

## President's Message

In this our 119<sup>th</sup> year, the Jamaica Agricultural Society (JAS) reaffirms its commitment to foster domestic agricultural production through best practices and efficiencies in output and distribution and developing good marketing know-how for our farmers' produce. As President of the JAS, I promise, along with the other members of the Board of Management, to continue the transformation of the JAS to ensure that the farmers, and by extension the agriculture sector, continue to contribute to the development of Jamaica's economy and advancing the agenda for rural development and a better quality of life for the rural citizenry. I am humbled to continue to serve you all, farmers and membership of the JAS, and thank you for the support and confidence.

With the support of my Executives; 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Donald Berry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President Royston Johnson, the Board of Management and staff, we are committed to transforming and re-positioning the JAS as a viable farmer's organization servicing the membership. As the oldest and most deeply rooted organization in the agricultural sector within the Caribbean, the Jamaica Agricultural Society advocates for the progression and development of the agricultural sector and empowers farmers to produce effectively. We should never allow the country to forget our pioneering efforts which have contributed significantly to the sector.

The importance of the agriculture sector to Jamaica has been on a steady incline over the years and the year in review shows evidence of this:

Based on the Labor Market survey of 2013, the agricultural sector continues to be one of the largest sector contributors to the labour force, accounting for 16.4% as at January 2014, reflecting a commendable 3% increase in employment within the agricultural sector, as stated by the PIOJ. This growth came after the sector experience significant damage by Hurricane Sandy in late 2012. After declines in the first two quarters of 2013, the sector recovered in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters to record domestic crop production of 614,911 metric tonnes compared to 610,138 metric tonnes in 2012, a growth of .8%. This reflects the highest recorded production in 17 years. The growth continued into the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2014, recording a lofty 18% growth in domestic crop production over the corresponding period in 2013. I commend the farmers and thank The Almighty God for good weather.

Regrettably, exports declined by 12% in 2013, totaling US\$ 241 M compared to US\$274 M in 2012, due in part to the decrease of sugar exports. For the same period, imports grew marginally to US \$962 M compared to US \$948 M in 2012; an increase of only US \$14 M was realized outlining an overall stabilization of imports. The sector is still in its recovery phase from damages incurred from natural disasters; as such, I am enthused about the coming year.

Additionally, the performance of the agricultural sector has led to the passing of four (4) consecutive quarterly review tests under the Economic Support Programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

These statistics confirm the opportunity to move agricultural production forward and given adequate support, we will be able to realize the tremendous potential that is unharnessed within the sector. If Jamaica reaches its peak in agricultural production, it stands to benefit from import substitution, poverty alleviation and subsequently, sustainable economic growth whilst securing food independence.

In representing the agricultural sector, the Jamaica Agricultural Society has sought to implement and also continue strategic initiatives to foster effectiveness in agricultural production, output and distribution, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and other agencies. Over the period under review, we continue to build on the initiatives which will enable the Jamaica Agricultural Society to be a viable entity. These include the following:

- The Board continues to meet on a monthly basis to map out strategic plan for the JAS which includes the examination of the legal structure in an effort to reposition the organization as an independent and viable organization contributing to successful farmers and agro-processors.
- On November 25, 2013, we celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Eat Jamaican food campaign as a part of the aggressive drive to significantly reduce the imports of food, which is estimated to be at an alarming US \$1 B and encourage more Jamaicans to eat what we grow.
- Implementing Memoranda of Understanding with local and international organizations including: Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Food for the Poor, Nation's Choice, etc. The MOU with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security valuing \$14 M provided training to 1,500 farmers primarily in poultry management, pig and cattle rearing, under the Step-To-Work programme across 10 parishes has been successful.
- We launched the National Red Peas Planting Programme to address the massive importation of close to 88% of the country's consumption of red peas. This was facilitated by a donation from Food for the Poor of over 30,000 pounds of planting material valued at \$3.7 M, which have been distributed to over 1,500 farmers in all 14 parishes.
- We continue to promote agriculture through Parish Shows and the Denbigh Agricultural, Industrial and Food Show.
- For the financial period ending March 31, 2014, the Society recorded a surplus of \$2 M compared to a surplus of \$5.2 M for the period ended March 31, 2012 and a loss of \$8.5 M in 2012. This has been achieved through aggressive strategic debt restructuring, re-engineering of membership which is still underway and focusing on income generation, through grants, contributions and self-financing projects. Our assets have increased to \$477 M up from \$370 M in 2013.
- The JAS is also a critical Stakeholder on the Tourism Linkage Taskforce established by the Ministry of Tourism which will be used as a basis to re-engineer Jamaica Agricultural Society Commercial Enterprises (JASCEL) and the Central Marketing System which will be underpinned by market access for farmers' produce in an organized framework.
- We have acquired \$10 M in funding from the Universal Access Fund to build a Farmers' Call Centre, which will complement JASCEL, a central marketing platform for our farmers. This will be supported by a donation of 270 computers from the Government of South Korea.

- Integrated farmers' training programmes island wide and intensified training of our staff to carry out further training of farmers.
- We are continuing the re-organization of our assets and properties; we have settled the outstanding debts from the 1990's with FINSAC to clear the 52 acres at Denbigh and Westmoreland properties. The JAS Property Enhancements include the commencement of work on the car park downtown-Sutton Street, the completion of phase one of the construction of Great George Street Westmoreland, the Compton House expansion and commencement of discussion regarding the development of Denbigh, Hague, Bluefield- St Ann and Montpelier- St James.
- Partnering with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), the Judiciary and the farmers in the Praedial Larceny Prevention Programme. The JAS also partnered in the launching of the Farmer's Watch in Clarendon and Portland and had significant success in the parishes of St. Thomas and St. Elizabeth. The journey to win the war against this cancer that has cost the sector in excess of \$5 B annually is by no means complete. This is just the beginning.

This is indeed a step in the positive direction towards the preservation and direct marketing of products in innovative and lucrative ways. We recognize the importance of mapping the cause for our farmers as growth within the agricultural sector is one of the most critical factors needed to drive continued development within the nation. As we strive for growth, we will continue to forge greater collaborations with the Jamaica 4-H Clubs and the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA).

On behalf of the Board of Management, I wish therefore to thank the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, staff and farmers of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, and the commodity associations who are all paramount to the organization's existence. We will continue to leave an indelible mark in the lives of our farming communities and ensure that there is a repositioning of the rural economy and a better standard of living for the rural population and the nation's farmers.

It is my pleasure to report to you that the JAS had a successful year, notwithstanding challenges faced and most of which we must address decisively in the future if the transformation is to be completed and achieved on a timely basis.

**Agriculture is a huge asset to our development, let us embrace it... Let us work as a team to strengthen this pivotal pillar of our food security.**

Sincerely,

**Senator Norman Washington Grant, J.P.  
President**

June 27, 2014