

Ministry Paper 53 /2014

Irish Potato Production Programme

1.0 Purpose

The matter for tabling is the Implementation of the Irish Potato Programme in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

2.0 Background

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is implementing several strategies to reduce the food import bill, by growing more of what we consume. One of the strategies being employed to reduce our food import bill is the strategy of import substitution, where there is deliberate effort to increase production of certain crops. One such initiative is the Irish Potato Programme which seeks to promote import substitution of the Irish potato crop.

Irish potato was chosen because of its potential to reverse the high import component of consumption. The table below shows that for the period 2007 and 2008 percentage of local consumption was below 50% which was not in line with the initiative of 'Eat What You Grow and Grow What You Eat'.

Since the direct intervention to increase production, the percentages of local consumption have risen significantly as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Percentage of local consumption

Year	%
2007	44.14
2008	33.48
2009	55.51
2010	72.39
2011	76.88
2012	79.73
2013	86.90

3.0 The Irish Potato Programme

The Irish Potato Programme is geared toward achieving 100% of tabled potato by **2015**. This initiative requires increased production and improved productivity, along with unified efforts of all key players in the agriculture sector including farmers, buyers, extension personnel and researchers.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MOAF) has been instrumental in leading this effort toward 100% import substitution. Access to high quality seeds, provision of high quality extension support, farmers capacity building through training, use of best crop and pest management practices and market linkages are indispensable factors for sustainable development of the Irish Potato industry. The MOAF identified two areas of critical support namely crop nutrition and pest management . It should be noted that these two areas represent a significant part of the production cost and directly impact on yields and quality of tubers.

Irish Potato Programme 2013-2014

This programme aims to provide crop care support to farmers by providing them with pesticides which represents 50% of the pesticide demand for the crop up to five (5) acres per farmer in the designated production zones - Guys Hill, Christiana, High Gate and parts of Trelawny and St. Ann.

The general programme targets 1,250 hectares for the fall and spring crops. Of this amount, **905 hectares** have been planted so far which includes youth and women. A total of 2469 farmers are involved in the programme. It should be note that the acreage reaped to date is 358.9 hectares (5383 tonnes) and 546 hectares (9190 tonnes) is scheduled to be reaped.

The sum of **J\$17.9M** was made available to support the crop care programme (Pesticides) for the management of blights and broad mite which are considered major pests of economic importance on Irish potato production in Jamaica. **\$31.6JM** expended to date on the Programme to also include land preparation, fertilizer procurement and training. The Ministry through RADA:

- Ensured that a stock of pesticides was available to farmers in a timely manner for suppressing pest population at the early stages and minimizing risks of pest outbreaks.

- Ensured that food safety for consumers and environmental well-being through the use of products approved by the Pesticides Control Authority.
- Suitable land preparation with right tilt for production.
- Fertilizer procurement and distribution on a timely basis.

The Programme also provided 100% support for production of 40 hectares under the Youth and Women component valued at **J\$8.54M**. This was the Ministry's commitment to engage young farmers in the age range 18-35 category.

RADA continued to provide farmer training in best practices, and one of the requirements of the Programme was that participating farmers attended training sessions delivered throughout the crop cycle.

Training included the following aspects of Irish potato production:

- *Site selection and soil preparation. Efforts being made on the importance of soil analysis and results interpretation*
- *Crop planting and fertilization*
- *Pest management*
- *Proper use of pesticides and sprayer calibration and*
- *Post-harvest and marketing*

To date a total of **2,267 farmers** benefited from training sessions conducted by RADA.

Training delivery methodology included **Farmer Field School (FFS)**, which often referred to as "*school without walls*".

In FFS setting, farmers worked in small groups to ensure that each one's ideas were shared and the field was used as the primary resource for discovery-based learning. Funds had been provided to facilitate several FFS in the Manchester and Guys Hill belt (St. Mary, St. Catherine and St. Ann). FFSs are being facilitated by Extension Officers and efforts of JaREEACH Project/USAID and RADA in developing comprehensive FFS module for Irish potato production.

Criteria for participation in the Programme:

- For Youth and Women Component (between 18-35 years old)
- Must not be directly affiliated with RADA or the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

- Must be a registered farmer with RADA
- Must have legal access to at least one (1) acre of suitable land which falls within the designated Irish Potato planting zones
- Fields of programme participants must be accessible
- Must participate in all relevant training under the programme
- Must adhere to best practices
- Must keep farm records over the crop cycle (this aspect of the programme will be used to validate best practices in production, management and marketing)
- Must accept and work with assigned mentors
- Must have one character reference from a Pastor or Justice of the Peace

NB: All the above criteria apply to women with the exception of the age limit.

Objectives/Activities 2014:

- Supply 100% of nation demand (15M kg) for table Irish potato by 2015 in keeping with the RADA Marketing Plan
- To provide crop care support in the form of chemicals for 50% of the targeted acreage for fall and spring (1,250 ha up to 5 ha/farmer) of potato in production based on the recommendations
- To establish two (2) trial plots of new varieties to determine which is more suitable for the production of French fries.

I. Youth and Women Component:

Target – 40 hectares (100 acres)

Achievement to Date:

- ✓ Planted – 40 hectares (100 acres)
- ✓ Reaped - 10 ha. - 150 tonnes
To be reaped - 30 ha - 450 tonnes
- ✓ Number of beneficiaries - 176
 - a. Male under 35 years - 59
 - b. Female under 35 years - 64
 - c. Female over 35 years - 53

Assistance Received:

- Full coverage of all land preparation cost
- Cost for planting material (seeds)
- Total cost for pesticide (Insecticide/fungicide)
- Two (2) 0.20 hectares Farmer Field School Demonstration Plots to demonstrate best practices were established in St. Ann and Manchester.

II. Sponsorship/Contribution

Received from the following organizations/companies to implement the programme:

- Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries - **\$9M**
- Newport Fersan - 300 (50 kg/bag) bags fertilizer
- Agro-Grace - Pesticide for crop care on 2.4 hectare crop
- Gladstonbury Potato - Planting materials (seeds) 60 x 25kg/bag to plant 5 acres
- St. Jago Farm Store - \$50,000.00
- T. Geddes Grant - \$50,000.00

Farm-gate price is **\$88.00** per kilogram (\$40.00 per lb.) and is trending down.

Other Achievements:

Overall yields from the fall planting were excellent. Some farmers experience up to 20 tons per hectare in the Guys Hill production zone. The farmers are upbeat and highly motivated about the programme and many have expressed their desire for further expansion in the 2015 planting season. Three (3) farm tours were organized and conducted to expose extension personnel and farmers to good agricultural practices in the major production zones of Guys Hill and Christiana. Over **350** farmers participated.

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