

**Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry
Fisheries, Rural Transformation,
Industry and Labour**

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**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE HON. SABOTO CAESAR, NEW
YEAR'S MESSAGE:**

Let us do more with our '24

Today I call upon all our farmers, fishers and workers in general to see 2024 as a year for the taking of a fresh guard. We survived the COVID-19 pandemic and the eruptions of La Soufriere, and as a people, we did well through our combined efforts and the guidance of dedicated leadership. We are, however, still on the path to full recovery. In agriculture, hundreds of acres of land will have to undergo rigorous soil testing in 2024 to properly inform and guide our farmers. Several disruptions in the supply chain for fertilizer and other inputs have not been fully mended, and in many instances where we saw green shoots, they were again stunned by military conflict and the implications on supply and demand as a result of climate change. The variables will always be a part of the developmental equation, but what we have to offer as a nation is our steadfastness. In 2024, we have to show up for duty as a people!

The productivity of the labour force is intrinsically linked to economic growth and development. Simply put, if we work both harder and smarter, we can increase the pace of development. This is a call for us to do a personal assessment of our stewardship. The waiter who constantly mixes up the order has to get it right, and the poultry farmer who is called upon to produce more eggs must see this as an opportunity not to just commend the government for building an international airport and increasing the number of stay-over visitors but as a chance for him to showcase his talent as a food producer. The cricketer must know that making a duck is not a smiling matter for him as he walks from the crease to the pavilion, but that it is in the best interest of his team that they all spend more time in training. Too many acts of slackness are masquerading as good work. We must raise our standards!

We will see the opening of several international hotel chains, linkages established with international markets for our agricultural produce and fish in international markets, and an increase in the request for our services to be offered to more foreign direct investors. How will history record our response? Will it be documented that we were the people who turned up late or did not show at all; the stakeholders who ignored the request for active participation in work and confused the time for entertainment and the time for work; or the nation that rose from the ashes and was able to create a developmental platform that became a best practice model for small island developing states?

The lending institutions that have been indispensable allies throughout our journey deserve our sincere gratitude. It has been greatly appreciated how your active engagement at the table has facilitated cooperation and propelled constructive transformation. In 2024, we anticipate a revolution in private sector financing, in recognition of the pivotal role that such funding plays in advancing our agricultural and tourism sectors. This assistance will play a critical role in facilitating the modernization of our agricultural methodologies and will buttress the US\$10M grant programme that is currently being accessed by our food producers.

To mitigate the immediate and forecasted challenges of climate change, a proactive course of action is being implemented. To address and alleviate the consequences of a possible six-month drought in 2024, a Drought Monitoring and Committee (DMC) shall work in close partnership with all stakeholders to advise on how to reduce the impact on production. A more robust agricultural sector capable of withstanding the adversities presented by climate change can, however, only be established through collaborative efforts. Therefore, our farmers and fishers must be willing to amend many of our traditional practices that cannot withstand current impacts.

We must invest in the future in our pursuit of sustainable agriculture. I encourage the technical officers in the Ministry and our youth to actively participate in agricultural science research. If we follow the science that enables us to produce competitively, we will only be competitive. Our fresh insights and innovative ideas are critical to meeting our industry's changing needs. Education and awareness programmes, such as incorporating agriculture into our schools, took a modern outlook in 2023 and will be critical in cultivating this participation in 2024 among our young people.

I encourage our cooperatives to redouble their efforts. In the period 2012-2015, our efforts to build cooperatives bore significant fruit. The displacement as a result of both the pandemic and volcanic eruptions dealt a serious blow to our cooperative; therefore, 2024 must be seen as the year of rebuilding. The Farmer's Support Company will be strategically supported to collaborate with a cadre of assigned technical officers from the Ministry of Agriculture to advance the commodity approach to production. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations did excellent work in redesigning a dasheen value chain for SVG in 2023. The idea is to expand this same approach to many other commodities in 2024.

There is more than enough work for everyone, and engaging in unethical practices such as the stealing of animals and farm produce does not only harm people but is hampering our industry's chances of success. Let us collaborate to foster an environment of honesty and integrity. In 2024, in a joint operation between the police, private sector service providers, and the Ministry of Agriculture, we will begin the process of implanting GPS microchips in animals. This practice is already creating a major impact in the fight to prevent the theft of livestock in several countries. Let us learn from such experiences and ensure that future investments

are aligned with the common goal of supporting a vibrant and trustworthy agricultural community.

As we begin this new year, let us be unified in our dedication to food production. We must distinguish between simply having a job and actually working. We can overcome problems, seize opportunities, and create a successful and sustainable future for all if we increase quality output. I have confidence that we will get the work done. The resilience exhibited by our ancestors must continue to prove to us that we are made of "sterner stuff." There are many who sacrifice their nights to engender hope for a brighter tomorrow. Let us all stand and be counted in this national prosperity campaign for 2024.