

National Potato Conference and Exhibition at the MSIRI

Minister Arvin Boolell confident of boost-up in local potato production

On Thursday 21 August 2008, Dr. the Hon. Arvin Boolell, Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries, launched the National Potato Conference and Exhibition at the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute (MSIRI). In his speech, Minister Boolell highlighted the need to engage all the stakeholders, from small planters to scientists and policy makers, in activities that promote potato production, processing, consumption, marketing and trade.

Arvin Boolell also reiterated his belief that Mauritius can become self-sufficient in potato production, thereby helping to reduce our food import bill. Mauritians consume about 24,000 tons of potato each year, and we import around 7,500 tons. *"We must mobilize our resources and unlock relevant information and know-how so that we can reach our cherished objective to eat what we produce and produce what we eat. We must also inculcate a new mindset among our population, especially our youth, so that potato in our diet gets the consideration it deserves"*, Minister Boolell said.

Government has been making efforts to assist potato cultivators, by providing potato seeds, through the Agricultural Marketing Board (AMB), at a guaranteed floor price. The AMB also has a Boost-Up Scheme to help planters by providing seeds and marketing their production. However, the major constraint to boosting up potato production is the high costs of inputs.

With the ongoing world food crisis, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), which has declared 2008 to be the International Year of the Potato, wishes to see potato becoming a major component in strategies aimed at providing nutritious food for the poor and hungry. It is ideally adapted to places where land is limited and labour is abundant. The International Year of Potato highlights the present contribution that potato is making in relation to development and food security and its challenging role of feeding the poor and helping to reduce poverty.