



MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, COMMERCE, AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES

Statement by the Hon. Karl Samuda, CD, MP
Minister of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries
At a Media Briefing on
Emergence of Frosty Pod Rot Cocoa Disease
MICAFA, 4 St Lucia Avenue, Kingston 5
Thursday, September 29, 2016
11:00 a.m.

Salutations

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me join our acting PS in welcoming you once again to the Ministry.

As he has indicated, we regard the emergence of this cocoa plant disease as of paramount importance and we are therefore appreciative that you have responded to our invitation to be here this morning.

Background – the Cocoa Industry

Jamaica produces one of the finest cocoas in the world. Jamaican cocoa is highly sought after. It is acclaimed as one of the top-ranked fine flavoured cocoas and is desired by connoisseurs worldwide. Yet, although the demand for Jamaican cocoa is almost immeasurable, the international supply continues to lag behind the demand.

In 2013-2014 we produced 440 tonnes of cocoa for the local and export market. In 2015 only 266 tonnes were produced.

There is still a vast untapped market for Jamaican cocoa, but over the years we have witnessed a gradual decline in the level of production, due to the impact of climate change, plant disease and production challenges.

As you may be aware, cocoa has been identified as one of the agricultural subsectors to be reorganized and

revitalized to maximise the industry's potential to contribute meaningfully to the country's economic growth.

It is in congruence with this, that cocoa is among the four subsectors – along with coffee, coconut and aspects of the Export Division being brought together under the umbrella of the Jamaica Agricultural Commodities Regulatory Authority (JACRA). The plan is to deregulate the marketing of cocoa with the repealing of the Cocoa Industry Board Act and the introduction of the JACRA Act, which will establish a licensing regime for exporters of cocoa in a deregulated industry and so attract investment to the industry. And we are gratified to know that the JACRA Bill was passed in the Lower House of Parliament this month.

Emergence of the Frosty Pod Rot Disease

Unfortunately, we must report, today, that the Chief Plant Quarantine Officer has brought to our attention

the emergence of the Frosty Pod Rot Disease in Jamaica.

So how did we become aware of this?

In late August a Cocoa farmer in Clarendon observed a fungal disease that looked different from black pod in their field and reported this observation to the Cocoa Board. The Cocoa Board took appropriate actions to collect pods with the suspicious fungal disease, have the Plant Quarantine and R&D divisions of the ministry investigate the symptoms as well as request the support of IICA in identifying this disease.

The R&D division of MICAF tentatively identified the fungal disease as Frosty Pod Rot of cocoa. This finding has now been confirmed by the authority, the Diagnostic Lab of CAB International (CABI) located in the UK. This is the first time this disease has been confirmed in the Caribbean.

The facts as they have emerged are as follows:

1. The disease was first suspected to be present in the parish of Clarendon
2. Samples were taken for examination and this has resulted in the positive confirmation of the presence of the disease.
3. The disease is highly contagious. It attacks the pod of the cocoa and leads to rotting within 3 months.
4. It is estimated, that the disease could result in crop losses of between 70 to 80% of the cocoa tree's production.

Mitigation

This is a serious outbreak. Consequently, as Minister charged with the responsibility of the agriculture portfolio and in accordance with the powers conferred upon me pursuant to Section 3 of the Plants (Quarantine Act 1993), I hereby, with immediate effect, issue the Frosty Pod Rot of Cocoa (*Moniliophthora roreri*) Order 2016.

Under this Order,

1. Jamaica is declared to be infected with the Frosty Pod Rot of Cocoa, *Moniliophthora roreri* (hereinafter referred to as “Frosty Pod Rot”) or suspected of being so infected.
2. For the purposes of the Act, the Frosty Pod Rot is declared to be a notifiable plant pest and the

measures prescribed in this Order shall be taken for its eradication or control.

3. Unless the Chief Plant Quarantine Officer has given the person written permission to do so, a person shall not remove or dispatch from, or move into, any area of Jamaica any cocoa –

- (a) pods;
- (b) plant;
- (c) seedling;
- (d) cutting;
- (e) plant product;
- (f) plant related material; or
- (g) plant related article.

4. Unless the Chief Plant Quarantine Officer has given that person written permission to do so, a person who operates a cocoa orchard shall not

move or sell any cocoa pods within or outside of the parish in which that orchard is situate.

5. A person who visits any land that is infected with the Frosty Pod Rot, or suspected of being so infected, shall not visit any other land without changing the clothing or disinfecting the shoes worn in the land that is infected with the Frosty Pod Rot, or suspected of being so infected.

6. - (1) Every owner or occupier and every person having charge or management of land who knows of or suspects the existence of Frosty Pod Rot on the land shall forthwith give notice, in writing, to the Chief Plant Quarantine Officer, of the Plant Quarantine Branch at 193 Old Hope Road in the parish of Saint Andrew, of that fact and of all such information as may be available to that owner,

occupier or person as to the extent and nature of the pest.

(2) The owner or occupier and person having charge or management of land shall, in addition to the notice required under subparagraph (1) also give the notice, in writing, to –

(a) the Parish Agricultural Manager of the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) for the parish in which the land is situate;

(b) the Principal Research Director of the Bodles Agricultural Research Station, situate in Old Harbour in the parish of Saint Catherine; or

(c) the Cocoa Industry Board at East Avenue in the parish of Kingston.

(3) In accordance with section 7(2) of the Act, the notice referred to in section 7(1) shall be served personally on the person to whom it is addressed or shall be sent to him by registered post.

(4) The Chief Plant Quarantine Officer may, by notice in writing, require the owner or occupier and person having charge or management of land to furnish such additional information, and within such period, as the Chief Plant Quarantine Officer may specify in the notice; and the owner or occupier or person shall comply with the request for additional information.

7. – (1) The Chief Plant Quarantine Officer, or any person authorized by him in writing, may, for the purpose specified in subparagraph (2), enter any land that is infected with the Frosty Pod Rot, or suspected of being so infected, whether or not section 7 of the Act has been complied with in relation to that land.

(2) Upon entering land in accordance with subparagraph (1), the Chief Plant Quarantine Officer, or any person authorized by him in writing, may in their absolute discretion and for the eradication or control of Frosty Pod Rot, destroy, remove, uproot,

dispose of, prune or treat any item specified in paragraph 3.

(3) If any such item was not infected, that fact alone shall not render unlawful the taking of any action in relation thereto, including any action authorized by subparagraph (2).

(4) Before acting in accordance with subparagraph (1) in relation to any land, the Chief Plant Quarantine Officer, or any person authorized by him in writing, shall ensure that reasonable notice is given to the owner or occupier and person having charge or management of the land.

The main points, in summary, are as follows:

- All cases or suspected cases of the Frosty Pod Rot are to be immediately reported to our Plant Quarantine Unit and/or other Departments of the Ministry as indicated before.

- The movement of cocoa plants, pods, seedlings and cuttings is immediately restricted; and the Order also allows
- Entry by the Chief Plant Quarantine Officer or any person authorized by him (in writing) upon lands and farms suspected of having the disease and taking the necessary actions to destroy same

Other Steps

As a signatory to the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement and consistent with our obligation under the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), the Government of Jamaica has taken the necessary actions to report on this disease.

With this media briefing, today, we have also now launched our stakeholders' sensitization and public

awareness programme which is to be rolled out over the next few weeks.

In instances like these, it is always important to act swiftly to cauterize the situation and undertake all measures necessary to protect the livelihood of the farmers involved, the economies of the farming communities and all other affiliated businesses and service providers. The cocoa industry is a fairly fragile one, but one with a great potential for future growth and expansion and for these reasons also, we must move with alacrity to protect it from the threat of this disease and secure its future.

Farmer Training and Extension Services

Let me assure you, that already the officers from the Plant Quarantine and Protection Unit of the Ministry, officers of the Cocoa Industry Board, our officers from the Research and Development Station at Bodles as

well as officers from RADA have gone into the field and have initiated the process of identifying and destroying the Frosty Pod pest.

I also wish to note the support of our international partner agencies such as IICA and the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau International (CABI) in our response measures.

There are specific measures to contain its spread and those are being applied as we speak.

Appeal

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to repeat that this is a serious and infectious disease. We are therefore appealing to our cocoa farmers, farmers of other produce and the public at large, to join us in combatting this disease.

Where it is suspected that the disease has infected a crop or farm, please contact the Plant Quarantine/Plant Protection Office of the Ministry and/or the RADA parish office immediately. The numbers are:

RADA: 888-275-7232

R&D (Bodles): 745-2957

Cocoa Board: 923-6413

Plant Quarantine Protection Unit: 588-5844

Ladies and gentlemen, let me end where I began. Our cocoa industry is a gem to be treasured, nurtured and expanded. The Jamaican cocoa industry has a special pride of place, given its renown dating back to the era when this fine Jamaican cocoa was processed and branded by Sir Hans Sloane who has created a legacy of fine British chocolate and drinking cocoa.

We must build on its fine traditions and return it to its pride of place. We will not be defeated by the Frosty Pod Rot Disease!