

**B/838 The Honourable Second member for Savanne and Black River
(Mrs Hanoomanjee)**

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

Whether, in regard to the non sugar sector, he will state (a) the short term plan for enhancing production of fruits and vegetables and (b) the long term plan to render this sector more viable, in view of the number of planters shifting from sugar cane to fruit and vegetable plantation?

Mr Speaker Sir,

Mauritius produces a wide range of fresh vegetables and fruits to meet the requirements of the population and the growing tourist industry. Annually around 110,000 to 115,000 tons of fruits and vegetables are being produced. This sector is largely driven by around 12,000 small holders, farmers operating island wide.

2. Since I have assumed office in July 2005, a gamut of measures and actions have been undertaken to render this sector more attractive and remunerative. As announced in the Government programme, we have already set up model farms across the island. Three such model farms at Mapou, Flacq and Rivière Des Anguilles with all required training facilities are functional today. These farms are acting as a show case for sustainable and successful agricultural development in vegetables, fruits and ornamentals cultivation. A fourth model farm at Plaisance will be set up this year.

3. In order to better train farmers, a Farmers Training School will be constructed at Wooton. Funds to the tune of Rs11M have already been earmarked to that effect. The target groups for the training school are (i) farmers (ii) unemployed women & youth (iii) VRS employees. This school will address the needs of the farmers to move towards a modern agriculture and to become agro entrepreneurs.

4. Mr Speaker, Sir, the overall aim to revalorize the agricultural sector, as mentioned in the Government programme, will not be possible without access to land. Accordingly, as at date some 800 Arpents of land have already been released to some 700 applicants for vegetable, fruit, agro and livestock activities.

5. A hydroponics village is being set up at Cluny village on some 14Arpents of land. Seventeen beneficiaries have already been selected and infrastructural works are under progress.

6. We are encouraging seed production by private entrepreneurs. Accordingly a Quality Declared Seed (QDS) scheme for vegetable seeds has already been initiated whereby all technical backup are provided to support private seed growing.

7. One of the major measures in the Government programme is the development of small and medium enterprises by young entrepreneurs in the non sugar sector. This will allow for the creation of self employed jobs and to alleviate the unemployment problem of the country. This Ministry has organized an Agri-Business forum last year to allow new and emerging entrepreneurs to benefit from the experiences of successful ones and to obtain useful information. This forum has

(a) served as a platform where all successful entrepreneurs have shared their experiences related to the development of their enterprises;

(b) disseminated information on agri business opportunities and which led to the initiation of the 'Çaravanne de L'Éntrepreneuriat' which is proving a real success

(c) enabled potential entrepreneurs to have information directly from all institutions related to agri business promotion and development.

The event has been a success and we are planning to hold the next one in April 2008. This will become a recurrent feature every two years.

8. The legislative framework related to plant protection has been strengthened. A new Plant Protection Act has been introduced to ensure prevention, control and elimination of plant pests and to protect plant resources. A new Seed Bill and Plant Breeder's Rights Bill are near finalization and this will allow for development of seed business activities.

9. Regarding part (b) of the question, as the House is aware, the adverse effects of the reduction in the price of sugar will be echoed in the non sugar. It is imperative to formulate a plan to dampen the consequences and manage production in the non-sugar Sector. It is forecasted that around 5000ha of land recognized to be difficult land for sugar production would be released. Given that the non-sugar sector faces various challenges, my Ministry has decided to design and implement a coherent strategy for this sector.

10 A draft plan for the 'Strategic Options in Crop Diversification and Livestock Sector' covering the period 2007-2015 has been prepared and is available for consultation on the Ministry's website. This plan is expected to be complementary to the Strategy papers for the sugar and the forestry sectors.

11. In the period 2007-2015, we shall strive to re-equilibrate the roles of agriculture, with more focus on ensuring food stability and security, while still giving due importance to the multifunctional roles of agriculture.

12. The plan will establish the basic policy framework and a vision for the food, agriculture and related areas, and clearly define the roles of each stakeholder group: the State itself as well as those of the farmers/producers; the

agro-industries and the consumers, including their respective Institutions and Organisations.

13. Specifically, the plan will indicate alternative strategic options for a diversified agriculture and agro-industry, offering new opportunities to those planters who would wish to shift to other activities than Sugar Cane, as well as new agro-entrepreneurs.

14. The national message shall be “to consume increasingly what we produce, so as to produce increasingly what we consume”.

15. In order to ensure broad agreement on the vision, objectives and priorities of the plan, a workshop will be organized with all stakeholders, so that implementation shall become a coherent and concerted effort of one and all.