

## PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION B/1286

B/1286 The Honourable Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka (**Mr Dayal**)

*To ask Dr the Honourable Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries:-*

**Whether, in regard to the sugar reforms, he will state if a maximum production target for our sugar has been set and, if so, indicate (a) the quantum thereof and (b) whether cane cultivation will be restricted to the production of sugar and, if not (i) the acreage of land under cane cultivation which has already been abandoned or the shortage in the tonnage of cane produced and (ii) the policy to encourage maximum cane cultivation in order, *inter alia*, to protect the environment?**

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**REPLY** (on 04.12.07)

Mr Speaker, Sir,

In the context of the sugar reform, the target set for sugar production is 520,000 metric tonnes by year 2015 to enable the industry to meet its commercial commitments *vis-à-vis* EU buyers.

In view of the challenges facing the industry in the light of the EU sugar reform resulting in the drastic cut of 36% in export price of sugar and the phasing out of the Sugar Protocol by October 2009, producing only sugar will not enable the industry to survive. This is why we have envisaged a shift from the sugar industry to a sugar cane industry where the industry will have a multifunctional role. In this new configuration, sugar cane production will be centralized at the level of four factories which will be flexi-factories capable of producing raw sugar, refined white sugar, special sugars, ethanol from molasses and/or cane juice, more electricity from bagasse and industrial rum.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

According to information available at the Sugar Insurance Fund Board, acreage of land under sugar cultivation is on the decrease from 77,322 hectares in 2001 to 71,507 hectares in 2006. Likewise, cane production has decreased from 5.7 million tonnes in 2001 to 4.7 million tonnes in 2006.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the sugar cane industry has a relatively low environmental impact in comparison to other land uses, for example in regard to relatively low agro-chemical inputs, soil conservation qualities and availability of cost-effective wastewater re-use and recycling technologies. It is therefore essential for the preservation of our environment that the sugar industry continues to exist and the maximum acreage is put under sugar cane cultivation. Sugarcane is known to be quite effective in the green scene of the air also contributing to the prevention of our lagoons.

However, in the context of the reforms, policies have been elaborated for two categories of land, i.e. land which will remain under cane and land which could no longer be under cane.

Regarding land that will remain under cane, measures have been taken to encourage planters, particularly small planters, to regroup themselves under the Field Operations and Regrouping Project. This project enables them to benefit from a number of facilities and incentives that will allow them to be competitive and cost effective. For difficult areas where increase in yield is not possible and which yet have to remain under cane cultivation for environmental reasons, it is envisaged to provide financial support to the planters concerned from funds under the accompanying measures.

With regard to land which will not remain under cane cultivation, estimated at some 5,000 hectares, alternative activities that are more profitable than sugar cane cultivation will be envisaged. Some potential areas for agricultural diversification purposes on these lands have been identified by the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute which has classified these areas into three categories. Since these areas are ecologically sensitive areas, prone to degradation, the choice of alternative crops is a very crucial one. Some potential crops identified by AREU as alternative to sugar cane are as follows:

- Horticultural crops: Pejibye, Palm, Aloe Vera, Vetiver grass
- Fruits : Pineapple, litchi, avocado, passion fruit, banana, mango, papaya, strawberry
- Ornaments : Tropical exotic flowers and foliage.