

FOOD SECURITY

- The days of cheap food are over. The United Nations have made this prediction, and it is estimated that by year 2016, price of food commodities may triple up. Countries like Mauritius have to make an effort to reach self-sufficiency in certain products.

- We are addressing the issue of increasing agricultural products, other than sugar, over the next year, through the implementation of our Action Plan which was released a few months ago.

- The area under food crops harvested in 2006 stood at 7,207 hectares compared to 6,901 hectares in 2005, representing an increase of 4.4%.

- There has been a slight increase of 10.5% in the production of food crops in 2006; it rose from 96,782 tonnes in 2005 to 106,902 tonnes in 2006, due to increase in area under food crops harvested of 4.4%.

- However, over the years, Mauritius is becoming increasingly dependent on food imports for local consumption. Formulation of import substitution strategies to encourage price competitive local production is required, although importation of certain food crops and staples such as maize, rice and flour, is inevitable, due to agro-climatic reasons and economies of scale.

- The right strategy needs to be adopted for the food crop sector to meet the changing export market requirements. To be able to export our fruits and vegetables, good Agricultural Practices need to be adopted by the farmers to produce quality products, as there is concern over abuse of pesticides and untimely sprays, which

represents health hazards. IPM techniques should be integrated to reduce the dependence on pesticide use.

- The food crop sector (vegetables) needs a further strengthening with the right technological input from AREU and government support as regards availability of land and financial measures.
- Some crop species can be grown under controlled environments. Hydroponics, still at a small scale, offers possibilities for crop production in areas where no suitable soil exists to support conventional horticultural techniques. It is a versatile technology that can be adapted to different needs, from high tech automation system under protected culture to simple kits for rooftops or backyards.
- In line with decreasing dependency on food imports and increasing local production output, processing of fruit and vegetables needs further strengthening. Various prospects and opportunities exist in this sub-sector in terms of possibility for import substitution, increasing demand for processed foods, increase in per-capita consumption, consumer acceptance and changing food habits, expanding tourist industry, increasing horticultural production, emerging export possibilities, and strategic location of Mauritius. Nevertheless, the fruit and vegetable processing sub-sector is still in its stage of infancy.
- Local processing of some fruits and vegetables e.g. tomato, onions, among others should be encouraged to have continuity in supply of these items throughout the year.
- Contract growing can be favoured, whereby growers can supply the Agro processors at an agreed price, volume and quality standards.

- Clustering of Small planters in view of taking advantage of economies of scale and resolving the constraints of the latter group
- Traditional species can be exploited and fruit trees such as Jacque, corosol, custard apple, billimbi can be grown for both local and export market as either fresh or semi-processed products.
- Production of fruits such as Passion fruit, palm cabbage, asparagus, papaya, breadfruit hog's plum (fruit de cythere, guava, Chinese guava, taro, mango (green or ripe), combava, atte need to be encouraged.
- Alternative crops such as Pitaya, cabbage palm, for small-scale cane growers. The agricultural alternatives have not been studied yet in any detail. Options proposed for part of the land in the superhumid zone include mixed cropping of vegetables and fruit production. None of them has been validated yet. And on a very small-scale, there is the additional option of protected culture of selected flowers, ornamentals and vegetables.