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## Santa Fe mega farm is thriving out of wasteland : - successful example of what's possible under the Jagdeo Initiative - Ramsammy

March 19, 2013

THE Santa Fe mega farm which is thriving out of what was formerly wasteland in Region 9(Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo) is a living example of the Jagdeo Initiative, says Minister of Agriculture Dr. Leslie Ramsammy. In a recent interview with the Guyana Chronicle at his Regent Road, Georgetown office, he stated that the mega farm, which he visited recently with a team from the Agriculture Ministry, including Minister within the Agriculture Ministry, Ali Baksh, is a living and successful example of what is possible under the Jagdeo Initiative.

"I know some people have said that the Jagdeo Initiative is a waste of time...I invite all of them to come to Santa Fe, because Santa Fe is not only a thriving farm that is sprouting out of wasteland, but Santa Fe is a living example of the Jagdeo Initiative," he asserted.

The minister related that there are at present 120 acres of rice growing in Santa Fe, which will be reaped for the first time in June this year.

He said that it is expected that by next year, rice cultivation will be increased to 1,000 acres in the area, and eventually to approximately 5,000 acres.

What is especially remarkable, he said, is the transformation that is taking place in the area, since Santa Fe is located in what was once wasteland.

Ramsammy further indicated that the idea

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of a mega farm was first conceptualized in 2010, as part of the Jagdeo Initiative, when then President Bharrat Jagdeo had invited Caribbean investors to utilize the land resources in Guyana to address the food and nutrition security of the Caribbean.

#### Santa Fe success story

“So Santa Fe is a success story. Even though it was just October, 2010, that the discussion occurred about the possibility of establishing a farm in the hinterland, we’ve been able between 2010 and now to find the land, develop the land, and to have actual production occur,” he stated. He said that it was during that time that the Simpson family of Barbados, who are the owners of the Sol Group, visited Guyana and had discussions with the then president and government. According to the minister, after these discussions, they decided to invest in 10,000 acres to cultivate rice, soya and corn.

He further noted that they have started with the first 120 acres of rice and have begun to put all the necessary infrastructure in place, such as irrigation and drainage canals and a pump system. In addition, he said they have constructed a silo and a rice mill on site.

However, he said the Simpson family has realized that 10,000 acres will not be enough, and has applied to the Government of Guyana to extend their allocation to 30,000 acres, and this has been approved by the government.

Ramsammy related that the rice being produced at Santa Fe is intended to satisfy the local Region 9 market, thereby causing rice prices to drop in that region since rice will no longer have to be transported from the coastland. In addition, rice from Santa Fe will also be exported to Brazil.

He emphasised that the farm is not just producing rice, but also soya and corn, which are being grown to satisfy the Guyana and Caribbean markets.

He highlighted that at present, more than 200M tonnes of corn are imported into the Caribbean region.

“So Santa Fe is looking at that market, so that the Caribbean could reduce its import from outside the region, which is also a component of the Jagdeo Initiative,” he said.

In addition, the minister mentioned that this will reduce the imported component of stock feeds, which include corn and soya.

He further stated that agronomists at Santa Fe are researching its suitability for other crops, such as cassava and passion fruit, noting that this is being done with the intention of targeting the export market. He also related that they are looking to improve the yield of the crops produced at Santa Fe, noting that with the first crop of

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rice, about six or seven tonnes are expected per hectare.

Additionally, he said that the cassava which will be grown is of a variety that is two to three times the yield of that which is currently grown in Guyana. This variety is of a higher quality and is intended for the export market.

The minister reiterated that the Santa Fe mega farm is living testimony that Guyana can live up to its reputation as the 'bread basket' of the Caribbean.

#### Bluewave project

He noted that there have been many spinoff benefits from Santa Fe and it is being used as an example for similar projects, such as the Moco Moco rice and beans project and the Bluewave project. He explained that Bluewave is another foreign investment in Guyana, which was given an initial allocation of 12,000 hectares in the intermediate savannah. He disclosed that this company is at present doing developmental work on their land, with the intention to follow the model of Santa Fe.

However, he stressed that these investors are not competing with each other, and even if competition does exist, it is friendly competition, since they are working with each other.

Moreover, while the Simpson investment has brought in people from outside of Guyana, such as engineers and agronomists from Brazil and consultants from other parts of the Caribbean and the world, there are many Guyanese experts working there also.

He emphasised that the Santa Fe project is providing huge employment opportunities for the people in Region 9 and surrounding areas.

In addition, Ramsammy stated that the agriculture ministry is looking forward to the expansion of Santa Fe which will lead to a significant expansion of Guyana's exports.

Meanwhile, during his visit to Santa Fe, Minister within the Agriculture Ministry, Ali Baksh, noted that the operations in Santa Fe are multi-purpose. He said that the project is intended to be extended and will see not only the cultivation of rice and soya beans, but also the rearing of cattle, sheep, aquaculture and pigs in the future.

"This is a vast investment, and we from the Ministry of Agriculture are very satisfied so far. Looking at this project at its initial stage, a lot of investment has already been done," he said.

He concluded that within the one-year period, a lot has been done and the investors must be commended for taking on such a task and doing so well.

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