

Ministry of Agriculture

End of Year Press Conference

Ministry of Agriculture Large Boardroom

Wednesday 23rd December 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Media Good Morning and welcome to the Ministry of Agriculture's 2015 Year-End-Press Conference where we highlight major achievements of the sector during 2015 and our projection of where we want to take Agriculture during 2016.

Rice – a success story

During 2015, the rice industry continued to perform favorably despite marketing challenges.

As at the December 16, 2015, paddy production was 1,051,563 tonnes equivalent to 683,516 tonnes of rice. This figure was 48,278 tonnes or 7.60% higher than the production of paddy and rice for the entire of 2014. In 2014, 977, 289 tonnes of paddy equivalent to 635,238 tonnes of rice were produced.

For the period January -December 16, 2015 exports stood at 510,807 tonnes compared with 501,208 tonnes for the entire of 2014.

Despite the increase in the volume of exports for this period, the value was 15 % lower than the value for 2014. For the period January – December 16, 2015, the value of the exports was UG\$ 211,834,746 compared to US\$ 249,504,955 for 2014.

In the areas of Research capacity, both the GRBD 14 variety and the **Aromatic Variety** were released along with its production package for commercial cultivation by farmers in spring 2015. Nineteen advanced breeding lines are currently being tested in Advanced Yield Trials in four location across the country. These candidate varieties will be tested in Farmers fields and if found suitable will be released. **Another, Sixty Five (65)** Advanced Breeding Lines are currently being tested at the Research Station. Each season, over 4,000 breeding lines are studied by the team at the Rice Research Station.

The Extension arm of the Guyana Rice Development Board continued to give support to our local farmers countrywide in areas of best practices, problem solving, management and decision- making.

1. **Technology Application**

Extension officers were also exposed to training in Paddy Bug management, cost of production, extension communication, organization, leadership and management, seed improvement and weight determination at mills

2. Farmers Field Schools

A total of fifty eight (58) schools were conducted in 2015; where farmers were exposed to best practices. 10 were held in Region 2; 16 in Region 3; 2 in Region 4; 16 in Region 5 and 14 in Region 6.

a) With respect to quality control, 57 Mills have been licensed as of November 2015 and One hundred and one (101) licensed graders are presently licensed and operating at mills countrywide.

2016 projection

It is expected that the new varieties released will continue to contribute to improving the productivity of rice in Guyana in the coming years. It is foreseen that GRDB 12, GRDB 13 and GRDB 14 will continue to expand in acreage in 2016.

The GRDB will be implementing a proactive programme to manage '**red rice**'. Similarly comprehensive studies will be done on the paddy bug menace and its management aimed at reducing losses.

At least 500 varieties will be accessed from international research institutes/centers in 2016.

Sugar- a bitter- sweet journey

The journey of Guyana's sugar industry remains a bitter-sweet one. Sugar production for 2015 currently stands at 229,215 tonnes surpassing its projected target of 227,443 tonnes. The 2nd crop production is presently at 148,372 tonnes against the latest estimate of 146,300 tonnes. For the 2nd crop, four estates - Skeldon, Albion, Blairmount and Uitvlugt - exceeded their production targets with the Skeldon factory recording its highest output since its commissioning.

It is anticipated that there will be no canes carried over into the 1st crop of 2016.

The Skeldon factory performed creditably during the 2nd crop and the average thru-put was 230 tonnes cane per hour which is a marked improvement from previous levels. Tillage and planting operations are ongoing with most estates expected to achieve the 2nd crop target which will be beneficial for the 2nd crop of 2016.

The Average cane harvesting attendance for the industry as at December 11, 2015 was 60.9% compared with 59% for the 2nd Crop, 2014. The API negotiations are currently at the conciliation stage, whilst wages negotiations will commence in the new year.

The World Market Price (WMP) for raw sugar continues to be way below the levels of 2-3 years ago, and impacted negatively on the price we obtained from sugar sales. This was very evident from sugar sold to the European market where the price received is very much related to the World Market Price. Sales of value added sugar increased significantly from 2014 levels and our presence was re-established in most of the CARICOM countries. Sales of our latest brand of package sugar “Enmore Crystals” which is aimed at the North American market commenced in 2015 in both the USA and Canada.

2016 Projections

Sugar production for 2016 is projected to be at 242,287 tonnes a 5% increase over 2015’s production. Grinding operations for the 1st crop will commence at the end of January.

The Commission of Inquiry’s report into the operations of the sugar industry with recommendations for a way forward for the industry has been received and having been considered by Cabinet, will be laid in Parliament next week whence it will be considered by the Economic Services Committee.

While the recommendations of the COI were many with many options it is government’s view that the future of sugar is so important to the fortunes of Guyana and the Guyanese people to warrant as much discussion and consideration as possible in our quest to chart a way forward for the industry.

Implementation of the approved recommendations will commence in 2016.

National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI)

NAREI in 2015 continued to push research and development in Guyana with the inclusion of new crops and spices. To this end, farmers across the region are now embarking on corn and soybean production on a commercial level.

In 2016, plans are now apace to have completed;-

- An Agriculture Development Plan for Regions 7, 8 and 9;
- Expansion of orchard production and soya bean in the Intermediate Savannahs.
- Operationalizing of a spice factory at Hosororo
- Evaluation of Black Sigatoka Disease resistant plantain varieties
- The control of the Red Palm Mite in coconuts (as you are aware only two weeks ago Cabinet approved \$49M to assist farmers who were affected by the mite)
- Commencement of the micro propagation of breadfruit to increase production
- To have a more responsive, efficient and reactive extension service in place during 2016.

Drainage and Irrigation

Improving the drainage network across the country has been the major part of the NDIA's mandate which has been successfully undertaken during 2015. As a result, construction of drainage pump stations were completed at Windsor Forest, Canal No. 1 Polder, Paradise/Enterprise, Pine Ground, Rose Hall, Vrede-en-Vriendschap and GuySuCo No. 66 Village Eversham BBP, No. 43 village BBP, Bengal BBP, Gangaram, and Lima.

SUMMARY OF WORK UNDERTAKEN IN 2015.

- Maintenance of approximately 24,350 rods of drainage & irrigation canals within Wakenaam, Leguan & Cane Grove NDC.
- Maintenance of 106,177 rods of drainage and irrigation channels and canals within Community Development Councils areas such as Greenfield, Hope, Anns Grove, Two Friends, Bellfield, Nabaclis, Golden Grove, Haslington, Triumph, Friendship, Kuru Kuru, Mocha, Barnwell North, Bell West, Friendship, Lusignan to Vryheid's Lust Area, Canals Polder, etc.

- Maintenance of 129,376 rods of drainage and irrigation channels and canals within Water Users Associations' areas such as Cane Grove, Golden Grove/Victoria, Blankenburg/ Den Amstel, Vergenoegen/Naamryck, Lot 52 – 74, Black Bush Polder, Crabwood Creek, Vreed-en-Hoop/La Jalousie.
- Repairs to sluices, culverts, revetment, bridges, etc.

2016 projection

Several works are in the pipeline to be completed in 2016. Among those are:-

- The completion of the Northern Relief Channel at Hope/Dochfour.
- The continuation of the rehabilitation of intake structures at Anns Grove, Hope, Annandale and Nancy and relief sluices at Maduni and Sarah Johanna (Cunha).
 - Construction of drainage structures at Upper Pomeroon, Charity, Paradise, Naamryck, Beribissibali, West Watooka
 - Revetment of D & I structures at # Leguan, Wakenaam, Hogg Island, East Bank Essequibo, Buxton/Friendship, West Berbice, etc.
 - Feasibility study and preliminary designs for construction of water conservancy facilities in the Rupununi Savannahs.
 - Rehabilitation of hydraulic excavators, pontoons and pumps
 - Excavation of outfall channels and purchase of high density polyethylene tubes (HDPE).
 - Procurement of pontoons, excavators, steel sheet piles and
 - Empoldering of farmlands in Upper and Lower Pomeroon

Guyana Livestock Development Authority

The Guyana Livestock Development Authority in 2016, will be working to have completed several projects. Among those would see the development of the local apiculture industry towards a higher geographical coverage, higher production and international quality standards.

With respect to, Poultry and meat production, the Authority will be giving enhanced support towards higher meat and egg production which will reduce the dependency on the importation of these commodities.

Efforts will also be given towards the development of the dairy industry focusing on milk collection and pooling in peri-urban areas and consider associations of milk pooling farmers as pivotal target groups, with the aim of strengthening urban marketing of fresh and safe milk.

We will also be looking to boost the services of artificial insemination of cattle, small ruminants and swine as well as breeding farms for multiplication of breeding stock and support breeding stock multiplier farms for farmer-led dissemination of good quality animals.

2016, will also see the GLDA Promote agro-processing and value-added products in livestock while strengthening collaborative linkages between the Guyana livestock Sector with premier regional and international organisation.

Other Agencies (MMA-ADA, Hydromet, Fisheries. GMC)

Fisheries

The fisheries industry will be focusing its attention on ensuring regulations are in place so that enforcement can be carried out to have a more efficiently regulated fisheries sector in 2016. Aquaculture will continue to be a main focus of the Department, to ensure its progress and increased production. Promotion and development of Aquaculture within the hinterland areas will continue. Deep sea fishing is another focus where it is hoped that some companies will be operating in this relatively new area.

MMA-ADA

The Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary Agriculture Development Authority (MMA/ADA) will commence work on the MMA Stage 11 development in the Mahaicony area in 2016. This encompasses the development for agricultural purposes of over one hundred thousand acres of agricultural lands due to the;

- (a) Extension of the current Abary/Berbice Conservancy Dam

- (b) Damming of the Mahaicony River and
- (c) Construction of Irrigation Canal and associated structures

Hydromet

The Hydromet Department during 2015 embarked on several projects to improve weather forecasting. In this regard, the hydrological monitoring stations at Isseneru, Mazaruni River; Kamaria Falls, Cuyuni River; Tumatumari, Potaro River and Ikuribisi Falls, Reg. 7 have been completed.

Rainfall stations for all Regions were visited, data collected, maintenance to gauges was done, competency of part time observers was checked and stipends were paid for the first three quarters of the year. Data collected were quality controlled and processed. New rainfall gauges were installed in Region 8 while closed ones in other Regions were reopened to extend and maintain the rainfall monitoring network.

Five new Meteorological Technicians were employed and continuous training was delivered to ensure quality outputs from the section. During this process synoptic data from hard copies prepared at observational stations were transferred into the CLIDATA database. The section prepared and delivered vast amount of data to the private and public sectors from which students of the University of Guyana benefited most. During this process staff members would have understood the importance of data and how it can be used for scientific research.

In 2016, the Department hopes to have 5 additional Meteorological Observers trained to Int'l Standards at the Caribbean Inst. for Meteorology and Hydrology; Procure and Install Tidal stations in the Demerara and Essequibo rivers; Install near real-time monitoring stations in the Hope Canal and Install near real-time monitoring stations at 3 selected locations around Georgetown, based on advice from the City Engineer's Dept.

Pesticide Board

The Pesticide Board continues to be instrumental in its quest to manage all pesticides and toxic chemicals in Guyana in a lifecycle approach. In 2015, much as been achieved by the Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Control Board such as the;-

- The development of a draft chemicals emergency response plan
- Development of an MOU with the Guyana Revenue Authority and other agencies.
- Establishment a pilot school project to educate students in secondary schools countrywide

2016 Projections

In 2016, the Board will be pursuing the implementation of regulatory action for the holistic and comprehensive management of toxic chemicals in Guyana. Enhanced efforts will also be made to reduce the illegal trade of pesticides and toxic chemicals and to also have a national technical capacity developed for chemicals emergency response.

GMC

2015 was an overall good year for the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) in the promoting and advancement of value-added production supporting our local small farmers.

In 2016, the corporation will be accelerating its work through the establishment of a Cassava Processing Facility at Parika in Region Three. The Corporation will continue to strengthen linkages among stakeholders by launching a programme to support linkages among its stakeholders. Contracts will catalyze this reinforced linkage programme with a view to market-led agricultural production. This is expected to reduce the prevalent situation of the ever-present cycle of gluts and shortages which affects agricultural production and exports locally.

Additionally, Regional and International markets will be also be sought during 2016 through the conduct of Market Studies, participation at Trade fairs and exhibitions.

I wish to thank the Members of the Media here present and to proffer complements of the season to you and your families from the Ministry of Agriculture. The floor is now open for questions.

Thank you.

