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News

Wake up!.....Farmers warned to embrace technology and research

PETRE WILLIAMS, Observer staff reporter
Thursday, June 23, 2005



CLARKE... We have not even scratched the surface of some of the things that we have potentially

LEEDS, St Elizabeth - Agriculture Minister Roger Clarke warned farmers Tuesday to wake up to the realities of the global economy which requires them, he says, to apply a variety of new technologies and scientific research if they are to compete successfully in the export market.

The minister was speaking at the Jamaica Exporter's Association seminar that was held under the theme, "opportunities and challenges to market-led agricultural production", at the Chariot's Hotel in Leeds, St Elizabeth.

is technology and research, he noted, that will allow them to boost production in order to fill export quotas and satisfy the needs of the domestic market.

"We have not even scratched the surface of some of the things that we have potentially," said Clarke.

"Ornamental horticulture, aqua-culture - particularly ornamental fish - has a potential of some US\$300 million annually... yellow yam is being sold now at up to \$100 per pound (but) there is a shortage; sweet potato, we don't have enough."

Agriculture, through export, has the potential to earn more than the \$27 billion it raked in last year, but is constrained by farmers who continue to refuse to adopt new production methods.

"Some are very stubborn; don't want to change," Clarke said.

"The hotel or even the exporters will go into an arrangement with a farmer to supply certain things and we sign off on it.

You supply one week and the next week a higgler comes and offers you a little more, credits it sometimes, and you give it to that higgler," he said.

"The exporter has his commitments and when he comes he can't get it, he loses that market. The higgler who comes and credits don't come back either and you are left with the goods on your hands."

He also cautioned farmers not to price themselves out of the market.

"People in the export market have to compete with other people bringing in goods from other countries," he said. "You will price yourself out of the market if the exporter cannot buy it from you at a reasonable price and those are some of the challenges we face."

Other challenges relate to a range of export standards, such as food safety, packaging and traceability of inputs.

Dr Andrew Medlicott, a post harvest technologist with the Jamaica Business Recovery Programme, agree that there is no getting around the need for technology, research and compliance with trade standards.

"We can't be doing what we've been doing all the time. We have to move as markets move. We have to change as markets change," he said.

The free market, he added, has turned most local markets into international markets so that they must, if they are to survive, meet global demands.

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