

## **Sugar Reform well under way**

### **Minister Arvin Boolell meets several stakeholders**

Dr. the Hon. Arvin Boolell, Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries, has held several consultative meetings with stakeholders of the sugar industry on Tuesday 18 December 2007. The Sugar Reform is well under way, and several positive developments are seeing the day.

He first met representatives of Riche-en-Eau, who have opted for the Blue Print, and who are in the process of negotiating with their employers for the land due under the provisions of the Blue Print. Minister Boolell also had an important meeting with the Sugar Industry Labourers Union (SILU), during which he guaranteed that all the workers of the sugar industry will be given their dues.

The Sugar Industry Efficiency (SIE) Act amended early this year also makes provision for Early Retirement Scheme (ERS) for employees of sugar factories which will not be closed and which will establish sub-clusters. More importantly, it provides for the introduction of training/re-skilling schemes for VRS and ERS employees. The VRS 2, ERS and Blue Print workers will also be entitled to earlier receipt of the Actuarially Reduced Contributory Retirement Pension, as from age 45 for female workers and age 50 for male workers.

Furthermore, a meeting was held at the Ministry between Minister Boolell, the metayers, representatives of the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association (MSPA) and officers of the Mauritius Sugar Authority (MSA). A committee, which will be chaired by Mr. Ramkissoon, from the Food and Agricultural Research Council (FARC), has been set up to review the rental formula. Moreover, the MSPA has been invited to consider the possibilities of land-swapping, land-selling and compensation, in favour of the metayers.

On Monday 17 December 2007, Arvin Boolell gave the authorization to Medine Sugar Estate to proceed with the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS 2) of 516 labourers. This represents the first batch of labourers who have opted for VRS 2. According to the Mauritius Sugar Authority (MSA), there are over 6,000 workers who are going to choose to retire under the VRS 2. The MSA also expects to have 3,500 workers opting for VRS 2 up to 31st December 2007. This number represents one of the key performance indicators assessed by the European Union (EU) for the disbursement of the accompanying measures.