

Boost for vegetable farmers

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VEGETABLE FARMERS across the island, who were severely impacted by Hurricane Ivan last September, could soon see increased yields, having been provided with drip irrigation systems under the Jamaica Business Recovery Programme.

The programme, which is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), provides assistance for farmers in the hardest hit parishes of St. Catherine, Manchester, St. Elizabeth, St. Ann and Clarendon.

FIELD DAY

Last Tuesday, 26 farmers from Clarendon, who recently received irrigation systems, participated in a field day at John Logan's farm in Toll Gate, where they benefited from advice on how to operate and maintain the equipment, which includes materials, pump, filters, drip line and a 2,924-litre gravity-fed tank.

Audrey Bryant, agricultural extension officer at RADA, told JIS News that the agency was responsible for the selection of

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the beneficiary farmers in addition to providing technical advice on operation and maintenance.

Explaining how the project works, Harril Miller, agronomist attached to the Jamaica Business Recovery Programme, told JIS News that, "we offer a package to the farmers, which is valued at about US\$5,000 which is given to a lead farmer. We target about 35 lead clients per parish and we ask each lead client to identify about 10 beneficiary clients and so we end up assisting 35 lead

clients and 350 beneficiary clients."

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Beneficiary farmers in Clarendon are from the communities of Rhymesbury, Clarendon Park, Vernamfield, Bog Hole, Ebony Park, Swansea, Sandy Bay and Moores, where in some instances, the drip irrigation systems are used under green house conditions.

HANDING-OVER COMPLETE

According to Mr. Miller, the handing-over of irrigation equipment was now complete and focus was now being placed on providing technical assistance. He noted that at least six training sessions have been planned for Clarendon. The first one was held in Rhymesbury on September 14, and would continue through until December 31, when the one-year programme officially ends.

Errol Carter, irrigation specialist, who conducted the training session, said it was very important that the systems were properly maintained to provide maximum efficiency and to ensure longevity.

He advised the farmers that, "before you start irrigation, you need to check your field; check that you have the right pressure at the end of the line, check that you have the right pressure at the pump, check that there are no leaks in the rows and then commence your operation."

He also urged them to check for cuts and to repair them immediately, informing that the system should provide about one litre of water per hour.

Carter said that young plants could be watered once per day for about one and a half hours but as they mature, they will need to be watered twice per day. He noted that filters were important to prevent clogging of the system and the filters must be checked and cleaned regularly.

Farmer John Logan told JIS News that, "this programme is extremely good, because the equipment is of great value to us as farmers".

