

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NO B/915

B/915 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 potato planters of Cote d'Or and Mon Desert Alma, he will state if he has received representations from them concerning (a) the poor quality of seeds for the Spunta variety allocated to them in 2006 by the Agricultural Marketing Board and which has resulted in heavy financial losses to them and (b) the difficulties they are now facing for the reimbursement of their loans with the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd and, if so, the remedial measures that will be taken?

REPLY

Mr. Speaker Sir,

I am informed by the Agricultural Marketing Board (AMB) that in May 2006, several planters at Cote D'Or and Mon Desert Alma made complaints of delayed germination and stunted growth of their potato plantation from Spunta Seeds.

2. For the first planting season, i.e., mid April to end June, the supply of seeds is met mostly from local Spunta seeds which are approved by the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute (MSIRI). The AMB ensures that only local seeds which have been certified by MSIRI are sold to planters.

3. Site visits by officers of the AMB, MSIRI and Agricultural Research and Extension Unit (AREU) were conducted to investigate into the problems. Field observations and surveys revealed that the delayed germination was attributed to deficient rainfall from April to June, which was only 37.5% of the normal.

4. No evidence was found to associate the unsatisfactory growth with the seed quality. Furthermore, no complaint was received from growers who had used the same seeds in other regions of the island. The problem was of a physiological nature which is beyond control.

5. However, Mr. Speaker Sir, though the problem was not linked with the quality of potato seeds, support was given to the planters who suffered heavy financial losses and called for assistance.

6. The following measures have already been taken to assist the planters:-

- (a) On request, Development Bank of Mauritius (DBM) examined cases of the affected planters who had contracted loans and provided relief on a case-to-case basis. Eventually, their existing loans have been rescheduled and they have been provided with additional funds to facilitate new plantation.
- (b) AMB offered the affected planters to be included in the Local Potatoes Boost Up Scheme 2007. In this scheme, they are provided with a credit of 80% on the price of seeds against a commitment to sell at least 60% of their ware potato production to the AMB.

7. Furthermore, I have requested that a committee be set up by the AMB, including MSIRI and AREU, together with all stakeholders to look deeply into the issue as follows:

- (a) whether there is any recurrence of the problem, in those regions and other regions, for this year's plantation;
- (b) if so, to accordingly recommend on measures to be taken to improve the situation;
- (c) if not, how to compensate those planters and to advise them on alternatives.