



Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries

**Speech Notes for Hon Audley Shaw, CD, MP
Minister of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries
Launch of International Year of Plant Health
The Pavilion, Hope Gardens
Wednesday, January 22, 2020
10:00 a.m.**

Salutations:

- ✓ Chairman, Permanent Secretary, Dermon Spence
- ✓ My Colleague Ministers, Hon J.C. Hutchinson and Floyd Green
- ✓ Members of Overseas Delegations
- ✓ Representatives of the FAO and IICA
- ✓ Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- ✓ Other Specially Invited Guests and Stakeholders
- ✓ Senior Directors from my Ministry
- ✓ Farmers
- ✓ Members of the Media
- ✓ Ladies and Gentlemen all,

Good morning and welcome to these lovely gardens.

It is certainly a pleasure to deliver the keynote address at this the ***Launch of the International Year of Plant Health*** here in Jamaica.

I join all the other speakers before me in greeting you, as we look forward to a year that will focus full attention on matters relating to plant health and the protection of our environment.

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries (MICAF) recognises that plant health is a fundamental pillar for achieving the level of production and productivity needed for local and, indeed, global food security and economic growth.

And so, on behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica, we have accepted the United Nation's charge to lead in the promotion of actions to protect our plants and consequently our own lives.

The observance of 2020 as International Year of Plant Health provides us with another opportunity to intensify our commitment to doing just that – ensuring the health and wellness of plants and consequently of all living things on our planet.

As a country and region, our ability to produce crops to meet national and regional demands continues to be plagued by many issues, chief among them being threats to pest outbreak, which have, over the years, been exacerbated by the impact of climate change.

Many of the traditional crops within the Caribbean that were major income earners have been affected by pests that have adversely impacted the economic performance of these crops. Coffee, cocoa, banana, citrus and sugar cane are just a few. Perhaps, we can recall some of the names - Moko disease that affected our banana sector, the coffee berry borer, citrus greening, to name a few.

We have also seen an increase of pests over the last 10-15 years. Jamaica has recently been hit by the Frosty Pod Rot (FPR) Disease of Cocoa.

Thankfully, the management measures now being implemented are having a positive impact.

- Over 841 acres of cocoa have been treated
- 288 farmers have so far benefitted from the programme
- There has been an increase in production yields in areas where management has been implemented in St. Mary and

- The Frosty Pod Rot management team is now on the ground in Clarendon

The ***Plant Quarantine and Produce Inspection Branch*** and The ***Banana Board***, in collaboration with a national task force, are also now implementing measures to respond to the current threat to our banana: the Tropical Race 4.

The importance of plant health to agriculture, therefore, cannot be overemphasized. Healthy plants ensure high production yield and protection of our environment from overuse of pesticides.

Ladies and gentlemen, these threats are a constant and ever-present reminder that we cannot relent in our efforts to mitigate the threats to our food security.

Progress made

I note, however, that significant strides are being made in Jamaica's case, as well as within the region, to address and remedy the incidence of plant pests and diseases.

Locally, we now have a Green Paper for our National Seed Policy. This piece of legislation, when finalized, will ensure clean seeds are put into production.

We are modernizing the Plant Quarantine Act to make it more comprehensive to deal with the matters of protection and quarantine and soon Jamaica will have a Modern Plant Health Act in line with international standards.

We are also moving a step further to modernizing the Plant Quarantine and Produce Inspection Branch, which is our national plant protection organization, to better safeguard our country, agriculture and the environment. The Ministry is also modernizing the support services such as our Research and Development Division to better provide support to these endeavours.

We have worked with the Trade Board and we implemented mandatory pre-border sanitization of used vehicles being imported into Jamaica with effect from January 2019. We must reduce the soil being imported, which is a major carrier of pest. The Ministry is also working with the Mexican Government and the Jamaica Constabulary Force on an Agriculture Canine Programme to help reduce the number of authorized plants and crops being smuggled into the country.

Work is also under way to ensure the optimal operations of the country's clean seed bank hosted by the Bodles Research Station.

Disinfectant Mats

As we launch IYPH today, I wish to announce that effective February 1, 2020 Jamaica will introduce the pilot installation of disinfectant mats starting at the Norman Manley International Airport as part of our comprehensive effort to reduce the risk of both plant and animal pests being introduced into the country. The strengthening of our border protection capabilities is of high priority.

But, beyond prevention, plant health and protection **is everybody's business**; we all have a stake and a responsibility in keeping Jamaica's plants and Jamaican agriculture healthy. And so, we wish to use this opportunity to engage all of us, **every single Jamaican**, in a national drive to improve plant health.

So, I am calling upon our **travellers** to exercise the highest level of care.

I am calling upon our **importers** to ensure that the plant material and plant-based produce you bring in are clean and pest free.

I am calling upon our **farmers and horticulturalists** to protect your crops, use the best agricultural practices to ensure healthy pest-free production, prune your trees and plants and call upon your extension officer, if you need help!

The responsible divisions and agencies of the Ministry will continue to play their part. In particular, the Plant Quarantine and Produce Inspection Branch, the Rural Agricultural Development Authority, the Research and Development Division, The Banana Board, JACRA, working collaboratively with other entities, have significant roles in keeping our public awareness and engagement alive and robust while employing measures to both prevent and manage plant diseases.

In closing, let me emphasise: agriculture remains a significant aspect of the growth for small island nations such as ours.

We must now employ innovative strategies and technologies that will see us implementing effective pre-border port of entry and post-border measures to safeguard agriculture and plant health.

Let's remember that any pest that enters the island and, indeed, the region becomes an imminent threat to us all! It is our duty to protect our plants and so protect our own lives!