



## **Ministerial Statement**

**By**

**The Hon. Walter Roban, JP, MP**

**Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs**

**Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023**

**Introducing the Integrated Agriculture Strategy**

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**Mr. Speaker,** I rise today to update this Honourable House on the Ministry of Home Affairs' strategy to enhance the island's local food production and food security.

**Mr. Speaker,** while the worst of the impacts of the pandemic thankfully recede in our rear view mirror, it has left us painfully aware of how much we rely on overseas exports. Not in recent memory has our local food security been of greater importance.

Recent international events have shown that small island nations like Bermuda can be significantly impacted by supply chain issues as well as higher costs, quality, quantity and availability of basic food products.

These concerns translate into a critical need to improve Bermuda's food and nutritional security by developing and supporting a vibrant local agriculture sector. Recognizing that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

**Mr. Speaker,** this unprecedented situation really makes us appreciate our island. Not only are we one of the most beautiful places on earth but the island can be bountiful too. I must commend our intrepid farmers as they tenaciously produce food for us, despite the ravages of hurricanes, droughts, pests and the unwanted attention of "night" farmers. They need all the assistance that we can give so they can keep doing what they do best.

That said we also need to attract new farmers to take up the challenge, to ensure that the island has a continued supply of good quality food and a lower reliance on the need to import from overseas.

**Mr. Speaker,** going forward it is recognized that a comprehensive and strategic response to both challenges and opportunities is required in order to strengthen Bermuda's food and nutritional security resilience to natural and man-made shocks.

**Mr. Speaker,** this initiative is so important to the Government that the Integrated Agriculture Strategy (IAS) will now form part of the

Government's Economic Development Strategy. The IAS will assist with increasing domestic food production and also aims to increase the Agricultural Sector's contribution to Bermuda's GDP.

The general objectives of this strategy need to include the following:

1. Making inputs cheaper to assist in lowering the cost to produce good quality local food.
2. Help reduce preventable losses of locally produced food.
3. Provide good quality storage of produce.
4. Identify opportunities to enhance local production through the addition of new crops and technologies to grow these new crops and/or existing crops more efficiently.
5. Provide direct assistance to local farmers, through advice, training and services, to improve output and reduce preventable losses of locally produced food.
6. Explore means of making more land available for production and to use that which is in production more efficiently.
7. Explore opportunities to add value to locally grown food.
8. Encourage greater participation and job growth in the agriculture sector.
9. Better utilize technology to improve domestic food production.
10. Assess and strengthen workforce development needs.

11. Promote and develop Food Co-operatives.

Over the next year we will endeavor to implement these objectives by developing an IAS that will contain key components including the following strategies:

1. A Crop Strategy
2. A Dairy Strategy
3. A Livestock/Poultry Strategy
4. A Honey Bee and Pollinator Strategy
5. A Fruit Tree Strategy
6. An Aquaculture Strategy

**Mr. Speaker,** at this time both the Crop Strategy 2016-2021 and the draft Dairy Strategy 2013 are under review to better reflect the current needs since the onset of the Covid pandemic. This review is being undertaken by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, in consultation with the Board of Agriculture. Work is to begin on the livestock/poultry, honey, fruit tree and aquaculture components.

In the coming months, the Department will undertake consultation with key Government and industry stakeholders to gain their insight into what should be included in the strategies and how those recommendations should be prioritized. So please stay tuned.

**Mr. Speaker,** while the strategy will set out the actions for the medium to long term, we have a number of priority initiatives that are required to address several pressing issues. These include:

- **A Crop Innovation Study** aimed at identifying opportunities to replace imports. This will be undertaken by a consultant agriculture economist who will undertake an assessment of opportunities for new crop varieties and means to increase production of those crops currently being grown by local farmers. The findings of this study will be shared with industry so that they may consider new opportunities for production.
- **The identification of new land for increased production.** Land, or lack of it, is a critical challenge for the agriculture industry. Farmers need opportunity to plant both in field crops as well as produce using hydroponics and aquaponics systems. With this in mind the GIS based Arable Audit projects will be completed. This will provide a good understanding of what land is available and provide opportunity to negotiate putting this land into production.
- **Introduce measures to curtail night time farming and selling of illegally harvested produce.** Earlier I referenced a problem that farmers are having with “night farming,” produce being taken not for individual use but on a commercial scale. I must reiterate again that stealing from fields is an offense and officers are ramping up

their oversight of fields. Offenders will be prosecuted when caught.

To help with this we will fully implement the in-field camera monitoring program. A number of cameras are already operational, and we encourage all of our commercial farmers to contact the Department to discuss with us their problem areas so we may be better able to assist in tackling this problem together.

I would ask the public, that if anyone, who is not a farmer, attempts to sell large amounts of produce to them, not to purchase this food. I would further encourage members of the public to please report any suspicious behavior to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources at [environment@gov.bm](mailto:environment@gov.bm) or telephone 236-4201. Farmers can report any incidents directly to the Bermuda Police Service by phoning two one one (211).

We will also address illegal selling of produce through the introduction of a registration of commercial farmers to properly identify commercial farmers who sell goods roadside and to strengthen the penalties for those who participate in “night farming”. This will require amendments to the Agriculture Act 1930. It is not intended that this will be cumbersome or costly for our farmers but more a simple identification system similar to that used by the commercial fishermen.

**Mr. Speaker**, we need to ensure that as we encourage more growing that we have the infrastructure to store it as optimally as possible and that it is made available to the public in the best quality as it can be. As such we will develop, subject to budgetary approvals, **a replacement Agriculture Services Centre** to support increased local production, particularly storage of locally produced food.

Last but certainly not least we will provide critical advice and direct support to farmers to assist with reducing preventable losses caused by disease and boost in field production. Industry has made this specific request to the Government, and we have listened. We have **recruited a seasoned consultant agronomist** to provide direct support to farmers to assist with:

- In-field disease identification and prevention, soil health and management, seed selection and assessment of crop seed varieties to produce the best yields;
- Securing of materials and supplies for the agriculture industry, pesticide use and their application;
- Development of industry and grading standards;
- and post-harvest handling and added value.

I am pleased to say that the consultant Agronomist, Mr. Scott Swanson, will be starting with us as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. I have no doubt that this will be eagerly welcomed by the Farmers' Association.

**Mr. Speaker**, in the coming months I look forward to coming before you and reporting on our progress on these very important initiatives.

In closing I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the public to buy local, support our farmers and fishermen, so that they can continue to provide for you.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**.