform and expand the agricultural sector.

Mr Speaker, our goal of increased and sustainable production and food security must continue to be our unwavering focus for, as the COVID-19 pandemic has forcibly reminded us, it is agriculture that is the main cornerstone of our lives, our livelihoods and our economy.

So in my presentation today, **Mr Speaker**, I will identify and outline some critical aspects of the Ministry's road map towards *Sustainable Agricultural Production & Food Security*.

But, **Mr Speaker**, before I proceed to outline that road map, allow me, first of all, to acknowledge those who make it possible for me to be here – my family, Most Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet colleagues, parliamentarians and the constituents of North West St Elizabeth, part of the food basket parish of Jamaica.

Let me acknowledge and thank also members of my staff and support team at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries.

And, last, but by no way least, **Mr Speaker**, I salute the over 220,000 farmers of Jamaica and the other critical stakeholders in the agricultural sector in Jamaica for their committed and unwavering support of the industry.

Mr Speaker, as we journey along the road to an improved agricultural sector, we recognise that there are systemic challenges that confront the sector. We have identified these challenges over the years and have sought to address them, but we are aware that these are perennial challenges which require persistent and consistent attention.

Our task, **Mr Speaker**, is therefore to find and implement sustainable solutions to those problems. Our road map seeks to identify those problems and to outline the strategies and actions to resolve those issues.

I believe many of the challenges that confront the sector are familiar to us, **Mr Speaker**. They include matters of:

- inadequate marketing and distribution;
- climate and irrigation-related issues;
- insufficient investment;
- poor infrastructure like farm roads
- land management and distribution and
- Major deterrents such as praedial larceny.

Let us begin with praedial larceny, **Mr Speaker**.

1. PRAEDIAL LARCENY

The crime of praedial larceny, **Mr Speaker**, continues to be one of the major deterrents to agricultural production in Jamaica. It is estimated that this crime costs farmers some \$6 billion annually and, perhaps equally, if not even more painful, is the fact that the praedial thieves are like scarecrows who drive away potential investors from getting into crop and livestock production and so expanding a segment of the economy that is so critical to domestic supply and the export market.

The crime of praedial larceny is not an easy one to fight, **Mr Speaker**, but the Ministry, working with our industry partners, the judiciary and the constabulary force, is determined to confront and arrest this monster.

Mr Speaker, in this regard, the Praedial Larceny Control Programme of the Ministry has been overhauled to bring it in line with the increased imperative for food production and food security. What this means, **Mr Speaker**, is that the management process for praedial larceny control is now being scaled up to include inter alia:

- a. Team leadership at the level of an Assistant Commissioner of Police, with ASP Bishop Dr Gary Welsh currently at the helm.
- b. Establishment of police farmers' groups on the same basis as the police youth clubs, where PMO groups and/or JAS groups will work with the police.
- c. Acquisition of seven brand new vehicles by the Jamaica Constabulary force dedicated to praedial larceny

- d. Inter and intra farm zone collaborations and the enforcement of farm watch protocols to be agreed with various agencies and groups.
- e. Continued training, sensitization and relationship building with police and farmers groups, corporate farms and members of the judiciary
- f. Establishment of a dedicated court day to deal with praedial larceny matters
- g. Re-establishment of the agricultural warder's programme, which is referenced in the Praedial Larceny Act and, **Mr. Speaker,**
- h. We are establishing a protocol for the use of forensic technology for forensic identification of stolen produce in the absence of eye witnesses.
- i. Amendments to the Agricultural Produce Act, which I will detail later in my presentation and
- j. Stricter enforcement of the National Animal Identification and Traceability System (NAITS).

Mr. Speaker, the members of this Honourable House may recall the introduction of the national animal passports under the former late Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Roger Clarke. The National Animal Identification and Traceability System (NAITS) was primarily intended for the control of disease, food safety and the tagging and tracing of animals. The system also has the potential to curb the larceny of cattle.

Let us recall, **Mr Speaker**, that under the NAITS legislation, all cattle reared in Jamaica should have both the ear tags and the corresponding passport to identify the animal. So, consequently, there should be no movement of cattle from any one location to the next without those passports and the ear tags.

In addition, no public health inspector is permitted to inspect or certify any meat before an ante-mortem verification is done, which includes the checking of the passport and the matching ear tags.

Mr Speaker, it is regrettable that there is no universal compliance with these requirements at this time. To date, of the estimated population of some 76, 000 cattle, approximately 50% or 38,000 have been tagged.

Mr Speaker, the time has also come for stricter enforcement of the animal identification and traceability system to ensure that the stamping and certification of meat from cattle are conducted in accordance with the law.

This ante-mortem verification of the animal is an essential aspect of the praedial larceny control programme and so, **Mr Speaker**, as we move to tighten the noose on cattle thieves, **I wish to take this opportunity to announce to this Honourable House and to the country that effective January 1, 2021 all cattle must have ear tags and corresponding passports.**

All cattle owners, therefore, now have six months to access the free ear tags and passports for each head of cattle. And we are urging them all to get those tags now!

Tag your animals, so we can trace them and keep them out of the hands of the praedial thieves.

So, **Mr. Speaker**, over the coming weeks, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries, through its Veterinary Services Division, will be engaging the Ministry of Health and Wellness to collaborate with the public health inspectorate in strengthening compliance with the regulations and to have adherence to jointly strengthen our resolve to ensure that no cattle meat is sold without the requisite checks and balances in accordance with the requirements of the law.

2. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY REVIEW

Mr Speaker, our laws and regulations enable us as legislators to enforce the necessary actions to realise our development goals.

As it relates to the agricultural sector, we continue to review, amend and promulgate the enabling legislations. This is even more important, **Mr Speaker**, as we seek to continually improve our strategies on the road map for *Sustainable Agricultural Production & Food Security*.

In this regard, **Mr Speaker**, I wish to highlight some of the legislations being pursued at this time.

a. Agricultural Produce Act

This Act is to be amended in order to strengthen and modernize the legislation for the purpose of effectively regulating the trade and movement of agricultural produce, which fall under its ambit and to give effect to any attendant matters. Whilst the proposed amendments to this Act are by no means a panacea to the scourge of praedial larceny, it is anticipated that the direct effects of the amendments will aid in the conviction of persons who have committed acts of praedial larceny.

Recommendations have been made and are now advanced for submission to the Cabinet. Among the changes being proposed in the new legislation are:

- To expand the definitions of agricultural produce to include fish;
- To include crops such as castor bean, bamboo, hemp, mushroom, and livestock

- Increase in the fines of up \$3 million and the term of imprisonment of up to one year for praedial larceny.
- We see value in, not only increasing fines and penalties, but also in adding a restitution clause so that farmers can recoup losses directly from the convicted criminals.
- Changes to the existing Agricultural Produce Receipt to improve traceability systems
- Inclusion of an invoice with telephone numbers of the farmer and their taxpayer registration number. Invoices are to be used in consignment arrangements between farmers and purchasers of agricultural produce.

Mr. Speaker, the issuing of invoices is an important and necessary step in safeguarding the farmer's income and to legally document those transactions in which the farmer has provided his or goods on credit.

Mr. Speaker, we are strengthening the legislative framework; we are giving the laws more and sharper teeth so that our farmers can reap far more of what they sow and can benefit from the livestock that they rear.

b. Agro-Investment Corporation Act

This Act is being amended so as to transfer the rights, assets and liabilities of the Agricultural Support Services and Productive Projects Fund Limited to the Agro-Investment Corporation (AIC) and the winding up of the Agricultural Support Services and the Productive Projects Fund Limited. This Bill also repeals the Agricultural Marketing Corporation Act of 1963 and the transfer of its titles and assets to the AIC.

c. Agricultural Marketing Act 1944

This Act is to be repealed in order to facilitate the transfer of the title and assets of the Agricultural Marketing Corporation to the Agro-Investment Corporation.

d. Tobacco Industry Regulation Act

This Act is to be repealed in order to close out the Tobacco Industry Control Authority pursuant to Cabinet Decision dated October 7, 2019 and consistent with the Policy on the Categorization and Rationalization of Public Bodies developed by the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service.

e. The Plants and Plant Products (Inspection and Quarantine) Bill

This Bill, **Mr Speaker**, proposes new provisions for plant quarantine and produce inspection activities and to establish a department of Government to be known as the Plant Quarantine and Produce Inspection Branch.

The Bill proposes measures to:

- prohibit the entry of plant pests;

- prescribe measures to ensure the importation of only the highest quality pest-free plants, plant products and other regulated articles;
- Repeal the Plants (Quarantine) Act.

f. Jamaica Agricultural Commodities Regulatory Authority Act (JACRA Act)

Mr. Speaker, the JACRA Act is to be amended. The JACRA Act is currently under review and consultation is being carried out in order to give effect to Cabinet Decision number 20/18 dated June 4, 2018, to merge The Banana Board with the Authority. The amendment of the JACRA Act will also seek to address recommendations made by the stakeholders.

Similarly, **Mr. Speaker**, consistent with Cabinet decision, under the Government's Transformation Programme, the MICAFA continues to pursue the structural adjustment and rationalisation for the Jamaica Agricultural Society, the Jamaica 4-H Clubs, the Consumer Affairs Commission and the Fair Trading Commission, The Banana Board and the Jamaica Exotic Flavours and Essences.

COVID-19 RESPONSE PROGRAMME

Mr. Speaker, from all indications, the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to be with us for a while. We have to continue to manage it to ensure the highest possible levels of health, food and economic security for the population.

Mr. Speaker, it is an unprecedented balancing act, but as Government it is our responsibility and duty to continue to provide the stellar leadership being provided so far in managing this disease.

As it relates to the agricultural sector, I believe we have been stepping up to the plate, **Mr. Speaker**. And, indeed, I wish to join in commending our farmers, our purveyors and distributors, the relevant agencies and all who have joined in the national effort to keep the nation fed, even while providing supplies to export markets.

Mr Speaker, in recognition and commendation of the hard work of our farmers, it is worth repeating that in a season when the overall economy declined by 1.7%, the agricultural sector grew by 7.8% in the January to March period, with a particularly strong performance of 10.7% growth in the domestic crops sub-sector.

Mr. Speaker, with the drought and COVID-19 challenges, while we are pushing the farmers to get back into production, we are expecting a slight decline of some 3 to 5.6% for the April to June period. Notwithstanding, we are expecting an increase in the production of certain tubers and fruits such as pineapples and melon.

Mr. Speaker, even as we are responding to the current situation, we are challenged to look ahead, navigate the way forward and chart the course for *sustainable productivity and food security*.

Mr Speaker, I wish today, on behalf of the farmers of Jamaica, to acknowledge, with thanks, the \$1-billion support for the COVID-19 recovery programme being provided by this Government, through the Ministry of Finance.

And so, **Mr. Speaker**, as part of the COVID-19 Response Programme and in accordance with MICAF's business plan for 2020-2021, I wish to draw the attention of this Honourable House to some of the strategic projects to be undertaken going forward. Among the areas to be funded under the COVID-19 Recovery Programme are:

a. Provision of Equipment and Machinery

The provision of equipment and machinery valued at \$230 million to include the procurement and use of drones to enhance the technological modernization of the agricultural sector and facilitate increased production and productivity;

In addition to access to more tractors, bulldozers and backhoes, I wish to emphasize the urgent necessity to

utilize more drone technology in Jamaican agriculture,
Mr. Speaker.

This use of technology to assist extension officers and investors in the determination of physical characteristics of soil and ground cover is critical.

To this end, the Ministry will purchase 13 drones, one per parish, for use by the officers. There is a need for greater infusion of technology in the sector to determine crop production acreages, livestock production numbers, soil fertility status and environmental and crop forecasting. This is a priority.

b. Production Incentive Programme

Priority focus also continues to be placed on the Production Incentive Programme aimed at boosting the capacity of our small farmers to achieve greater productivity. Under the Production Incentive Programme, it is projected that farmers will be provided with support for soil analysis, soil nutrient management,

marketing, land preparation, seeds and planting material, fertilisers and pest and disease management capacity, all valued in excess of \$350 million.

c. Drought Mitigation

Mr. Speaker, the heat is on and the drought has started to impact farmers in some of our most productive areas such as those in Clarendon, Manchester and St Elizabeth. But, already, **Mr. Speaker**, the water trucks are also rolling out. Under the \$194-million Drought Mitigation Programme being implemented by the National Irrigation Commission some 275,712 gallons of irrigation water has already been trucked to 136 farmers in 22 communities; procurement of 500 water tanks is in progress, and 2,000 ¼ acre drip irrigation kits are to be provided in short order.

Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the Opposition Spokesman has said that this government has reduced the area under irrigation; this government now has the

largest irrigation projects that we have seen in years, funded under the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Partnership Fund (CIPF) through the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), valuing over £50 million

d. Livestock and Fisheries

There is a \$95-million support to poultry, pig, small ruminant farmers and fishers to equip them to recover market changes under COVID.

A STRUCTURED AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Mr. Speaker, as we move to recover from the impact of the COVID- 19 pandemic and chart the course to sustainable agricultural production, it is even more important now to strengthen the present structure.

From start to finish, from farm to table, **Mr Speaker**, we have to strengthen and expand the linkages along the agricultural value chain. In this regard, **Mr Speaker**, we must vigorously pursue the following:

a. Strengthening the value-chain management system

Mr Speaker, a critical item on the agricultural road map is the strengthening of a value-chain management system to include hotels, exporters, consumers and agro-processors. In this way, we can address issues of shortages and glut and of flexibility in our marketing arrangements.

In this way, we should be able to efficiently identify the availability and quantity of produce; match demand and supply chains; identify who has what crops or goods and who can supply to whom and the distribution mechanism to be employed.

b. Improving the Agricultural Distribution System

Mr Speaker, market access for agricultural output has been a perennial problem, particularly for small farmers in Jamaica. The occurrence of COVID-19 exacerbated this issue and exposed the need for a more robust and resilient distribution system and diverse markets to enhance farmers' access and to mitigate the effects of future shocks.

Useful initiatives now being contemplated in association with the private sector to improve the agricultural distribution system, therefore, include:

- The extension of the Agri-linkages Exchange System, which links farmers to the hotel and tourism sector to other players such as supermarkets;
- Expansion of the relationship between farmers and the school-feeding programme;
- Investment in cold storage facilities in areas where the major actors in agro-processing operate to allow for greater levels of storage; and
- Investment in refrigerated vehicles.

c. Emerging Food distribution Mechanisms

Again, **Mr Speaker**, the COVID-19 experience has been instructive in highlighting the need for providing easier access for consumers to produce markets, whether in the form of farmers' markets, mobile markets or online markets and delivery services.

The overwhelmingly positive response to the innovative approaches of marketing and distribution of fresh produce in communities islandwide is a valuable take-away from the COVID-19 response.

This is the wave of the future, **Mr Speaker**. It is all about facilitating the ease of conducting trade and business and, specifically, marketing agricultural produce.

Jamaica will not be left behind, **Mr Speaker**. The establishment of distribution outlets closer to communities is therefore on the *road map to sustainable production and food security*.

d. Improving Post-harvest Infrastructure

Mr Speaker, about 30% of the annual production of crops is lost due to poor post-harvest handling and treatment practices. This threatens the food and nutrition security of the country; reduces the projected revenue for agricultural production and the food processing sector while reducing the earnings of our farmers.

To address these post-harvest concerns, the Ministry is, therefore, seeking more support for capacity building for players along the value chain and for the provision of additional physical infrastructure, training and equipment.

e. Establishing Additional Agro-processing Facilities

Mr Speaker, agro-processing is important for several reasons, one of which is a reduction in post-harvest losses. Agro-processing has the potential to increase nutritional value, food security, shelf life and reduce food spoilage and wastage. Processed foods also enjoy greater price stability on the world market and may, therefore, increase market opportunities for exports, and import substitution, contributing to income security, employment generation; enterprise development, diversification of rural economies, among others.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the deficiencies in the agro-processing sector and so, **Mr Speaker**, in addition to the short-term responses, the construction and equipping of additional facilities in agro-processing are among the key initiatives for the medium term.

I urge the private sector, **Mr Speaker**, to grasp the opportunities available in this area and invest in agro-processing.

The RADA-operated incubators are also to be fully equipped and activated to enable the processing of crops into juices and purees and other intermediary products for general distribution and use in public institutions such as hospitals and prisons as well as in the school-feeding programme.

ROLE OF RADA

Mr Speaker, the work of the Rural Agricultural Development Authority is critical to the transformation of Jamaica's agricultural sector. I wish at this point, **Mr Speaker**, to outline a few of the programmes in which the agency is integrally involved.

1. Production Incentive Programme (PIP)

During the 2019-2020 fiscal year, special emphasis was placed on field establishment, crop care management, monitoring and evaluation of the programme for the nine (9) targeted crops, namely sweet and yellow yams, cassava, ginger, strawberry, hot pepper, dasheen, MD2 pineapple, onion and Irish potato.

There were some notable achievements, **Mr Speaker**.

Let's take **Sweet Yam**:

- A total of 50 hectares was established and treated with fungicide under a structured management programme. This was in an effort to minimize the spread of the anthracnose disease, thus enabling the farmers to be able to supply clean planting material to support the incremental increase in production annually. Over 450 farmers have benefited to date.

Over 55 hectares have been reaped to date, realizing a 12% increase when compared to the corresponding period of 2018-2019. Arising from this programme, we have seen an uptick in additional export of this commodity.

- **Yellow Yam**

The programme sought to establish this crop in non-traditional growing parishes such as St. Mary, Portland and St. Thomas, benefitting over 25 new farmers and establishing over two hectares. This is projected to expand into commercial production going forward.

- **MD2 Pineapple**

This programme was geared towards incrementally increasing the acreage of the MD2 variety in order to satisfy consumer demands.

To date, 350,000 suckers have been distributed and 7 hectares established. Already, this new variety has taken off in the traditional pineapple-growing areas of the country and significant production has been seen in the last few months.

- **Onion**

This programme is geared towards producing 20% of the consumptive needs of the country. Accordingly, 300 hectares of onions were established under the Production Incentive Programme, with the crop now ending with an estimated 2,300 tonnes - one of the best in several years.

This performance, **Mr. Speaker**, will exceed our target of 20% of the consumptive needs. This performance was influenced by an increase in productivity with average yields increasing by approximately 40%.

- **Irish Potato**

Although 1,200 hectares were targeted for production, due to challenges with adverse weather in the Irish potato-growing areas just less than 1,000 hectares were established. This led to a production of 15,700 tonnes, a reduction of 2.9% over the 2018 production.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition Spokesperson in his presentation to this Honourable House stated: “We now have to be issuing import permits” for Irish potato and that “This government’s emphasis is imports rather than enabling our local farming communities.”

Mr. Speaker, we have been importing Irish potato for a number of years now, not just since we have become government. In fact, it was the Jamaica Labour Party government that initiated the Irish potato, onion, sweet potato, ginger, yam, and strawberry programmes and there is an ongoing programme for these crops.

The Opposition Spokesman further stated, **Mr. Speaker**, “Our checks have revealed that the extent of the change in the School Feeding Programme is a redesign of the recipe for baked products to reduce the sugar content and a replacement of the sugary drinks with bottled water. No structured arrangement has been made with farming communities to produce and supply nutritionally laden locally produced crops for the nutritional enrichment of our children.”

Mr. Speaker, the spokesperson is clearly not aware of what has been happening in the country in agriculture. The former Spokesperson could give him a lesson or two in Agriculture 101, although not trained; he has much more awareness and competence in expounding on activities in the sector.

Mr. Speaker, the JLP government is the one that has been championing the school-feeding programme, and I have placed special emphasis on the breakfast programme. It is absurd and ridiculous when he is unaware that many schools are using locally grown produce in their school-feeding programme.

It must be highlighted, also, that great emphasis is being placed on school gardens where the children can start learning at an early age the importance of agriculture. The school gardens are also being used in some areas as demonstration plots for the farmers within the area. The produce from the school gardens goes into the breakfast programme.

It was the JLP government that conceptualized a breakfast programme using locally grown produce. The late Roger Clarke, himself, said we are the conceptualizer of the programmes and their party, the implementer, but they have never implemented a sustainable programme. It has, therefore, come back to us to be both conceptualizers and implementers.

2. National Farm Road Rehabilitation Programme

It is important to note, **Mr. Speaker** that the rehabilitation contracts under the National Farm Road Rehabilitation Programme were put out for tender using the National Competitive and the Restricted Bidding processes. The rehabilitation was done to pre-existing farm roads with high levels of disrepair and a quality assurance programme was also put in place to ensure the quality of work implemented.

Mr. Speaker, a total of 77 roads was completely rehabilitated for the 2019-2020 period with an overall expenditure of Five Hundred & Sixty-one Million (\$561 million) dollars.

Not in our wildest dreams, **Mr. Speaker**, did we come anywhere near to spending a billion dollars as some have said.

As we have heard, **Mr. Speaker**, as a result of the COVID-19 impact the budgetary allocation for the National Farm Roads Programme for this year has been reduced to **\$525 million** for the rehabilitation of **56** roads.

So, **Mr. Speaker**, we may have to seek the advice of the Member from Northern Trelawny as to how we can source even a fraction of the \$1.6 billion expenditure in one parish that he reported, as we move into the 2020-2021 Road Rehabilitation Programme.

Permit me, also, **Mr Speaker**, to inform my constituents that the road from Ginger Hill to Pisgah has been tendered and we expect that a contractor will be selected soon to execute rehabilitation to this road and provide badly needed relief for the hard-working farmers in this area.

3. Agricultural Aide Programme

Mr. Speaker, RADA, as you can see, has a lot of demands but the hands are few. Currently, one extension officer is called upon to serve some 2,400 farmers.

It is against this background that we have introduced the Agricultural Aide Programme. This programme, a partnership with the HOPE programme and certified by HEART Trust/NTSA, is aimed at strengthening the extension services by providing support to extension officers and augmenting the work of RADA while at the same time attracting more young people into farming.

Mr. Speaker, the agricultural aide programme is targeting young people aged 18 to 35 from farming communities across the island, who will be trained by extension officers to work with farmers in those communities.

Mr Speaker, though delayed by COVID-19, funding is in place and the programme has started with 90 trainees. They will work with the extension officers in the field for one year, after which they will be certified by HEART Trust/NTSA.

RESTRUCTURING OF RADA

Whether it is increased farmer training, provision of extension services, creating the linkages between farmers and their markets or assisting with the distribution programme, the intervention of RADA is necessary.

The challenge, however, **Mr. Speaker**, is that currently, we only have one extension officer to serve 2, 400 farmers. A further detailed analysis of the staff composition, **Mr. Speaker**, reveals that:

- 110 of the 520 staff members, (21%) are located at the Head Office

- Only 150, that is, 30% of the RADA staff are extension officers
- Of the 520 staff members, 56% (283) perform non-agricultural duties while 237 (43%) perform agricultural functions with 69 (34%) serving as managers.

What that means, **Mr Speaker**, is that we have to restructure the organisation in such a way as to put more boots on the ground.

And so, **Mr Speaker**, plans are under way to increase the complement of field staff so that more extension officers can be made available to work side by side with our farmers and farmers' group and create that paradigm shift that will boost agricultural production in Jamaica.

The new structure, **Mr. Speaker**, will see an increase in our technical capacity by over 100%, moving from 150 to 303 extension/assistant extension officers. What this means is that we will now have a ratio of 1 extension officer to 1,400 farmers without any net increase in costs.

Over the next quarter, we will be seeking Cabinet's approval for the restructuring of RADA after which we will engage a consultant as a first step in the process.

REVITALISING THE AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENT CORPORATION (AIC)

Mr Speaker, as I indicated in my opening remarks, insufficient investment in the agricultural sector has been one of the major hurdles to the expansion of growth in the sector.

Against that background, I join in saluting and welcoming the renewed interest of several large private sector investors in agriculture in Jamaica.

Yet, at the same time, **Mr Speaker**, it is incumbent upon the agencies of Government, tasked with managing the investment of resources in the sector and in assisting our farmers to continue to improve their own role.

Chief among these agencies, **Mr Speaker**, is the Agro-Investment Corporation. Conceptualised, as its name suggests, as the investment arm of the Ministry of Agriculture and tasked with the promotion of agri-business, the time has come for the AIC to execute its core functions.

As we seek to address the matter of investment on our road map to achieving *sustainable agricultural production and food security*, **Mr Speaker**, the AIC is now being tasked to:

- a. Redefine its role as an agricultural investment and development corporation
- b. De-emphasize its landlord functions and re-emphasize agricultural trade promotion and investment
- c. To seriously undertake the monitoring and organization of a produce distribution and management network throughout Jamaica.

Structure of Agricultural Sector

Mr. Speaker, the crop and livestock production in Jamaica has traditionally been executed in various organizational forms. One such form, **Mr. Speaker**, is where several farmers in various areas of Jamaica produce a miscellany of produce in an unorganised and unattached manner. These collectively are referred to as the **PRODUCTION ZONES**. Here the linkages are, however, rudimentary and haphazard, although necessary to support the higglers, purveyors and farm families.

An upgrade from the production zone, **Mr. Speaker**, is where infrastructure is provided and where investors are more targeted and is referred to as an **AGRO-PARK**. Like the production zones, there is no marketing or distribution processes associated with these activities.

Mr. Speaker, these two construct of agricultural production supports an informal and erratic distribution and linkages upon which exporters, hoteliers and processors compete for the products in various forms of quality compliance.

It allows for the forward and backward linkages required to support a dependable food supply.

Finally, **Mr. Speaker**, we have the **AGRO-ECONOMIC ZONE**, which is an emerging construct of our agricultural production machinery that extols the coordinated and organised production with the complementarity of sorting, packaging, and grading operations to support the farmers and allow for the organised transit through the value chain. The interventions of a national organised value chain management system in all three of these constructs, **Mr. Speaker**, will constitute and characterise the current structure of our agricultural production.

UTILIZATION OF AVAILABLE SUGAR CANE LANDS

Mr Speaker, with the right-sizing of the sugar industry, new opportunities are emerging for the diversification of agriculture in Jamaica.

As the saying goes, when one door is closed, another is opened. In this case, as one farm gate is closing, another is opening.

The transition from sugar cane cultivation into other crops is taking place all across the island in former sugar-dependent communities, **Mr Speaker**. Some 26, 305 hectares (65,000 acres), managed by the SCJ Holdings, are being redirected into other crops, into housing and into other industries.

Critical to the land utilisation policy is that these lands should be used to maximize our agricultural production, engaging the willing and able hands of small farmers, who were once sugar workers as well as young men and women.

These lands will be utilised to cover the gamut of the food production needs of Jamaica to include fruits, vegetables, tubers, aromatic and medicinal plants, large and small ruminants, pigs and poultry.

There is a lot of attention being focussed on the lands on the St. Catherine plains, **Mr Speaker**, so let us take a look, today, at some of the other areas where diversification is under way.

As the SCJ Holdings has continued to recover lands from failed privatization efforts, **Mr Speaker,**

Long Pond in Trelawny – has seen the reacquisition of some 4,300 hectares (over 10,600 acres) of land now being leased for productive endeavours. Of that amount, some 1,619 hectares (4,000 acres) is being made available to small famers in the area for cultivation.

Over 256 hectares (some 635 acres) of the former cane lands is being used by Organic Growth Holdings Incorporated for the growing of medicinal hemp to be used in the production of cannabidiol (CBD) oils.

Golden Grove Duckenfield in St. Thomas

Over at Golden Grove in St Thomas, over 2,500 hectares (some 8,300 acres) are also being transitioned into other agricultural production and the small farmers are not being left out, **Mr Speaker.**

Holland in St. Elizabeth

Mr Speaker, today I want to extend to you a special invitation to the former Holland Sugar Estate in St Elizabeth. A revolution in agricultural production is taking place at Holland, **Mr Speaker**, where Jamaica's first model agro-economic zone is being developed.

Already, some 186 small farmers are engaged in the cultivation of a variety of crops, including papaya, melon, sweet pepper, cantaloupe, sorrel, and sweet potato, on approximately 490 hectares (1,212 acres) of the 971-hectare (2,400-acre) property.

This model agro-economic zone, **Mr Speaker**, will not only comprise farms but will include facilities for grading, packaging and processing so that farmers can sell their produce right there in a structured way.

These produce would then be graded, packaged and sold to the hotel sector, export and local markets while the remainder would be processed, providing fruit juice and other value-added products.

The plans for Holland, **Mr Speaker**, also include the allocation of some 162 hectares (400 acres) of the property to the Airport Authority of Jamaica for expansion of the airstrip and another 121 hectares (300 acres) will be reserved for the rearing of cattle which are now roaming the property.

Mr Speaker, the vision for Holland is already bearing fruit. In spite of the vagaries of the weather last year, some 91 tonnes (201,210 lbs) of crops were produced between March and June this year, with at least one farmer earning up to \$1.2 million per fortnight.

Another important component of the agro-economic zone, **Mr. Speaker**, is agro-processing. I am therefore pleased to announce that Spur Tree Spices processing company is currently on the brink of inking a lease agreement to establish a modern state-of-the-art grading and processing facility on the property.

The company is hoping to start operations before the end of this year, starting with the processing of scallion, hot pepper, callaloo and ackee for export and will be expanding into other crops as time progresses. **Mr. Speaker**, I would like to congratulate them for partnering with the farmers on this ambitious endeavour.

The Holland model, **Mr Speaker**, is a commendable one for the transformation of our agro-parks and, indeed, the agricultural sector in Jamaica.

It is an important part of the strategy to be placed on *the Road Map to Sustainable Agricultural Production & Food Security*.

Mr. Speaker, we still have a number of parcels of government lands that are lying idle and we are in dialogue with various organizations to have these lands occupied by small farmers.

These lands include:

- Alvie and Canoe Valley in South Manchester with over 2,023 hectares (5,000 acres)
- Nonsuch and Unity Farm in St. Mary (1,200 acres)
- the Muirton property in Portland
- Enfield in Westmoreland (166 acres)
- Parbuckle Wharf in Hanover (119 acres)
- Dundee, Trelawny (300 acres) and
- Alligator Pond in Manchester (30 acres).

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition Spokesman has also stated that the government policies threaten small farmers' investments and, by extension, rural livelihood. **Mr. Speaker**, we are putting more small farmers on agricultural lands now more than ever before.

CONCLUSION

Mr Speaker, as I come to the close of my presentation today, I wish to share with this Honourable House a few of the recommendations of the COVID-19 Task Force on Agriculture.

The task force urges us, **Mr Speaker**, as we chart the way forward, to ensure that the sector continues to play a greater role in the economic development of the country. That is to be achieved, **Mr Speaker**, through increased production, lower food imports, and increased linkages to manufacturing and tourism.

The concepts are not new, **Mr Speaker**, but I believe the pandemic has served to reinforce the urgency with which we must address them.

It has also highlighted the possibilities and opportunities we have for expanding both fresh produce and processed agricultural products for export.

The recommendations of the task force call us to take action by:

- Stimulating production and productivity through a targeted productivity programme
- Implementing a drought mitigation and irrigation programme
- Continuing the implementation of the Land Reform and Land Use Programme
- Identifying and increasing storage and distribution facilities
- Placing special focus on agro-processing and a national agribusiness strategy
- Diversifying markets and
- Utilising modern technology to advance research, documentation and management of agricultural systems.

Mr Speaker, the task force has not lost sight of the fact that it does take cash to care and so it also recommends that consideration be given to:

- Waiving of duties on tools and equipment, agricultural implements, seeds and other input materials and irrigation systems

- Waiving the duty on marine fuel for the fishing industry
- Removal of the GCT from eggs to encourage greater consumption and
- Temporarily granting duty concessions on refrigerated trucks to move produce across the island and to minimize crop spoilage.

Mr Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has not caused us to lose our way but it has brought us to a juncture on the road to national development that requires significant stimulus for growth. Agriculture has a significant pivotal role to play in stimulating that new and renewed growth.

For the economy to grow, agriculture must grow.

Agriculture is the seed that fosters economic growth, so let us now move forward, guided by the *Road Map to Sustainable Agricultural Production & Food Security*, which I have sought to outline today.

We must grow what we eat, eat what we grow, and can what we can't on our way to prosperity in the sector.

May God bless us all and bless Jamaica, land we dearly love.

I thank you, **Mr Speaker**.