



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
FISHERIES & MINING

SECTORAL PRESENTATION

2024



MAY 21, 2024 | 2:00PM

BY THE HONOURABLE FLOYD O. GREEN, MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining
Houses of Parliament

**HARVESTING HOPE, MINING POSSIBILITIES
CREATING A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL**

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint” Isaiah 40:31

Madam Speaker, I am acutely aware that I am able to stand here in this moment because of the endearing mercy of God and the countless blessings He continues to bestow upon me. I am also grateful to the many persons who I come across in all parts of Jamaica who indicate that they have whispered a prayer on my behalf. Thank you.

I am truly humbled and honoured to be able to once again address you, and this Honourable House; today, in my capacity as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and of course Mining.

Madam Speaker, the Most Honourable Andrew Micheal Holness, Prime Minister of Jamaica, continues to show inspiring and visionary leadership that is dedicated to bettering the lives of all Jamaicans. It is not an easy road but he continues to restore hope in our island nation and I am grateful that he has given me another opportunity to provide stewardship to these most critical elements of our country.

To my Cabinet Colleagues, and my fellow Parliamentarians, thanks for your encouragement and support as we work together to Harvest Hope, Mine Possibilities and create a better future for all.

It is my family who keeps me grounded and I am grateful to my wife, Kerida and my son Nathaniel who bear the brunt of this life of service but who provide peace and joy in what can be a difficult journey. My son has formed his own political party among his friends and is advocating for a 4-day work week and a ban on homework and for the first time joins me today in the Gallery of this House.

Madam Speaker, I am privileged to work in tandem with State Minister, Honourable Franklin Witter, he is a steady, calm experienced and reassuring force. He has marshalled his assigned areas with great skill and is a tremendous asset. Additionally, our astute, talented and hardworking Permanent Secretary, Mr. Dermon Spence, continues to provide strategic leadership to a team of competent senior managers and committed staff at the Ministry and across all our agencies.

Madam Speaker, it is often the dedicated individuals working behind the scenes who make this possible, and I wouldn't have been able to stand here today without the work of my Communications Specialist Kenneisha Campbell, Executive Assistant Maleka Morgan, Secretary Joan Clarke, Office Manager Kenroy James, Close Protection Officer Roxroy Montague and Rasta, my driver.

Madam Speaker, in the modern world of agriculture, fisheries and mining international partnerships are critical, and as such I thank our international partners and stakeholders, which contribute to the growth and development of our sectors.

Madam Speaker, your guidance and stewardship of the House has been strong, even-handed and rule-based, I applaud your conviction and support your direction.

I am here today because of the great people from South West St. Elizabeth. Every day I am focused on improving their lives and our communities and I am grateful for the trust and confidence my constituents have placed in me to continue to represent them in this Honourable House. The Management team has joined me today along with the new Councillor for the Pedro Plains Division Dr. Karl White, Former MP and Mayor Derrick Sangster, Former MP and Mayor Jeremy Palmer.

Finally, to the backbone of our sectors and the reason I am able to deliver this presentation today, our miners, farmers and fishers – a massive thank you. We work on your behalf, to accomplish your goals to ensure that you can pursue these areas that you are passionate about.

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, those listening on radio and watching us on traditional or social media, allow me to share with you the journey of transformation that we are on across agriculture, fisheries and mining; a journey to restore hope in the sectors, hope that was dashed time and time again over a 22 and a half year reign, hope which is not based on talk but is based on action, hope that will allow us to transform our rural communities, transform Jamaica to Harvest Hope, Mine Possibilities and Create a Better Future.



RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT EXPANSION

Madam Speaker, research and development is critical to a nation that is serious about feeding itself. Despite our world-renowned scientists and many research institutions, the percentage contribution to GDP for research has remained below 0.5 per cent for over decades. Having inherited this situation, we have taken a decision that we must change these years of neglect of such a vital and critical activity.

This Administration, Madam Speaker, has therefore deliberately focused on the expansion of our research and development facilities through a structured Cabinet approved Research Centre Rehabilitation Programme spending over 1.5B over a five-year period;

Already we have achieved significant milestones under Phase 1 of this project, Madam Speaker, including the installation of modular office spaces, completion of works at key facilities such as the Milk Testing Laboratory, Small Ruminant House, rehabilitation of the well and the installation of water storage capacity and new distribution systems. There has also been engagement of consultancy services to correct structural issues at the Cattle Barn, procurement and initial testing of neck collars for cattle as part of the Herd Management System, and obtaining permits for designs, drawings, and bills of quantities for nine livestock buildings.

Madam Speaker this is not work to come, this is work that has been done!

Additionally, this Andrew Holness-led Government has committed to spend a further \$6.4B over the next six years for the continued rehabilitation of Bodles and also for transforming our research stations, Montpelier, Orange River, Top Mountain and Hounslow. We will be converting all five research stations to centers of excellence.

This year, in fact this month, we will be starting construction on a \$443 million state-of-the-art piggery facility. This will provide Bodles with the capacity needed to further drive our pork industry as we expand into regional markets. Additionally, we will be upgrading the irrigation infrastructure at Bodles to the tune of \$130M this year and procuring critical pieces of farm machinery in the amount of \$20M, and moving to design a state-of-the-art small ruminant house at the Hounslow Demonstration Station for a cost \$6M.

Through Research and Development we will Harvest Hope and cultivate a better Future.

Madam Speaker, for years agricultural research never made it to these speeches, but we would be foolhardy if we believe that we can grow our agriculture sector in a changing climate without adequate research. That is why this year we will be evaluating yield enhancers/biostimulants to produce ginger outside of the traditional growing period; we will be determining the impact of climate change on beekeeping (population and productivity) in Jamaica, we will seek to formulate a local broad-spectrum bio-pesticide for use on vegetable crops and development of a forecasting system for purple blotch disease on onion.

It is through initiatives like these that the small farmer in Kelitis or Yallahs or Flagaman or Gayle will be able to have better outcomes from the agriculture enterprise

SEEDS

Members, as part of our Bodles Redevelopment and in keeping with our drive for food security, we are establishing a sustainable seed system that ensures a consistent and reliable supply of clean, affordable and accessible seeds in support of agricultural production.

More than a seed bank, we are establishing a Seed Technology Center which will not only be a repository of our local gene and germplasm pool, but will also be a cutting-edge seed processing facility aimed at optimizing the swift extraction, treatment, and drying of seeds for use by our farmers.

Under the **Pilot Program for Climate Resilience (PPCR)**, managed by the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) and implemented by UWI, we have secured a state-of-the-art, high-volume commercial seed dryer. This investment promises to significantly enhance our capacity for rapid multiplication strategies and expedite seed drying processes.

The Seed Technology center will also be upgraded with cold storage capacity through partnership with JSIF to facilitate the promulgation of a wide array of seeds including Irish Potato.

A seed sterilizer will be acquired this year, which will help our Plant Quarantine and Inspection Branch (PQPI) control seed import and offer treatment to reduce or eliminate any introduction of seed-borne pests into the Island. This also means, Madam Speaker, that farmers wishing to import seeds from overseas territories will now have the ability to have their seeds sterilized at our main airports.

Farmers, I have heard your concerns about the quality of seeds. This year we will be starting the process of establishing a Seed and Nursery Certification Unit which will stand as a driver for regulating the seed and nursery sector, seeking to ensure that the seeds provided in the market meet the requisite standards for production and productivity. The FAO is helping us in that regard and we will work together to promulgate the necessary seed regulations to guide the industry.



SOIL

Madam Speaker, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), it is estimated that 95% of our food is directly or indirectly produced on our soils.

As **@Towie_96** raised in the comments on my TikTok Live last Wednesday, healthy soil is critical for our agri-food system and farmers must be able to take a data-driven approach to what they plant where, and the nutrition regime they utilise.

To this end we continue to implement the Soil Fertility Mapping Project in Essex Valley focusing on Land Use Mapping, the collection of 1,081 soil samples, and the establishment of crop trials plots.

In collaboration with UWI St. Augustine, we've developed Fieldwork Protocols for Sustainable Soil Management (SSM) and are advancing Digital Soil Mapping initiatives, with a focus on Soil Organic Carbon Stocks and Soil Nutrients. Concurrently, our national soil sample collection has progressed and samples are now being prepared for analysis at a regional laboratory. We are moving to establish a comprehensive soil database.

Madam Speaker, to this end, I am pleased to announce that the Ministry will be providing 100 farmer groups across Jamaica with soil testing kits, and training them in the utilisation to ensure that our farmers are taking a data-driven approach to farming. We will be providing kits for 200 small farmers at a value of \$9.6 million and kits for extension officers at a value of \$4.1 million.

DEVELOPMENTS IN JAMAICA'S ORGANIC SECTOR

We have to take soil health seriously. This is why we have partnered with the Jamaica Organic Agriculture Movement (JOAM), and we are continuing the implementation of a project at a cost of \$35 million to address decades of soil depletion due to inadequate agricultural practices, limited knowledge of soil microbiology, and the negative effects of climate change.

Under this partnership, we will train at least 300 persons in the fourteen parishes in soil and water management techniques over two years.

The laboratory services within the Ministry will also be improved as a result of equipment acquisition valuing \$5.5 million, which will significantly improve its soil diagnostics and soil testing capacities.

The Project's goal is to create opportunities for farmers, entrepreneurs, and home gardeners to learn how to improve soil health and fertility levels by using various soil improvement methodologies; Compost, Biochar, and Effective Microorganisms (EM). The project will also focus on waste management through the collection of organic waste and converting it into compost.

NATIONAL PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY PROGRAMME

Madam Speaker, 2023 was a challenging period for domestic crop production and has been cited as the hottest and driest year on record for the country. This, Madam Speaker, inevitably posed severe challenges for the sector. Consequently, the interventions of the ministry during the year were focused on mitigating losses, increasing resilience and ensuring the country's food security.

Members, the Ministry, through our National Production and Productivity Programme, provided over \$1.3 Billion to support the growth of the sector during the year. This, Madam Speaker, despite the heat and the drought and the rainfall, resulted in the second highest level of domestic crop production in the country's history. Additionally the value of our domestic crop and livestock productive sectors grew by 32% during the financial year. We should applaud the resilience of our farmers.

Madam Speaker, I hear a lot of rhetoric about the support for our farmers, but Madam Speaker, may I remind you that the records are there for all to examine. Between 2012 and 2016, the allocation to the Production Incentive Programme to provide assistance for small farmers cumulatively was \$350 million. Madam Speaker, this year our Production Incentive to farmers is \$1.3 billion. In fact, Madam Speaker, in the last 3 years we have provided over 3 billion dollars to help drive production and to help our small farmers. It is not by chance that in 2021 we hit our highest production levels, then our second highest levels in 2023. This is the Government that provides support to our farmers.

Last financial year through our Production and Productivity Program we were able to strategically assist our farmers especially our small farmers in:

- **A variety of crops to include yams (sweet and yellow), hot pepper, ginger, coco, cassava, dasheen, strawberry, Irish potato, onion, lime, red peas, sweet potato, sweet corn,**
- **Livestock to include small ruminants and poultry**
- **Climate change adaptation and mitigation activities**
- **Agricultural Tools & Equipment**
- **Extension support and training**
- **Land preparation**

Members, this includes providing support resulting in over 8000 acres (3,600 hectares) of harvested crops being distributed throughout various market channels, and direct support to over 25,000 farmers, generating work for over 82,000 skilled and unskilled labourers.

For the livestock programme over \$85M was expended, benefiting over 4,700 farmers. The Ministry rehabilitated over 23,000 square meters of plant nursery space and resulted in over 650,000 seedlings/plantlets and seed materials being provided to farmers.

The Production and Productivity Programme, Madam Speaker, has created a value of approximately \$3.16 B to the agricultural sector.

Madam Speaker the amount of farmers they reached in their full term we are now reaching one year! We are harvesting Hope and creating a better Future.

onion

Madam Speaker one program that we have to celebrate is our onion program. Through the Production and Productivity Programme, the irrigated production of local onions has increased significantly over the past 8 years. This has resulted in consumers being able to purchase more of the locally grown crop, which is preferred by the market and as a consequence has spurred an upward movement in the total quantity of onions being consumed annually moving from 8,561 MT in 2017 to 13,709 MT in 2023.

This increased production also aided us in surpassing our goal of local production satisfying 40% of total onion consumption in 2023. In fact, the country produced 44% of its consumptive needs. It is worth noting that production for 2023, while accounting for 44% of local consumption, would've represented 71% of domestic onion consumption in 2017.

When compared to local production in 2017, production has increased by 644%, moving from 818 MT to 6,087 MT in 2023.

This targeted effort of increasing local production through farmers and farm families has also resulted in an estimated 11.9% reduction in the quantity of onions imported in 2023 when compared to 2022.

This year we are going to support local onion farming groups by the installation of driers in two of our highly productive zones. Between the Ministry and private players, over \$60 million is being spent on these technologies.

Irish potato

Irish potato, another one of our priority crops, is predominantly farmed in unirrigated areas. Those farmers have had an extremely difficult last two (2) years. I have mandated the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) and the National Irrigation Commission (NIC) to target our significant Irish potato growing areas and to provide them with solutions for access to water. In that regard, we recently constructed a water catchment system, valued over \$5 million dollars, in one of the major growing regions - Hinds Town. Work is under way to establish irrigation systems in New Pen, St Mary and Lucky Hill Pen, St. Ann.





LIVESTOCK SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Madam Speaker, one of our critical strategies and targeted activities in the livestock production sector is to ensure a steady supply of protein for the Jamaican population to guarantee our food and nutrition security. We have therefore taken a strategic approach to expansion across all our animal protein segments. As a result of the interventions of the Ministry we have seen the value of our domestic livestock production record an 18% increase, from J\$105.5 billion in 2022 to J\$128.8 billion in 2023.



SMALL RUMINANT PROGRAM

Our largest segment of increase has been across the small ruminant sector. Madam Speaker we have had to be expanding our small ruminant barns at all of our agricultural shows as not only have we seen an influx of goats and sheep but of youth, small ruminant farmers who have recognised that real money can be made from the sector. Like Shantel Dillion and 28 year old Kacheif Brown IICA Youth Farmer of the year, both from Westmoreland and have between them over 200 heads of goats. This is not happening by chance Madam speaker and members, this is not happening by "buck up", but by a Government taking clear steps in policy and program to drive the sector. In August 2021 we launched the Small Ruminant Development Program.

The implementation of the Small ruminant development programme has resulted in the:

- **Importation of over 1000 goats across the public and private sector. Last year the Government imported 197 small ruminants which is the largest importation into the country since the early 1990s. We are familiar with Boer and Nubian, but we have brought in new breeds – Saanen, Kiko, Alpine, La Mancha; breeds that are also known for high production of milk.**
- **The intervention that this Government made to waive the GCT has resulted in savings totalling of \$13.38 Million to persons importing live animals under the programme. Our 2023 National Champion Farmer, Owen Bartley of Unity Boer Farm, has partnered to bring in some of the world's top quality animals with excellent genetics.**
- **Additionally under the progame we have Improved forage and silage production. In fact Bodles has established over 100 acres of fodder.**
- **We have also constructed a 500 head Small Ruminant House at Bodles at a cost of \$41 million which will be opened soon.**

Madam Speaker, we are Harvesting Hope and Cultivating a Better Future.

As we continue to develop our small ruminant industry, Madam Speaker, in the new financial year we will:

- **Expand the Small Ruminant Semen Bank and the Animal Fertility Laboratory to collect and store genetic material from selected sheep and goats, as well as preserve our local genetic stock of high value.**
- **Develop a herd Registry and Animal Management system to allow farmers to register purebred small ruminants and for greater accessibility to animal records,**
- **Partner with private sector stakeholders, such as the Jamaica Broilers and Caribbean Broilers to train persons to increase the availability of highly specialized skillset across Jamaica and to support the continued artificial insemination and embryo transfer technology method for rapid enhancement in animal production.**
- **Install and commission the newly acquired \$11.69M JMD Feed Pelletizer to produce feed using local raw material and to improve our ability to respond to restrictions in feed and raw material supplies and supply chain disruptions.**
- **Continue our Artificial Insemination programme where we distribute semen to clusters of farmers free of cost to help enhance the quality of their stocks.**

CATTLE PROGRAM

Madam Speaker, Jamaica has a rich history of cattle farming and breeding. We are reclaiming that history. Significant work has been done by the Dairy Development Board, Agro Invest Corporation and Bodles to restore some of our former glory in Cattle Production.

From our National Livestock Genetic Improvement Programme, 39 farms have benefitted from single or multiple rounds of Artificial Insemination. We have inseminated a total of 504 animals, and have achieved a Conception Rate of 47% in dairy cattle, 38% in beef cattle.

Madam Speaker, Minard Farms is being restored as a centre of excellence, housing our gene pool repository of Jamaica Black, Jamaica Brahman and Jamaica Red Cattle.

We have seen a significant turn around at the Minard Estates, with their first set of calves under the program performing exceptionally well and with the herds being managed in such a way that we have returned to cattle auctions.

And at the mention of Minard Estates, Madam Speaker, I would like to share with this House that under this Government, we are also now regularizing the farmhands at Minard, taking them from years of contract work and making them full time employees with their new title Facilities Custodians. Madam Speaker, we restore and we care!

Our hardworking, long-serving farm technicians and handymen will now be full time pensionable employees of the Government of Jamaica. That, Madam Speaker, is Harvesting Hope and Cultivating a Better Future.

Our Red Poll Line remains strong and is performing extremely well and continues to have solid record keeping. In fact Madam Speaker, Jamaica exported 30 Red Poll cattle to the Cayman Islands this year and are in advanced discussions with regional partners including St. Vincent and the Grenadines to export another 30 animals and have also begun discussions to facilitate requests from St. Lucia, Dominica, Grenada, and Trinidad and Tobago for exports of live cattle and semen.

We have assigned a consultant geneticist to the Bodles Research Centre and are focused across the industry on Improved livestock genetics, artificial insemination and breeding techniques.

Madam Speaker, for years our Jamaica Hope line has been allowed to deteriorate, We are not going to stand by and allow that to happen. January this year we embarked on the Jamaica Hope Rehabilitation Project which is intended to restore the herd's functional capacity by implementing a genetic evaluation system. The objectives include increasing the frequency of desirable genes in animals, and improving milk yield, fertility, and environmental adaptability.



DAIRY REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

Members, last year, we produced 10.6 million liters of milk, with over 4000 cows in production. Our aim is to hit 30 million liters by 2030. To achieve this we are building from the ground up.

We are partnering with our educational institutions and have already provided support over the last 3 years expending some \$73 million dollars to College of Agriculture, Science and Education (CASE), Ebony Park Heart Academy, Northern Caribbean University, Knockalva Polytechnic College and Moneague College; all towards development of their dairy programmes. At the secondary level, Sydney Pagon STEM Academy, Dinthill Technical High School, Munro College and Newell High schools will all have direct support provided to rehabilitate or construct milking parlors and the associated modern equipment and animals provided to ensure efficiency.

Another \$56 million is to be spent this year to continue these interventions.

- **Madam Speaker, as we continue to focus on the development of the livestock sector, in the 2024/2025 financial year we will be embarking on The Dairy Livestock Innovation and Nutrition Knowledge Program – D' LINK**
- **Introducing solar powered cooling systems and as such significantly reduced the cost of production**
- **Purchasing and distributing 15 new Mobile Milkers across our dairy farming clusters and schools**
- **Installing 7 energy efficient Milk Cooling Tanks**
- **Establishing a technology center and Equipment Lease Program through the JDDDB to facilitate and promote the advancement of dairy operations by providing access to various equipment and machinery. Equipment which includes milking machines, silo packer, silo press, flail harvester, chaff cutter, hay baler and others, would be available for lease to dairy farmers**
- **Facilitating the importation of live cattle, embryos and semen of adaptable international breeds**

This is how you Harvest Hope and Cultivate a Better Future.

Madam Speaker, when the Dairy Development Board was established the concept of what was considered milk was fairly straightforward. As such, to lead the resurgence of our local milk industry a cess was levied on cow's milk. Since that time, a number of products using the nomenclature of milk, compete with dairy milk, but don't have the same cess regime. Additionally, all of these items are imported. Cabinet has approved the expansion of the definition of milk to incorporate milk from other animals such as goats. However, we are currently consulting various stakeholders to explore a further expansion of the definition of milk towards an inclusion of all products that claim to be milk to ensure that the playing field is level and more importantly that the pool of funds to fast track the development of the local sector can be expanded.

POULTRY SECTOR PERFORMANCE

Madam Speaker, our poultry industry continues to perform exceptionally well. We continue to support a policy direction that puts Jamaica first and supports our local farmers than a policy direction that would see to give advantage to farmers in other countries. The poultry meat sector has seen continued expansion over the last ten years, with production that would seek to give the 110 million kg produced in 2014 to 138 million kg in 2023, reflecting growth of 25% over the period.

The sector continues to move positively as small farmers continue to expand their production to meet the growing demand for chicken meat contributing approximately 40 per cent of the total output for 2023.

Madam Speaker, we have been working with our private sector stakeholders to expand the industry; and the financial year saw a substantial increase in the consumption of local chicken feet resulting in the reduction of imported chicken feet/paws by approximately 47% with chicken feet production expected to increase further in FY 24/25.

We will continue to work with our partners, Madam Speaker, to expand the industry even further in the 2024/2025 period.

Madam Speaker, I wish to announce the unveiling of our Urban Harvest Program which will see the provision of start up livestock support such as chicken, small ruminants, pig and ornamental fish. It will also include the distribution of 3000 BackYard Kits, as well as an incentive regime to encourage hydroponic farming. Each initiative will have set criteria and will incorporate the participation of the Ministries, NGOs and church groups towards inciting the involvement of the urban population centre across Jamaica.



PRAEDIAL LARCENY PREVENTION

Madam Speaker, we can't speak of Livestock and Food Security without talking about Praedial Larceny. Praedial Larceny continues to be a significant threat to Jamaica's agriculture sector, with estimated losses amounting to billions of dollars per annum. We remain extremely concerned and equally committed to strengthening our efforts to combat the incidents of praedial larceny. To this end, Madam Speaker, we continue to execute our public education and sensitisation efforts with a total of 53 public education initiatives conducted up to February 2023.

Through strategic partnership with the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), we continue to strengthen the capacity of our police personnel to enhance the effectiveness of our praedial larceny prevention efforts. In this regard, Madam Speaker, up to February 2023, seven training sessions were conducted with JCF personnel across 19 geographic police divisions, training 148 police personnel.

Madam Speaker, one of the difficulties we have been facing in pursuing Agricultural Crime has been the adjudication of loss/damage and having persons with the necessary professional qualifications to undertake the valuations. Madam Speaker, we don't turn a blind eye to the issues, we move to solve them.

And as such, I am pleased to announce that we have collaborated with the HEART Trust/NSTA to develop a first of its kind certification programme for agricultural produce valuers in Jamaica. Madam Speaker, two new NVQ-J Level 3 NCTVET certified Agricultural Valuation courses have been finalized and are now available at all Heart Accredited Training Organisations. Madam Speaker, we are also pleased to announce that the Ministry and RADA are now finalizing the first cohort of 25 persons to be trained.

This will significantly assist the court processes around Agricultural Crime, as oftentimes the determination of values impact less than expected outcomes by farmers.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister has mandated that this Government must be a Government of Action. Last year we passed, through Parliament, the amendments to the Agricultural Produce Act, which became effective on December 28, 2023, amendments that have been in gestation for almost 3 decades. They talk, Madam Speaker. We act.

By virtue of the amendments, the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) is now the 'Authority' under this Act and is required to perform certain regulatory functions, including among other things, the issuing of agricultural dealer's license, the issuing of certificate of dealer registration and distribution of receipt books.

We are going through our sensitisation stage now and preparing the necessary regulations to be tabled this financial year and to embark on implementation.

Madam Speaker, we will have amendments done this year to the Praedial Larceny Prevention Act. Through these amendments we are seeking to significantly increase all the fines and to address related issues for which the duties of the agricultural warden relate in the Trespass Act, Larceny Act, Country Fires Act, Malicious Injuries to Property Act, and the Unlawful Possession of Property Act.

Madam Speaker, with the Support of the DBJ, we are embarking on a study to determine the value, cost and impacts of Praedial Larceny on the agricultural sector and of course to generate some well needed data that we can use in our planning processes.

AGRICULTURAL WARDENS

When we conducted our 13 engagement sessions across the island, Madam Speaker, and our TikTok Live last Wednesday, people were consistently advocating for more boots on the ground.

Madam Speaker, in our continued partnership with the security forces and the Ministry of National Security, we are pleased to announce that implementation of the Agriculture Wardens Programme will begin before the end of this financial year. It is expected, Madam speaker, that by December 2023, the first cohort of 100 agricultural wardens will be trained and deployed across police divisions concentrating firstly in the 8 parishes with high incidences of praedial larceny.

Madam Speaker, we must thank the Ministry of National Security and the Jamaica Constabulary Force for supporting us in this very critical initiative which will eventually see 300 agricultural wardens being trained and deployed over the next three years throughout the entire country. This programme will be supported by budgetary contribution of \$3.4 billion over the next three years and must be seen as a strong and direct response by government in addressing this long standing scourge of the "two foot puss" wreaking mayhem and havoc on the lives and livelihoods of our dear farmers and fishers.

Let it be a warning to all that you will not be allowed the privilege of continuing to reap what you did not sow, harvest what you did not grow and consume what you did not produce.



STORAGE

Additionally, through JSIF/World Bank we will establish a Windalco-Kirkvine cold storage facility. This 3700 sq ft storage facility will also have 6000 gallons of water storage and distribution capabilities which are crucial for maintaining quality and extending shelf life for agricultural produce.

This year we will embark on building 3 cold storage and packaging facilities through the Jamaica Bauxite Institute and JSIF with Water Valley in St. Ann and Mocho in Clarendon expected to be two of the beneficiary communities.

Under the CARICOM New Zealand project we will also be installing two (2) 20 ft solar powered refrigerated containers at Hounslow in South West St. Elizabeth to assist farmers from Hounslow, Flagaman, Newcombe Valley and surroundings. We also will be executing a \$150 million Moroccan pilot project under which we intend to build out an additional 6000 sq ft of storage facility.

Madam Speaker, we are acting on old age problems, but through harvesting Hope, we are cultivating a better future.

Madam Speaker, just like the Net International Reserve (NIR), we have conceptualised and started to design the building out of a national food reserve strategy which is an Emergency Food Reserve framework to be established to ensure that regardless of what happens around the world, Jamaica is food secured. This, you will hear about soon.

Madam Speaker, it is well understood that sometimes up to 50% of agriculture production is lost due to poor pre and post-harvest handling factors. This, coupled with inadequate storage and distribution facilities, can create further distortion in gains from agricultural pursuits. Accordingly, Madam Speaker, the Ministry and its agencies, especially RADA and AIC, have been working with private sector interest in identifying, securing and building out storage facilities to improve storage conditions and reducing post-harvest losses. In order to truly harvest hope and cultivate a better future we must significantly increase our capacity for storage.

That is why, Madam Speaker, over the next three years, this Government will undertake the largest investments in Agricultural Storage. Through the \$34.8 million FAO "Food Loss and Waste Reduction Project " we have already distributed 2 retrofitted 40 ft reefer containers which are placed at the Trelawny RADA office and the St. Mary Cooperative Multipurpose Facility.

This year we will refurbish and retrofit the Coleyville Cold Storage facilities in Christina, Manchester which is owned by the AIC at a cost of \$87 million, with the support of JSIF.

NATIONAL FARM ROAD REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

Madam Speaker, if our farmers can't get to their farms or get their produce to market then we can never be food secure. This is why the Farm Road Rehabilitation program is one of the most critical programmes that we administer. Under this programme, over the last financial year, a total of 64 roads were rehabilitated, covering 41km (208,615 square metres) including Zambia in South St James, Kimma in NW St. Ann, Number Road in North East St. Elizabeth.

An additional 40 roads totalling 47,028 square metres were repaired due to the damage caused by a tropical wave in June and Cyclone #22 in November 2023.

The total expenditure on farm roads rehabilitation for the financial year amounted to \$790M benefitting over 4000 farmers and an estimated 550 Ha of agriculture production areas.

Madam Speaker, for the financial year 2024/2025 we again commit to rehabilitate some 60 farm roads covering 30 km to impact 2500 hectares of farmlands and 3000 farmers.

Communities like Somerset in Bull Bay, Bonnett in Guys Hill, Mahoe Hill, places like Claro Town and Banton Town in St. Elizabeth will benefit. For this activity, the government has projected to spend \$670M.

Colleagues, by way of policy, I have directed that 10 per cent of this year's budget, some 67 million dollars go towards maintenance. We have to preserve what has been done already, as we move into new areas. The plan is to expend these funds as quickly as possible, as I am sure our Minister of Finance will provide more support based on the rate of spend. We have been in discussion regarding expansion.

Madam Speaker as you are well aware, our coffee farm roads in the Blue Mountain Range are in significant need. The team from JACRA is working with RADA and the NWA to design a coffee road rehabilitation program that will go through the PIAB process in an attempt to seek about 5 billion dollars in funding to deal with that highly productive region and being relief to farmers and their communities from the prevailing bad road conditions.

AGRIBUSINESS

AGRO PARKS AND AGRO PRODUCTION ZONES

Madam Speaker, through our structured agriculture programme, we continue to take a holistic approach to agricultural development that combines increased production with infrastructure development, technology adoption, sustainability, and market access to drive transformational change in the agricultural sector. Madam Speaker, this Government has also moved to establish Agro Production Zones, Agro Parks and Agro Economic Zones. To date, we have established 10 Agro Production Zone, 8 agro parks, and one Agro Economic Zone is currently being developed.

This approach, Madam Speaker, has resulted in increased production and in December 2023, the Agro Parks and Production Zones yielded a total of 10,177,469 kg when compared to 4,931,460 kg harvested in December 2021. This notable rise of 5,246,008 kgs underscores the expansion of lands under the charge of the AIC, now totalling 7,778 acres and representing a substantial 65% increase from 4,700 acres in FY2021/2022.

In 2021 we started the process to establish our first Mango Agro Park. Members, we invested an additional \$104M to date to bring the total acreage under irrigation to 365 acres. 120 acres is already under production and as we speak a further 80 acres is being put into production. We have also completed drainage works (1.4km), at a cost of \$352,000 to effectively address long-standing flooding concerns. This, along with assiduous stakeholder engagements, have resulted in a resurgence in planting and agronomic activities, which have resulted in a further 80 acres under various stages of land preparation within the park. I salute our 13 investors who have been working on this game changing initiative.

Our traditional Agro Parks, while they have done well, still have some utilization challenges where arable land is not being taken up because of a lack of access to water. We are fixing this!

Madam Speaker, work has already started to bring irrigation supply to a further 93 acres of land in the Ebony Park Agro Park. Plantation Garden River Agro Park will also see an expansion of their irrigation supply this year.

Members, we are not stopping there, we are moving to establish new Agro Parks. I am pleased to announce that applications are now open for land in the following Agro Parks:

Amity Hall – St. Catherine
Bridge Pen – St. Catherine
Parnassus – Clarendon

This encompasses over 400 hectares or 1000 acres of irrigated arable land and will have storage facilities and a distribution center. We invite investors to come take advantage of these tremendous opportunities. Interested Parties can contact the Agro Invest Corporation. All of those Agro Parks will be opened in 2025.

MATCHING GRANT SCHEME

Madam speaker, as we grapple with the issues around financing agriculture, the new AIC is seeking to develop and operationalise microfinancing options to provide support for agricultural enterprise. We have already started some discussions with Developmental Agencies for grant funding and loan schemes to be administered through the AIC.

Through the partnership with the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Partnership Fund (UKCIF) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) as part of the Southern Plains Agricultural Development Project (SPADP), I am pleased to announce that under a \$100 million scheme, persons will be able to access matching grants of between \$150,000 - \$500,000 per person for their agricultural enterprise.

DRIVING INVESTMENT

Madam Speaker, to accelerate the pace of transformation, our Agriculture and fisheries sector needs significant private investment. The countries that we celebrate for their Agriculture are built on private investment with the Government creating a facilitatory environment for that development. We have to go out and seek those investments.

To this end I am pleased to announce that Agro-Invest, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Mining (MOAFM), and with support from JAMPRO will be Staging an Agri-Investment Forum in the last quarter of the financial year. This forum serves as a pivotal platform to showcase and explore lucrative investment opportunities within the agricultural sector and presenting viable investment-ready agribusiness opportunities to attract both local and foreign direct investment into our local agriculture and mining space.



AGRI-BUSINESS COUNCIL

Madam Speaker again in an attempt to have greater alignment between our vision for agriculture and the Private Sector we have re-energised the food security and agribusiness council. This initiative is co-chaired by Matthew Lyn representing the PSOJ and I, and is tasked with not only aligning the missions, but engaging the private sector, our youth, and the Opposition in the formulation of a 20 year Agricultural Development plan.

AMC COMPLEX

Madam Speaker, there has been much debate about the future of the AMC Complex on Spanish Town Road, and the complex has even come in recently for high level visits and media features. A simple question could be asked and a simple answer given. The government has no intention to lose control of this important facility. But certainly, compared to past administration's handling, we intend to make it work more efficiently and effectively on its planned purpose.

The call for public private partnership investment is therefore intended to provide options to attract private capital in revitalizing and better utilizing the space for capital gains while retrofitting and facilitating greater commercialization, industrialization and more efficient throughput for agricultural commodities and services.

Accordingly, an Enterprise Team was established with oversight from the Development Bank of Jamaica to support the process. We now have the options and recommendations from the Team for consideration, which will be submitted to Cabinet shortly.

BUILDING RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE FOR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION

IRRIGATION

Madam Speaker, Jamaica has a total of 325,810 ha of lands available for agriculture; 62% percent of which is arable; and of that amount 44% per cent is irrigable and 12% percent is currently irrigated/under irrigation.

Given our predominant reliance on rainfall coupled with the current climatic change vagaries, the scenario is calling for agriculture production and productivity to be scaled through the incorporation of irrigation and other technology.

This government has taken a serious note of this deficiency and for the last 8 years has been actively pursuing a strategy of providing irrigation and other technological solutions to mitigate water deficit for agriculture led by the National Irrigation Commission along with other agencies.

Consistent with this position, in the last financial year, we have rehabilitated 300 metres of canal, distributed 196 rolls of drip hose, 14-1000 gallons and 44-650 gallons water tanks at a cost of \$8.51M; purchased one (1) water truck at a cost of \$19.3 million; incorporate 200 Kilowatt of solarized clean energy solutions at one location at a cost of \$42 million.

This has helped us to expand irrigation support to over 31 ha of lands impacting over 200 farmers.

Madam Speaker, during this financial year, we will continue to focus our efforts in building out irrigation infrastructure for the farmers of this country.

Let us recall that the Most Honourable Prime Minister announced the Pedro Plains Project as a national priority project; and accordingly, the Cabinet has given approval for an expenditure of US\$ 149M for the first phase of the project.

As we speak, the cadastral survey and other early works are being executed through a \$187M contract with the NLA. This project, Madam Speaker, will see the lifting of water from the black river to provide irrigation for 3332 acres of farmlands with approximately 4000 farmers benefiting on the plains of St. Elizabeth.

Similarly, work continues on the GBP\$16,710M SPAD and GBP \$35,305M ESSEX Valley projects targeting 1600 hectares in Manchester, Clarendon, St. Elizabeth and St. Catherine. Members, these projects are transformational. In Essex Valley we have laid all the pipes, drilled all the wells, finished the majority of the 27 km road rehabilitation, almost completed the solar photovoltaic system and now await the completion of the procurement for the pumps. For SPAD the pumps are already enroute. Completion dates are set for 2025 and 2026. Madam Speaker, these projects were made possible under a grant agreement of GBP\$52,015M from the UK Government through the UK CIF/CDB for which the people and government of Jamaica are thankful.

Madam Speaker, the NIC has earmarked irrigation systems for Hinds Town Project, Yallahs West Project, Lucky Hill Pen and the Lennox/Lower Leyton Project in the amount of \$713.6M (cumulative). Upon completion, these will impact a total of 4,167 hectares and 4,475 farmers and will increase production levels by up to 50% percent. All of these multi-year projects will begin this year.

DROUGHT MITIGATION

Madam Speaker, RADA has implemented various mitigation strategies within the major production zones across the island as a means to sustain production, productivity and economic livelihood. The Ministry has provided a total of \$175 Million for drought mitigation interventions including \$113 M for flood recovery and J\$62 M for drought mitigation and adaptation. These activities include:

- The construction and rehabilitation of four (4) water harvesting ponds supplying over 7.5 million gallons of water expected to benefit over 200 farmers and supporting approximately 210 hectares of farm lands.
- The operationalization of 1,630 ¼ acre mini-drip gravity irrigation system providing 2 million gallons of water to farmers and impacting 200 hectares of farm lands.
- Trucking of over 2.6M gallons water to some 1,250 farmers within the major drought affected areas of St. Elizabeth, Manchester, St. Ann, Clarendon, St. Catherine and Westmoreland supporting over 300 hectares of crops.
- Through partnership with RADA and farmers 9,590 m² of pond liners were provided to improve storage and distribution of water which enabled storage of approximately 2.6 million gallons of water for farm use.
- Over 24,000 units of assorted fruits and vegetable seeds were provided to support speedy recovery from the impact of drought resulting in the establishment of over 731ha of crops which enhanced production and productivity.
- Through collaboration with Food for the Poor and JSIF, four (4) farmer groups totalling 63 persons were supported with rainwater harvesting systems including field sheds, half acre gravity fed drip irrigation systems and 110 water storage tanks with a storage capacity of 110,000 gallons to support 12.6 hectares of crops.
- Collaborated with the Meteorological Service for farmer training in the use of 'Participatory Integrated Climate Services for Agriculture' (PICSA) approach on use of rainfall and temperature information in making decisions on crop preparation and management. In the new financial year, Madam Speaker, we will be scaling up the training and use of this approach.

This year we will continue to establish retention ponds in highly productive zones to ensure that when the rain does come we are making the most of it, additionally we have earmarked four old storage tanks for rehabilitation to serve farming communities.

I am also pleased to announce that we will be distributing 2500 Irrigation Kits starting this year to ensure that our small farmers have greater capacity to withstand times of drought. A mixed modality will be used for distributing, including the elected representatives, RADA, JACRA and various farmer based organizations.

PUBLIC GARDENS

In the reality of a changing climate or public gardens are critical. This is why we have constructed a new 1800 sq ft plant nursery to host 15,000 ornamental plants and retrofitted the existing plant nursery to host 15,000 fruit trees, medicinal and other edible (culinary) plants; three exciting developments, Members.

BATH BOTANICAL GARDENS

The Ministry is collaborating with the Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo), Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF), the Social Development Commission (SDC) and the World Bank to rehabilitate Bath Botanical Gardens in St. Thomas. This is a symbiotic relationship between health and natural heritage. This project is valued at JMD\$18.3 million and its duration is 18-20 months.

HOLLAND BAMBOO SCENIC AVENUE

We have planted 5,050 bamboo (*Bambusa vulgaris*) throughout the avenue for the resuscitation Programme also known as "Operation Darkness" to enhance the beauty of the Avenue as one of the most photographed areas within the island and region.

THE MONTPELIER BOTANICAL GARDENS

We are seeking to establish a new Botanical Gardens, to be located at Montpelier in St. James. This is part of an overarching drive that each parish should have a botanical Gardens over the next decade.

EXPORT EXPANSION 2023

Madam Speaker, the year recorded a 2.1% increase in the value of fresh agricultural exports moving from US\$ 92.6 million in 2022 to US\$ 94.5 million. This is commendable in light of last year's falling local production due to adverse climatic conditions.

Notwithstanding, there were increases in the volumes exported for several other commodities including Coffee Beans, which saw a 48.02% increase over 2022; Hot Pepper, which saw a 36.6% increase over 2022; Pumpkin – which saw an 11.36% increase over 2022; and Green Banana – a 6.46% increase over 2022.

Notably, while yam production and productivity were curtailed in 2023, the demand for the product remained strong; this when coupled with the Ministry's effort to enter new markets resulted in a significant 33.18% increase in the value of all yams exported in 2023. Earnings increased from US\$ 37.8m in 2022 and crossed the US\$ 50.m mark for the first time in our history in 2023, earning US 50.4m.

While yellow yam is the traditional major contributor to the exported yam category, we have seen increases in the demand for lucea, negro, sweet yam and others, which also contributed to the total yams exported.

Madam Speaker, another area where we have seen significant growth in exports is in our sauces. In the first 9 months of 2023, we saw a 20% increase from earnings from sauces exports moving from USD \$27.9 million to \$33.6 million.

This augurs well for our spices sector, especially as we seek to secure the agriculture value chain, more of our agro processors are looking to expand their agricultural output. Madam Speaker, while the brands are too many to call, allow me to recognise the work of PickaPeppa, Walkerswood, Spur Tree Spices, Scotch Boys and of course Grace Kennedy.

SPICES SECTOR

Members of our Agro Processing Sector depend significantly on our spices sector. Through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food for Progress Jamaica Spices (JaSPICE) Project which is being implemented at a value of US\$22.6 million our goal is to revitalize the spice sector over a five-year period.

To this end, this year:

- Approximately six new ginger nurseries are to be constructed or upgraded to increase production.
- 21 acres of ginger infield planting will be undertaken.
- We will engage private and public nurseries to produce over 100,000 pimento seedlings.
- 425 acres of turmeric to be planted infield.
- We will initiate at least one research per spice crop under laboratory and field conditions.

TRADITIONAL CROPS

COFFEE

The overall production for Jamaica Blue Mountain (JBM) and Jamaica High Mountain (JHM) Coffee crop year 2023/24 up to January 2024 was 177,842 boxes. This figure represents a slight increase of 1.5% over the corresponding period. It should be noted that the heavy rains in October and November 2023 significantly impacted the 2023/2024 crop projection and production.

Coffee Green Bean export figure up to January 2024 was 296,286.44 kg which sees a 20.25% increase in the cumulative amount for the corresponding period (January 2023) of 246,380 kg. This, however, is but a shade of the demand for the Best Coffee in the World, as the Japanese call it the King of Coffee. This is why this year we are focusing on the roll out of the Crop Restoration and Establishment Programme (CREP).

The CREP is a \$3.58 billion revitalization and expansion plan for Jamaica's coffee over a 4-year period. The core components of the CREP will focus on:

- **Farmer and agro-processor Capacity Building, Business Development & Training**
 - **Planting Material Production**
 - **Plant Nutrition & Pest Control Management**
 - **Infrastructure support for Quality Assessment and Certification**
 - **Establish Value Addition Innovation laboratory**
- This \$3.58 billion project is expected to:**
- **Provide support to over 15,000 farmers and their families.**
 - **Earn an estimated J\$9.55 Billion additional income to farmers over the next 5 years.**
 - **Earn an estimated additional \$116.3 Million USD income from exports over the next five (5) years.**

The CREP plan will be implemented through Public-Private Partnership initiatives and will place the Growers at the forefront of all to be implemented.

NEW TECHNOLOGY — BLOCKCHAIN

One other area Members. One of the critical needs in the Global market space is the ability to distinguish the world's best coffee from the rest. To this end JACRA will be seeking to implement BlockChain technology to provide digital traceability from farm to finished products.

The main objectives of this new technology are to improve the efficiency and timeliness of our service delivery to customers, track the supply chain of the commodities, provide verification of product origin and authenticity, increase information accessibility to the trade and to enhance compliance of licensees (exporters, importers, dealers, farmers).

This new technology will also assist Jamaica with being compliant to the new EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) which takes effect on December 31, 2024. This new piece of legislation will prohibit the EU from trading commodities such as coffee, cocoa, palm oil, cattle, etc. from countries that are linked to deforestation and forest degradation.

This forward-thinking move is to ensure that our Coffee Farmers can Harvest Hope.

COCOA

Madam Speaker, we are still focusing on the Frosty Pod Rot Disease Management Programme in earnest which aims to decrease the incidence of Cocoa Frosty Pod Rot disease which negatively impacts the production and productivity of the crop. The Government has spent approximately \$157.8M to manage this disease in Clarendon, St. Mary and St. Catherine.

Madam Speaker, we have been using drones to enhance our extension services support as well as to support data collection, crop analyses, mapping and even conducting two demonstrations of Drone Application of Pesticides/Fungicides with over 90 Cocoa Farmers across the parishes of Clarendon and St Mary.

The overall production for Cocoa crop year 2023/24 up to February 2024 was 95,592 kg wet cocoa. This figure represents a slight increase over the corresponding period in 2022/23 which recorded 93,947.5 kg wet cocoa bean production.

Local sales figure for the same period was 26,182 kg wet cocoa being purchased by local chocolatiers, which shows a 76% increase over same period for 2022-23 which recorded 14,818 kg local sales. This indicates a significant growth in local value-added production.

We have maintained our 100% exclusive Fine or Flavour rating from the International Cocoa Organisation again signaling that we have the best in the world in fact one of only 8 countries so designated. One of our Jamaican Chocolatier Pure Chocolate was selected among the top 50 for the 2023 edition of the Cacao of Excellence Award and subsequently won Gold at the Cacao of Excellence Award Competition in Amsterdam, Netherlands in February 2024. Let us commend Pure Chocolate and all our local chocolatiers who are creating a new paradigm for our Cocoa industry.



COCONUT

Through collaborative partnerships in Jamaica, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining, ITC, CARDI, CIB, Scientific Research Council, JAMPRO, Alligator Head Foundation, RADA, Knockalva Polytechnic College (KPC), input providers, have been leading the resurgence of Coconut. Not only have we reduced the spread of Lethal Yellowing by 70 per cent, commendations to Dr Myrie and the team, we have also done the following:

- Convened 13 Alliances for Action with 13 identified Lead Farmers and associated farmers in various geographic locations and undertaking training for over 200 farmers, focusing on: Good Agricultural Practices; Integrated Management of Major Pests of Coconut; Mother palm Selection; Nursery Establishment and Management; Fertility Management Intercropping and Value Addition.
- Established 30 lead farmer climate-smart demonstration plots for smallholder farmer capacity and market linkages improvement for coconut and associated crops in St. Catherine, St. Thomas, St. Mary, Portland, Hanover, Trelawny and Westmoreland, with more than 300 second ring farmers.
- Distributed more than 75,000 coconut seedlings for establishment of diversified plots – with a 50-50 co-investment requirement of selected farmer groups.
- Distributed more than 100,000 intercrops including Coconuts, Pineapples, Ginger, Sweet Peppers, corn, sweet potatoes, Scotch Bonnet Pepper, Oranges, Plantains and Bananas, Cabbage and Callaloo, 30 black tanks, 250 bags of fertilizers, 10 irrigation systems or parts thereof, 3 water pumps, .
- Conducted soil tests and provided customised fertiliser formulations to Alliance farmers and conducted Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of lead farmer plots and crops.

This year we are moving to work with 10 agro processors in support of developing agri-business solutions., continuing the research on climate resistant varieties , and increasing the production of coconut seedlings and seed-nuts (for local and export consumption) by partnering with local coconut farmers and business entrepreneurs.

Additionally the private sector is answering the call. I am happy to indicate that the SCJ has now entered into a lease arrangement for 220 acres of former sugar land that will be put into coconut production.



BANANA

Madam Speaker, in the year 2023, 71,528 tonnes of bananas and 46,455 tonnes of plantain were produced which represents a steady growth. Furthermore, when compared to 2019 (the base year), banana and plantain production for 2023 showed a respective increase of 12.3% and 2.9%. This is by virtue of direct Government intervention.

Since the launch on June 22, 2021, the Plantain Pilot Project (PPP) to establish 20 Ha of plantains, the Government has expended \$20 million dollars to establish 20 Ha of plantains across 6 parishes, and will expand the support for the programme with an additional \$15 million for banana and plantain production.

As we Harvest Hope and Mine Possibilities and reshape the Face of Food, there are some cross cutting matters that must be addressed.



INPUT COSTS

Madam Speaker, one of the main barriers for entry and expansion is input costs for agricultural enterprises. From seeds to fertiliser, to chemicals, to irrigation equipment, farmers have been complaining about prices. While we appreciate that there were significant increases in both ingredient prices and shipping costs after Covid-19, it is essential that just as the prices go up when the world prices go up they should also come down when things get better. We have been reaching out to input suppliers and I want to commend Newport Fersan for reducing their fertiliser prices and urge their retailers to pass on the savings. The team and I met with Isratech and they have indicated that they too have reduced their prices in relation to drip tapes, hoses and pond liners. This too is commendable.

LABOUR

The shortage of traditional agricultural Labour across the sector is approaching chronic proportions. Access to Labour and the cost has therefore emerged as a major challenge to our agri food systems. To treat with this the Ministry has embarked upon and will be enhancing the following initiatives:

AN EXPANDED RADA EQUIPMENT PROGRAM

Madam Speaker, RADA has already put into operation six (6) new tractors with higher efficiencies and more diverse horsepower. The parishes of Clarendon, St Thomas and St Catherine also received new tractor implements bringing the fleet to 15 tractors and 4 backhoes.

This year, we will continue the retooling of RADA's equipment pool to better cater to the needs of farmers by procuring two replacement tractors and implements at a total cost over \$30M. Additionally, we are about to embark on an enhanced RADA Tractor Lease and Land Preparation program that will provide greater access to privately owned tractors across the country.

Madam Speaker, we are, however, going even further than that. We will be supporting the procurement of Walk Behind Tractors and other small easily operated machines to help small farmers on difficult terrain. So, farmers will be able to lease these for a designated period at a reduced rate.

Additionally, RADA has procured four (4) drones that are now being used in our mapping exercises and has started to introduce the use of drones for spraying. We have seen that a number of private operators and individual farmers invested in purchasing drones to enhance their farming operations. This year, RADA will be partnering with those drone operators to provide land preparation assistance for our farmers. We will also be procuring more planters and harvesters during the course of this year and are looking to capitalize on the US \$1 million made available by the Government of India to provide Equipment support for Agriculture.

RADA RESTRUCTURING

Speaking of RADA, Madam Speaker, the restructuring of RADA will begin this financial year. The board is presently reviewing the recommendations from the consultants to forward to my office. The promise we are making is that a restructured RADA will see the retrofitting of the institution to improve extension services through the integration of all extension services under RADA, increasing the number of extension officers and providing highly specialized technical support and training methodologies.

Madam Speaker, one of our big achievements is that we now have a RADA Mobile Application available in the google play store. The App allows farmers to get real time extension services without the extension officer having to always physically visit the farm. It also provides an extensive "how to" guide and pest management guide. We will be rolling out a promotional campaign for the RADA App this financial year.

PROJECT F.E.E.D

FEEDING THE ECONOMY THROUGH EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (YOUTH AND WOMEN INITIATIVE)

Madam Speaker, the engagement of women and youth in agriculture is tantamount to its success or failure. This year, we will continue our focus on creating greater opportunities for youth to get involved in agriculture pursuits and to provide tangible support to motivate their achievements.

To this end, we are embarking on a comprehensive agricultural development program for youth, women and persons with disabilities called **Project Feed**, which is our drive to empower and develop our women and youth and our persons with disabilities so that we can feed our nation and build our economy.

Under Project Feed, appreciating the challenge with access to Land we are reserving 25% (up from 20% last year) of all our new agro park lands to be assigned to women, youth and persons with disabilities on preferential terms.

Under Project Feed, 390,000,000 dollars under our Production Incentive Program will be reserved to be accessed by young farmers to provide direct support to specific crop lines. Youth will be able to apply through a special portal created by RADA to access this benefit and through their elected representative, subject to the appropriate verification.

Under Project Feed, we will be partnering with the HEART/NSTA Trust to ensure youth and women who graduate are certified in greenhouse production with a greenhouse or shade house free of cost and input support for their first crop to enable them to start their agricultural enterprise. Where access to land is a challenge we will also attempt to accommodate them in an agro park.

Under Project Feed, we are introducing an Agricultural Scholarship Program to provide support for our young people especially who have excelled in agriculture and related fields in High School to be able to study areas here and abroad that are in significant demand. We are looking for Geneticists, Agricultural Engineering, Precision Agricultural Specialists, Soil Scientists. We are taking a public private partnership model looking to generate at least 100 million dollars per year. The Program will be managed by the 4-H and will build upon the Rio Minto Scholarship.

We are taking a public private partnership model looking to generate at least 100 million dollars per year. The Program will be managed by the 4-H and will build upon the Rio Minto Scholarship.

Under Project Feed, in partnership with the Heart Trust and NCTVET and the Private Sector we are providing Islandwide Tractor Operations and Maintenance Training Free of Cost.

Under PROJECT Feed, The Jamaica 4-H, will introduce a specific small ruminant training program to train and certify youth and women farmers. Graduates will be granted animals as input to start their own commercial operation.

Under Project Feed, we will be introducing the 4-H Mentorship Programme, a comprehensive programme available for 4-H Clubites and Youth Farmers in Jamaica where we will create a connected community of mentees with mentors, who have an in-depth understanding of agriculture, business, leadership and advocacy for the agriculture and fisheries sector, with the goal of ensuring food security.

Under Project Feed, we are partnering with the Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers to develop cottage industries in goat milk, cheese, yogurt, soap, jams, jellies, pickles and syrups.

Under Project Feed, we are introducing the 4-H International Exchange Programme, through the 4-H network, 4-H Clubs are taken up on reciprocal basis for promoting exchange of ideas, skillsets, knowledge sharing, values and cultures amongst youth farmers, clubites, staff and volunteers of different countries. This aspect of the programme is geared towards bringing agricultural innovations and learnt best practices to both countries while, challenging youth members to develop a global perspective.

Madam Speaker, it is the youth who will shape the face of the future of Agriculture. This government is going to ensure that our Youth and women harvest Hope, Mine Possibilities and Create a Better Future.



SCHOOL GARDENS

School gardens provide a practical space to demonstrate agricultural best practices with the aim of winning the interest of Students towards farming and other agricultural vocations, as well as to support the institution's school feeding programme.

We are introducing this year The Adopt a School Garden Programme as a partnership model between 4-H Registered school gardens and an external private sector organization to support the development and maintenance of school gardens. The mandate of the programme is to provide prolonged support for school gardens with the aim of enhancing quality agricultural education, learnt best practices, driving sustainability within the sector.

Under the programme, support will be directed towards greenhouse/shade house production, irrigation (tanks, drip hoses), agricultural tools, feed, fertiliser, fencing and small stock.





OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE SECTOR

Madam Speaker, the Fisheries sector grew by 29.6% in 2023 with production of 15,010 MT valuing J\$33.7B. Marine fisheries production for calendar year 2023 was 14,136 MT valued at J\$32.7B, while for the same period aquaculture production increased to 954.23 mt valued at J\$1B. Our preliminary analysis suggests that this represents real contribution to GDP of 1.15% and a contribution of 14.2% to the agriculture sector. Madam Speaker, this is the highest contribution the sector has made in recent memory and moves from a contribution of 9.8% in 2022.

Madam Speaker, the National Fisheries Authority registered 7,644 fishers compared to 5,687 in 2022 representing a 34.41% increase. Additionally, 1.3 million seedstock of tilapia were produced by the NFA to support the demand for fish from the sector.

Madam Speaker, of great significance to Jamaica and the Caribbean region, is the fact that Jamaica became the first country in the world to have the Queen Conch Fishery certified as sustainable under the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard. The MSC is an internationally recognized institution that certifies and monitors marine fisheries as sustainable. The benefit to Jamaica is that our conch products will have a competitive advantage in the international trade arena, and it will also open new markets for our local conch fishers. Madam Speaker, in my last sectoral presentation as Minister of Agriculture I reopened the Conch industry but indicated that it would not be business as usual, that we as an industry and government would take the necessary steps to ensure that we can have an industry for generations to come. Now, our conch industry is regarded as the world's best and our people are benefiting from export value of USD \$8 million annually. We are harvesting Hope and Mining Possibilities

MARINE

In partnership with the Caribbean Maritime University, the NFA has undertaken the "Safety at Sea" training programme which is designed to train a new generation of fisherfolk to operate their vessels safely at international standards. Following last year's first cohort of 47 trainees, for this year an additional 35 persons have been trained in Clarendon, Portland, and Hanover. Also, 12 more fishers have been trained in safe diving practices by the University of the West Indies under the same programme.



BLUE JUSTICE

As we all know, Fisheries crime in the Caribbean poses a severe threat to food security, the marine environment, and the rule of law. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to advise that Jamaica now hosts the regional Blue Justice Caribbean Hub with the National Fisheries Authority as the secretariat. The Authority, supported by the Norwegian Government, will develop, and sustain capacity to tackle organized crime within the fisheries sector in Jamaica as well as in other countries within the region. The Hub was successfully launched in November 2023 and has already staged a Regional Workshop in St. Vincent in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in that Island.

LICENCES & REGISTRATION SYSTEM

Madam Speaker, despite some preliminary delays, I am pleased to advise this House that our fishers, fish farmers, and other stakeholders can now register and apply for their licences and permits online. This allows us to automate the processing of licences and ID and shorten the length of time for applications and renewals. We are seeking to serve our Fisheries better with real time online registration and data support, through our Fisheries and Aquaculture Information System called IrieFINS.

We are Harvesting Hope and Mining Possibilities.



NFA'S PRODUCTION INCENTIVE PROGRAMME

Last year, we reintroduced the NFA's 'Production Incentive Programme'. Fishers benefited from an Outboard Motor Fuel Grant valued at \$4 million. Through this grant, 400 fishing vessel operators who were compliant over the last three years with the NFA's licensing requirements were rewarded with vouchers valued at \$10,000 each. Under the same programme, payments of \$120,000 each have been prepared for 14 young persons and women to develop their fishing enterprises. We anticipate another 36 individuals receiving this grant as soon as the recommendations are received from the relevant Members of Parliament. Safety equipment such as Marine VHF radios with GPS capabilities will be given to 100 fishers to support safe fishing practices at sea.

A vibrant underwater scene featuring several ornamental fish, including a prominent orange and black striped fish, swimming among tall, yellow-green artificial plants. The background is a clear blue water. The text is overlaid on a green rectangular area that has a torn paper effect at its top and bottom edges.

ORNAMENTAL FISH FARMING PROJECT:

Members, we are moving to revitalise the export of ornamental fish from Jamaica, under our "Ornamental Fish Farming Project". In 2022, this market had an estimated value of US \$5.8 billion and the global trade in ornamental fish alone was estimated to be valued at US\$339M. The Ornamental Fish Farming Project will provide support to groups of ornamental fish farmers in terms of capacity building, rehabilitation of infrastructure, retooling and training in marketing, business administration and technical capacity development.

This project is valued at approximately over 16 million Jamaican Dollars. Currently, an Export Clearing-house Facility is being constructed at the Aquaculture Division in Twickenham Park to facilitate the export of the ornamental fish that is produced by our ornamental fish farmers. This programme will make special inclusion for youth and women, at risk youth, and inner-city communities.

WE ARE HARVESTING HOPE.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT/ RESEARCH VESSEL

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining, through the National Fisheries Authority, continues to work towards sustainable fisheries resource management and strengthening the development of the fisheries industry. In doing so, we recognize the need to collect timely and accurate information on our marine ecosystems through research solutions.

Through our strong bilateral relationship with Japan, the Government of Japan under a grant agreement will provide a Research Vessel valued at 1BYen (J\$1B). This will be used to conduct fisheries and marine research for the sustainable utilization of our marine and fishery resources to include abundance and distribution surveys; especially of large migratory species such as tunas. In partnership with local and regional universities, we will also conduct surveys to understand changes in the marine environment regarding the impact of climate change on fisheries resources.

We also thank the Government of Japan for the commitment to provide a Technical Consultant who will assist the NFA in developing fisheries-centred blue economy activities, promoted as measures to address the issues in the fisheries sector. We anticipate that these activities will be implemented between 2024 – 2026.



AQUACULTURE

Madam Speaker, the NFA has embarked on a programme aimed at diversification within the aquaculture sub-sector. To this end we will introduce a program this year to produce fresh water prawn. The 7.3 million project will see the construction of a hatchery to produce the prawn and facilitate imported broodstock.

This aims to diversify our product offering, as well as the income stream for our fish farmers and also to ensure you can get the best peppered prawn in the world when you travel to Middlequarters, St. Elizabeth.

We will also be seeking to establish our first ever Aquaculture Agro- Park on 300 acres of land in Amity Hall, St. Catherine and 200 acres in Mitchell Town, Clarendon through a public - private initiative.

TILAPIA EXPANSION

Madam Speaker, the Ministry, through the NFA, has been implementing the US\$5 million Promoting Community Based Climate Resilience in the Fisheries Sector Project to increase the adoption of climate resilient practices among targeted fishers and fish farming communities. This has eight (8) sub-projects including:

- **Construction of a Bio-Secure, Climate-Resilient Recirculating Aquaculture System (RAS) Hatchery, valued at JM \$574 Million is now underway, as we broke ground for this project in February of this year. This hatchery will support the production of over 5 million fry per annum, which will drive the anticipated production of over 3,500 metric tons of tilapia by 2025 and impact over 117 existing Aquaculture farmers.**
- **Production of alternative fish feed using local ingredient to mitigate the rising cost of imported feed. A feed mill and pelletizer valued at US \$110, 000 will be used to provide feed solutions as a pilot benefitting over 177 Fish Farmers.**
- **In collaboration with the HEART-NSTA Trust a special certified training intervention is being executed at the Ebony Park Heart Academy. This will involve the renovation of 3 half acre fish ponds valued at USD \$125,000 as a lab to train and certify young persons and those involved in Tilapia Production.**

These projects, Madam Speaker, embody our efforts to build climate resilience within our fishing communities, especially by developing the skills of our fisherfolk and providing them with alternative livelihoods. Additionally, it is important to note that all sub-projects will utilize renewable energy.

FISHERIES FUTURE INITIATIVES

FISHERIES CONSERVATION

Madam Speaker, our strategic flagship conservation programme is the development and management of Fish Sanctuaries across Jamaica. Since 2010, supported by Cabinet decision, we have established a network of 18 Fish Sanctuaries. These are designated areas where specific regulations and restrictions are implemented to protect biodiversity, preserve critical habitats, and support the recovery of fish stocks. The Sanctuaries are run by some of the most passionate people in the world, an amazing NGO Network that have committed themselves to rescuing our marine ecosystem.

Madam Speaker, since inception, despite our provision of support, no budgetary allocation was made for the Sanctuaries. The pool of funds that we used to draw on have become significantly less with the past closure of our conch industry and the need for yearly surveys to support our conch sector has emerged. Madam Speaker, as such, we have been advocating for a direct budgetary line to be provided, to ensure consistent support and expand support to those not now receiving.

Madam Speaker, I wish to put on record our sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service for providing a subvention of \$60 M to the Fish Sanctuary management programme. While this doesn't treat with all the needs it is a massive step in the right direction. I have already started a discussion with Minister Samuda to see if that Ministry could put in place a matching support mechanism.

The establishment of these Fish Sanctuaries are consistent with Jamaica's commitment to allocate 30% of coastal and marine areas of particular importance to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

To date, the declared sanctuaries contribute over 10,000 Ha of protected areas, and the NFA intends to double that number by 2027.

Madam Speaker, our commitment to preserving the sanctuaries through the collaborative effort of our stakeholders and this government to ensure that they remain protected cannot be overemphasized. It is a proven fact that sanctuaries work, Madam Speaker. Our scientists and researchers have expressed that the data has shown the return of species long sought after as well as a doubling of the biomass within the fishing space.

Madam Speaker, in that regard I am pleased to announce the formation of two New Sanctuaries. Grange Pen, St. James, which encompasses an area from the RIU Hotel in St James, supports Jamaica's commitment to the Global Biodiversity Framework of conserving 341 hectares and Lucea in Hanover encompassing another 127 hectares. These have been Gazetted and now means that Jamaica has 20 Fish Sanctuaries. Thanks to the work of the Oracabessa Foundation, the fishers, the NFA and the private tourism interests in making these a reality.

Madam Speaker part of our drive is to make the Sanctuaries sustainable by finding income generating project. I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that through the recently completed 'Eco-tourism for Sustaining Fish Sanctuaries' sub-project in Galleon, St. Elizabeth, valued at US\$113,000, over 20 fishermen and women received training in eco-tourism by TPDCO to be tour guides. Equipment such as kayaks, floating jetty, mobile office, and vessel to be used for enforcement and the patrolling of the sanctuary have been purchased and are currently being deployed.

FISHERIES PRODUCTION INCENTIVE PROGRAMME

To further support the recovery and growth of the fisheries sector during this post pandemic period, the NFA will be providing grants to fishers and fish farmers who qualify under our Fisheries Production Incentive Programme at a value of J\$42M. The grants will be allocated in three programmes:

1. Business Development Grant for Youth and Women up to \$120,000 per person to qualified fishers under the age of 35 years. Selected individuals must be registered and provide a proposal on how they intend to start, develop or improve their business with this grant funding.
2. Boat Engine Initiative to support at least 20 fishers or fishing organisations prioritizing young people who participate in the NFA's training programmes.
3. Safety Gear for Fishers Initiative to provide equipment such as Life Jackets, Marine VHF radios and GPS devices targeting fishers on the Pedro Cays and Morant Banks.

FISHERIES LOAN PROGRAMME FOR ENGINES

Madam Speaker, discussions are far advanced in partnership with several insurance and micro loan institutions as well as suppliers to provide a loan facility for fisher folks. This will see loans of up to \$1M being on lend in a structured repayment arrangement at minimal interest for the specific purpose of purchasing boat engines.

Madam Speaker, it has been the experience of loan providers to these stakeholders that they honour their loan repayment obligations; and so, the response has been extremely positive to this proposal. Therefore, Madam Speaker, we are confident that by the second quarter we will be able to advise the sector on the quantity of funds available under this facility.

BEACH REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

Madam Speaker, the infrastructure which supports marine fisheries activities is generally poor or absent at fishing beaches. In addition, the impact of a series of natural disasters in the last few years has made the situation of the nation's fishers even worse. To facilitate rehabilitation of the fisheries sub-sector and in leading the charge, the Ministry, through the National Fisheries Authority, will spend \$20 M dollars this fiscal year to provide and upgrade facilities at three fishing beaches. This activity will include the installation of sanitation facilities, storage, work sheds, fish handling stations and signage at Pagee in St. Mary; Bournemouth in Clarendon; and Billy's Bay in St. Elizabeth.

FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Madam speaker, the untapped blue economy continues to present vast opportunities for contribution to our GDP. Jamaica therefore must recognize this potential and strategize to harness it. The key initiatives to be executed by this ministry in support of tapping into this potential involves the expanded utilization of current species and the exploration of new fisheries. Accordingly, we are taking the necessary steps to develop our pelagic fisheries, increase our oyster production and sea moss farming, among other initiatives, with significant income generating potential.

DEVELOPMENT OF PELAGIC FISHING

Through a pilot project valued at USD \$169,000 up to 280 fisherfolk from over 7 fishing communities are being equipped with the skills and tools necessary for Pelagic Long Line, and FAD fishing. A Pelagic Training Vessel has been purchased at a cost of US \$250,000 to support this initiative.

Training has already been completed with fishers in select communities in St. Ann, St. James, and Hanover to enable them to go further offshore to harvest untapped species such as tuna. The pilot project will now be extended to other selected fishing communities in Manchioneal, Portland; Pagee and Annotto Bay, in St. Mary; Discovery Bay, St. Ann; Whitehouse, St. James; Lances Bay, Hanover; and Whitehouse, Westmoreland, Parotee and Calabash Bay in St. Elizabeth

An aerial photograph of a coastal village. In the foreground, several colorful fishing boats are beached on a sandy shore. Behind them are several buildings with light-colored walls and dark roofs. The background shows more buildings and lush green vegetation, including palm trees. The overall scene is a typical coastal settlement.

SEA MOSS FARMING

A pilot project for Sea Moss Production in Oracabessa Bay, St. Mary valued at USD \$180,000 will extend economic opportunities to 3 communities (including Oracabessa, St. Mary, White River and Discovery Bay in St. Ann) through the establishment of a shade house and drying facility for sea moss, as well as training in sea moss production and marketing. This will be expanding to other Fishing Beaches in St. James, Clarendon and St. Elizabeth.

An aerial photograph of a rocky coastline. The water is dark and turbulent, with white foam from waves crashing against the shore. In the foreground, two small wooden boats are visible in the water. The background shows a rugged, rocky coastline with some vegetation.

OYSTER PRODUCTION

Two oyster production sub-projects have been established in Green Island, Hanover and Savanna-La-Mar, Westmoreland valued at USD \$324,000. This will harness the potential of mariculture as an alternative livelihood in our rural communities. Two containerized offices are currently being erected to support these communities at a cost of USD \$56,000 and two floating docks valued at USD \$16,000 are being installed.

PERFORMANCE OF THE SECTOR

Madam Speaker, the minerals sector continues to enjoy growth and remains one of the areas playing a pivotal role in our country's economic advancement, ranking 3rd in foreign exchange earnings. During the 2023 period these earnings increased by 68% when compared to 2024. Additionally, Madam Speaker, the gains made in limestone exports have bolstered the industry's diversification.

Madam Speaker, over the past sixty years, the Bauxite and Alumina Industry has remained an important part of the country's historical and present industrial fabric. It is the largest segment of our Minerals Sector, accounting for approximately 80% of its earnings and over 75% of the value of the country's traditional exports. It continues to provide some of the highest paying jobs in the country and creates a positive and catalytic impact on the economy of the communities in which it operates.

THE REOPENING OF JISCO ALPART

Madam Speaker, the modernization and reopening of the 1.65 million tonnes per annum alumina refinery in Nain, St. Elizabeth is central to the economic fortunes of a large section of St. Elizabeth and Manchester. In fact, its restoration and reopening will also have positive implications for the national economy. Owned and operated by Jiuquan Iron and Steel (Group) Company Limited (JISCO), it is unique in being the country's sole high temperature alumina refinery, which makes it capable of treating with the varying quality of bauxite ore.

Madam Speaker, having met with JISCO's owners in April, I toured the plant last week and it is clear that it will require significant work and investment to get it running again.

The company remains committed and has indicated that we will have a proposal regarding reopening by the last quarter of 2024.

Madam Speaker, we welcome these developments and stand ready as a Ministry to provide all the necessary and facilitatory support to bring this opening to reality especially for the people of St. Elizabeth and Manchester.

Madam Speaker, I wish to mention the tremendous support from my State Minister, Honourable Franklin Witter, who has been charged with the responsibility of managing aspects of the mining portfolio, and who has been working tirelessly to ensure that this becomes a reality.

We are Mining Possibilities.



REYNOLD'S PIER EXPANSION

The Jamaica Bauxite Mining Limited (JBM) is a state-owned company with a business enterprise mandate over government properties having oversight for 4,000 acres of land and infrastructure in St. Ann, including Reynolds Pier and Lydford Estate.

The Port Development and Expansion Project (PDEP), being undertaken by the JBM for the expansion of the Reynolds Pier, will expand the loading capacity to 8 million metric tons a year and will see the Pier as a best in the region multi-faceted port, that can dually berth Panamax vessels that exports Industrial material and berths the new large cruise vessels. The value of this expansion is at a cost of US \$ 130 million.

We have also started conversations with private interests and the port authority to explore possible locations for a new port or to expand an existing one. Already a location in St. Thomas seems to be a front runner.



HUMAN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

On August 18, 2023, the JBM executed and operationalised a three-year MOU with the HEART/NSTA Trust. This will see the upskilling and certification of current workers and seek to regularise them as established employees; so that as the increased port activity occurs, these staff members are skilled, enabled and ready.



LAND REHABILITATION

Among the core mandate of our Mines and Geology Division is ensuring that mined-out lands are properly rehabilitated in keeping with established standards for environmental management. Madam Speaker, in 2022/2023 approximately 258 hectares, or about 638 acres of mined-out bauxite ore bodies were certified as rehabilitated. Since the start of the Bauxite industry in the 1950s, 10,541 hectares of land has been disturbed for mining. Of this amount, 7,725 hectares have been rehabilitated. The remainder represents lands that are either currently being mined or are in the process of being rehabilitated.

BAUXITE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME [BCDP]

Madam Speaker, the Jamaica Bauxite Institute continues to stand as the cornerstone of the dynamic tapestry of the bauxite industry through its mission of maintaining an unwavering commitment to market-based research and facilitating investment in plant expansion and renewal without degrading the environment.

As global consciousness toward sustainable development intensifies, the JBI is placing greater emphasis on life after mining through its Bauxite Community Development Programme (BCDP). Through the programme, the JBI has executed a number of projects including:

- Provided production incentive support to nearly 200 poultry farmers across Clarendon, Manchester and St. Catherine expending over \$10M.
- Rehabilitated the water catchment facility at the Alexandria Hospital in St. Ann by completely resurfacing, fencing, cleaning, and rehabilitating the catchment facility at a cost of over J\$6M.
- Constructed two containerized classrooms, with the capacity to hold up to 30 students each, at the Aboukir High School in St. Ann at a cost of over \$12 million.
- Repaired four (4) greenhouse clusters constructed in 2017 under Phase 1 of the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI I) in Manchester, St. Elizabeth, and St. Ann due to extensive damage from natural disasters expending over \$24M.
- In partnership with the Southern Regional Health Authority (SRHA), completed the renovation and reopening of the Broadleaf Community Clinic, totalling over \$14M dollars benefitting some 5000 residents from Broadleaf and surrounding communities.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we have commenced a new socioeconomic survey in conjunction with the University of the West Indies examining the bauxite industry-influenced communities' demographic, economic, and social dimensions. The findings from the study will be used to determine further project investments for community development.

Madam Speaker, as we focus on Human Resource the JBI/BCDP will this year establish a yearly scholarship programme at a total value of up to \$5M for students at the tertiary level.

BAUXITE LANDS . LAND TITLING PROGRAMME

Madam Speaker, during calendar year 2023, the four (4) bauxite and alumina companies operating in the country issued a combined total of 159 Certificates of Titles (Land Titles) to persons whose lands they had acquired for bauxite mining and related purposes.

Madam Speaker, the issue is that several persons have been waiting for the settlement of their tenure under the bauxite lands agreements for extended periods. This is an area of concern which we intend to seriously address in the new financial year. As such, we have reconstituted the bauxite land titling committee, chaired by my Minister of State and supported by all responsible agencies.

TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENT

Madam Speaker, in leveraging the increased use of technology to interact with the communities in the bauxite mining affected areas, the Ministry has implemented two mobile applications.

- “Mining Matters” is a mobile application designed to facilitate citizens and other stakeholders in making reports related to mining and quarrying activities in their respective communities. This mobile application is a vital tool in empowering citizens and facilitating the reporting and resolution of mining-related matters through effective communication.
- “Quarry COP” - this application will help quarry operators to more adequately determine cost of production and other such financial parameters.

EARTHQUAKE AND SEISMIC OPERATIONS

Madam Speaker, our Earthquake Unit plays a very critical role in operating the country's seismograph network and raising awareness towards earthquake hazards as well as the application of mitigative strategies.

Madam Speaker, for the financial year 2023/2024, in pursuit of its mandate, the Earthquake Unit

- Completed the repair and upgrade of the solar power system for its monitoring center to provide a stable and reliable power supply for round the clock data collection and processing.
- Installed a new seismograph station in Montego Bay, St. James which increase the Jamaica Seismograph Network coverage across the island.
- Completed crucial power upgrades and communication systems at St. Thomas, St. Ann and St. Mary priority seismic stations to improve data quality and reliability at these stations.

Madam Speaker, the findings from some of the foregoing works were presented at the prestigious 2023 International Science & Technology conference and at several local, regional and international symposiums and seminars throughout the financial year; and this has attracted local and international interest for collaborations and joint ventures.

MINING POSSIBILITIES FOR 2024/2025

OPERATION PIPE WATER (Potable And Irrigation Water for Productivity and Empowerment in Bauxite Mining Communities)

Madam Speaker, the location, topography, and geology of many communities in which bauxite mining has been a major economic activity have created significant challenges for the structured delivery of water for domestic and other purposes; negatively impacting the residents' quality of life.

Madam Speaker, in partnership with several private and public organizations and donor agencies, we will be launching OPERATION PIPE WATER - the Potable and Irrigation Water Project for Bauxite Mining Communities. This project, Madam Speaker, will seek to alleviate the harsh conditions of these communities with the ultimate objective of improving the quality of life, economic opportunities, and lived experiences of the residents.

Madam Speaker, over the next ten (10) to fifteen (15) years, I propose that the project will expend approximately J\$20 billion to bring potable and irrigation water to over 125,000 residents and 800 businesses.

Approximately 3,000 hectares of land will benefit from irrigation systems, which should raise agricultural output by 8 percentage points and create employment for over 5,000 persons.

THIS IS HOW WE MINE POSSIBILITIES

GREENHOUSES EXPANSION

The JBI's partnership with the Jamaica Social Investment Fund will also see the BCDP investing over J\$100M to erect Greenhouse/Water Harvesting sites across all five bauxite bearing parishes. This project will benefit over 340 farmers directly and indirectly, improving the lives and livelihoods of thousands of persons in these areas.

MANCHESTER CITRUS REVITALIZATION PROJECT

Madam Speaker, the JBI will partner with the Jamaica Citrus Growers Association and other relevant agencies to implement a project to replant citrus in Manchester. The project's first phase will cost over \$7M and will serve as a pilot project to guide the recharge of citrus production across all bauxite parishes.

BAUXITE LAND LEASE

In the Ministry's drive to boost agricultural production and improve food security, the JBI and the JBM, in collaboration with the National Land Agency, will be undertaking a Bauxite Land Utilisation program where we will be providing leases to farmers in bauxite areas under a Bauxite Land Lease Programme . We have already identified some lands in St. Ann, Clarendon and St. Elizabeth for this purpose. The programme will create an efficient and affordable channel for farmers in these areas to access lands for agricultural purposes at below-market-rate lease values.

WE HAVE HEARD THE CALLS OF OUR CITIZENS AND WE ARE TAKING THE STEPS.

SARGASSUM ASH PROJECT

Madam Speaker, as a major focus of the third phase of the ACP-EU Development Programme, the Ministry's Mining Portfolio, in partnership with academia and manufacturers of cement-based products, will pursue research aimed at determining the quantity of sargassum ash that can be accommodated in certain concrete-based products without compromising strength and durability.

Madam Speaker, huge quantities of sargassum have been washing up on several of the country's beaches and is considered a waste and a hazard. However, through this project, my Ministry will seek to determine the extent to which it can be transformed into a resource for the construction trade, fertilizer and animal feed. If successful, a waste will be transformed into an alternative product for commercial or industrial use.

PRODUCTION LEVY

Madam Speaker, the Bauxite Production Levy (BPL) has generated billions of dollars for the country. It has also been an object of consistent opposition by the Bauxite and Alumina Industry. The industry is not as robust as it was several years ago and requires particular attention to allow it to reposition itself and to continue making a very meaningful contribution to our economic development.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is committed to collecting all the levy that is owed. To the extent possible, we will simultaneously consider modifications to the levy so as to reduce the burden on the companies.

LIMESTONE

Madam Speaker, while the results of the exploration for high-quality limestone by a locally owned company to augment its reserves are not yet available, it is clear that in the coming years, the increased exploitation of our limestone resources will become increasingly important in our minerals sector. To that end, we will pursue policies aimed at ensuring that the country extracts the highest possible value from the use of these resources while being a very competitive player in the industry.

Madam Speaker, a review of our policies will seek to ensure that the Limestone Industry is known as a centre of value addition and high-quality products above comparatively cheap raw bulk minerals.

Madam Speaker, these are interesting times in the Metallic Minerals Exploration Industry. The Company with the largest Gold Mine in this hemisphere just signed a partnership deal with a Jamaican company that has been driving explorations for gold and copper. Barrick is now here and I have impressed upon them and Geopysyx that any development has to prioritize the Jamaican people and our assets, and must ultimately ensure that the communities that touch and concern these activities see real benefits.

DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDUSTRIAL MINERALS POLICY

Madam Speaker, to help drive the development of the Industrial Minerals, we will be finalizing an Industrial Minerals Policy with the objective of establishing a well-defined and adaptive policy framework that provides a clear direction for the industrial long-term development minerals sub-sector. We project that the Policy Green Paper will be submitted to the Cabinet and tabled in Parliament by the end of the financial year.

THE MINERALS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Madam Speaker, in 2022 the government announced the plan to restructure certain institutional arrangements in the Minerals Sector and specifically, the establishment of the National Minerals Institute.

Madam Speaker, to give effect to the creation of the Institute, we will be merging the Geological Survey functions of the Mines and Geology Division and the Jamaica Bauxite Institute and incorporating the Earthquake Unit to create the new entity which will focus on managing and leading research regarding the country's mineral resources, products and seismograph.

Madam Speaker as I close let me address three issues,

GCT on IMPORTED RAW FOODS

Madam Speaker, a lot has been said about the announcement of the Minister of Finance regarding the GCT on raw foods and bringing our policies in line with the WTO rules. It is worth noting that the Policy Direction is not now in effect and as indicated a working group has been convened to examine the issues. From the Ministry of Agriculture's perspective we would love to see the removal of GCT on seeds and table eggs and an expanded concession regime to incorporate refrigerated motor vehicles.

Say Yes to Fresh - the best way to guard against imports however is to ensure that whenever we go out to purchase our food we are supporting our local farmers and fishers, we are saying Yes to Fresh. To this end, we will be embarking on an extensive promotional campaign encouraging persons to make healthy choices by eating our local food. We hope companies will come on board and will start branding their products with say yes to fresh stickers, so that we can easily differentiate our Jamaican products.

FINANCING AND INVESTMENT IN AGRICULTURE

Madam Speaker, the agriculture sector requires significant investments for its growth and expansion, and we continue to call for greater levels of investment in the sector especially due to its potential for great returns.

Madam Speaker, we continue to lament the limited flow of capital to the agriculture sector, and so we are calling upon our financial institutions to make available larger sums of money at more attractive terms and conditions so as to invigorate capital input.

Madam speaker, we wish to thank those who have tried, including the DBJ; but our analysis is that the sector needs annually at least 50 billion dollars by way of concessionary loans and grants for continuous engagement and expansion.

We, therefore, call on our financial institutions to do more for agriculture in 2024.

The Ministry will also be working closely with the MFPS as we seek to establish an Agriculture Development Fund through the amalgamation of current contributions and future prospects. This Fund, similar to the Tourism Enhancement Fund, will be used to support and infuse capital into the sector for development purposes.

Madam Speaker, we thank all our international and local partners, even those not mentioned here today, for their continuous support.

THE OPPOSITION LEADER

Madam Speaker, since the Opposition Leader left the House of Parliament without an Opposition Spokesperson on Agriculture the Opposition Leader himself was forced, painstakingly so, to dedicate a section of his speech to the sector.

Having reviewed the suggestions, it is clear that the Leader of the Opposition agrees with the direction of the Ministry and the Government.

Every Suggestion is something that we are already doing.
Increased Youth Training - Last year, we offered 169, 354 training opportunities.

Expand and repair Farm Roads - Last year we did over 70 roads.
Partner with UWI and CASE to boost research - We have provided 60 million to CASE to boost research capacity. We are partnering with UWI SODECO for our gluten-free flour project, and we are partnering with NCU for dairy research.

Upgrade CASE to University - I announced in August 2023 that this was the policy direction that we are taking with CASE.
What is clear, Opposition Leader, is that we agree on the direction of the sector, but there is still a very clear difference. The things you raised have been plaguing our farmers for decades. However, very little was done to address those issues, now action is the hallmark of today. So, you keep talking while we will keep working.

CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker, Members, Jamaicans. I am old enough to remember the 1990s and early 2000s and the way things were. It was in 1995 that Jamaica joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and entered into the General Agreements on Trade and Tariffs. While other countries in the region like Barbados were negotiating to enter Safeguard provisions to further protect their agricultural sector, it is clear that the Government at that time appeared to have been sleeping at the wheel, and left our farmers out in the cold. We now carry that burden.

Madam Speaker, during the 90s and the early 2000s, Jamaica saw a significant deterioration in our Agricultural Output. Traditional Crops such as Banana, Sugar Cane, Citrus, Cocoa saw tremendous declines. In fact, despite some of the best efforts of the dynamic and passionate Minister Roger Clarke who genuinely loved and respected the small farmers, the Government of the day, the Party that was in power did not give him the needed resources to move our agricultural enterprise forward. They talk a good talk and criticize every move that is made, but when they get the opportunity to do something they don't have the actions to back it up.

I remember distinctly that during that period in the early 2000s I felt like Hope was being removed from our island home and many of us felt like life here would make no sense. I got involved in politics to see if I could help restore hope and change lives.

What the farmers need now is action, not talk and politicking, action to restore Hope, so that we can Harvest Hope and Mine Possibilities, Hope that comes from storage facilities being built and rehabilitated. Hope that comes from pipes being laid and the wells done in Essex Valley, Hope that comes from our DLINK programme that will provide mobile milkers and solar coolers to our dairy farmers, Hope that comes from Project FEED with \$390 million being allocated to Youth, Women and Persons with Disabilities. Hope that comes from the construction of a new fish hatchery, Hope that comes through our Boat and Engine Programme for 20 youth, Hope that comes through our PIPE Water program to address water woes in bauxite communities, Hope that comes through our Bauxite Land Lease programme to give farmers land to farm.

The Hope that comes from knowing that you have a modern visionary leader in Andrew Holness who has ensured that finally, in the history of modern Jamaica, Farmers, Fishers and Miners are getting their just recognition and support. We will do everything in our power to remain on this trajectory, Jamaica has come too far to turn back now, we are moving Forward EVA! Backward NEVA.

We are Harvesting Hope. We are Mining possibilities. We are Cultivating a Better Future for all.