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GUYANA GETS \$8B FOR SUGAR REFORM

Following another successful round of negotiations with the European Union (EU) on the Accompanying Measures for Sugar Protocol countries affected by the reform of the Sugar Regime, Guyana is likely to receive the second tranche of \$8B (\$27M Euros) as part of the compensation package promised in the signing of financing agreement in 2006.

The total grant under the 2006 – 2010 plans is 89 million Euros. Guyana received its first disbursement of 3.27million Euros in 2007.

At the April 4 signing exercise the Agriculture Minister Hon. Robert Persaud expressed appreciation of the move which signals the extent of the EUs support of Guyana's National Action Plan that stipulates the intention to improve the cost effectiveness of our traditional sugar sector through expansion, development and diversification of the sugar cane industry.

Some of the indicators within the National Action Plan include the upgrading of sugar factories, increasing total sugar production through value-added products, and mechanisation of the field operations. With the amount released to the industry from the first tranche, work towards the establishment of a sugar packaging plant at Enmore is about to begin.

Guyana was the first of the ACP countries to develop a National Action Plan for submission to the European Commission therein effecting approval in 2006.

"MAKE EVERY CHALLENGE AN OPPORTUNITY"

- Nisa Surujbally



"Be Positive! Let's make every challenge an opportunity. There are great prospects for the local sugar industry in the sale of its commodity especially in Europe which is the highest-priced market and hosts a lot of advantages," came the affirmation of GUYSUCO's Marketing & Trade Director Nisa Surujbally

Reminding of the necessity of a steady increase in sugar production this year, the Director identified increases in the volume of value-added sugar this year as one of the main determinants of the industry's profitability. There is also anticipation of an increase in cane production especially at Blairmont Estate which is targeted to provide some 11,000 tonnes of packaged sugars to markets both regionally and internationally.

Surujbally informed that some 240,000 tonnes of sugar should reach Europe by October, 2008 even as the country benefits from the Tariff Rate Quota following negotiations with the EPAs. She also posited that the shortfalls from countries within the Sugar Association of the Caribbean (SAC) grouping are other means through which our sugar can be supplied this year. The Marketing Department broke new ground last year with sales of the value added products to Australia and New Zealand. The latter has indicated interest in receiving continued supply.

The business of sugar sale is good but the current challenge in the industry is to bring down the cost of production by improving efficiencies and increasing production.

Workers are challenged to give support to the plans the industry has to remain profitable and marketing continues to do its utmost to deliver the best from the sale of sugar which is the basic commodity.

The fear of the sugar industry's collapse should be nullified when one takes into consideration the heavy investments currently being made in the new factory, field mechanization and in increased value added production. These plans guarantee a viable future and reduce the dependency on the preferential markets as we develop the regional markets and go to value added goods not only in the Caribbean but around the world.

MEDICAL LABS PREPARE FOR INTERNATIONAL CERTIFICATION



Dr. Kissoon
Chief Medical Officer

Dr Kissoon reported satisfactory progress towards the international certification of the two clinical laboratories at Rose Hall and Ogle.

"The Guyana National Bureau of Standards is guiding the certification process and we have reached the documentation stage now. From all appearances, we will complete the process by November," Kissoon said.

The workshops and seminars in which Laboratory technicians have participated are also geared towards more speedy completion of manuals, their auditing and will enhance the quality of work and improve accuracy in the overall clinical management of the patient.



SALE OF SUGAR ON THE LOCAL MARKET

- Nisa Surujbally

ALTHOUGH the company is in the dilemma of a reduced target and meeting further market shortfall requirements, there is no intention of importing sugar for consumption in the local market, and contrary to concerns expressed by customers about the security of sugar supplies in the face of increased demand, the company will monitor closely the sale of sugar on the local market and exercise some control.

According to the Marketing and Trade Director, Nisa Surujbally, Guyana has a commitment to the CARICOM Heads of Government's Regional Sugar Policy, which mandated the sugar industries to preserve quotas to the European market and negotiate for the retention of shortfalls within CARICOM. The recently concluded Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between Cariforum and EU secured an additional 30,000 tonnes Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ) as well as the right to retain Sugar Protocol shortfalls within CARICOM. This will mean that Guyana has to supply more sugar to the EU between now and when the Sugar Protocol comes to an end in September 2009.

At the start of the year, GUYSUCO was well placed to meet these additional quotas as well as those to our intended CARICOM and local markets. The weather has however affected production and forced a review of the marketing programme.

As a result, certain CARICOM buyers were informed of a reduction in supplies. The Corporation offered assistance to these buyers in procuring sugar from extra-regional sources. None of the affected markets was disrupted and sugar was supplied until the extra-regional imports arrived. Contract customers have not been affected.

Local customers are, however, assured that the requirement of sugar for the Guyanese market will be met and are urged to exercise prudent management of their stocks. Consumers are advised that the price of sugar has not been increased.

WALES ESTATE TOPS PRODUCTION SCORES FOR DEMERARA ESTATES

Skeldon, Rose Hall, Blairmont and Enmore Performance also Commended

Wales Estate's achievement of 9,966 tonnes of sugar for the First Crop is recorded as the highest for the Demerara region and the highest for the location in the last three years. Grinding lasted ten weeks.

"Every kudos to the staff and workers of Wales," began West Demerara's General Manager, Mr. Aaron Dukhia in commendation of the Estate's achievement which reflected a four percent improvement on the latest estimate. He attributed the success to the improved cane yields, work done in land preparation in the past year; the commercial nursery of the Estate which played a significant role in the establishment of a good population of plant cane, and factory maintenance.

In observing the phenomenal triumph retained by the location in production trends, the GM reminded of the cane farmers input which accounted for 30 percent of the estate's total contribution and called for improvement in the current 65 tonnes cane per hectare in order to return the estate to its full potential of 33,000 tonnes annually.

"Workers must be commended on their input. There were improvements in their attendance and their good relationship with Management prevailed throughout the crop," Farm Manager Mr. Vishwa Panday praised workers.

Panday observed that the enforced rodent control strategy played a pivotal role in the improvements in agriculture. "Because our location is surrounded by savannah lands and it attracts rats in all seasons," he explained adding that with the enforced Rodent Control Strategy, rat-hunting, rat-baiting and circle burning is a more frequent practice. This is complemented by equal attention to the cleaning of dams, canals and peripheral areas carried out on the cultivation.

Unlike last year's First Crop when Uitvlugt was the only location where workers did not qualify for the Weekly Production Incentive, this year, workers across the industry qualified for as much as five days and at minimum one day. Human Resources Director Mr. Jai Petam in his reflection of the industry' performance for the Crop lauded the efforts of workers and singled out those of Wales, Enmore, Skeldon, and Blairmont locations for their contribution to production.

Chief Executive Mr. Nick Jackson observed that despite the minimized attention to maintenance at Skeldon factory (due to its imminent closure) there was a significant turnaround in production. Reports are that workers at this location, Blairmont Estate, Wales and Enmore had qualified for the equivalent of five days' pay each as production incentive up to the end of April. Workers at Rose Hall have so far qualified for four days' pay while LBI will get three days and Uitvlugt workers one.

EAST BERBICE ESTATE REJOINS PRODUCTION EFFORTS AFTER ONE WEEK STRIKE ACTION

Six days after a total shut down of factory operations three of the five harvesting gangs of Rose Hall returned to work, allowing for the estate's resumption of grinding efforts. The Cane Harvesters of the East Berbice Estate and later, Blairmont downed tools in an outcry against the high rates for electricity, the global increase in food prices and issues pertaining to the processing of claims and pension by the National Insurance Scheme.

The resumption followed a meeting where GUYSUCO reminded the Guyana Agriculture and General Workers' Union (GAWU) in the presence of harvesting and factory workers represented by the Union that the Rose Hall strike was in total violation of the subsisting grievance procedure and that the Corporation does reserve the right to dismiss any employee or representative who instigated such strike. This action, the Corporation maintained, was rarely invoked in the past, but because conditions had so dramatically changed, GUYSUCO had to signal its intention to resort to taking this course of action regardless of whether the person or persons are union representatives or ordinary workers.

The loss of production over the three estates was equivalent to US\$140M loss in revenue. Not only has the inconsiderate and irresponsible action closed grinding operations in the most ideal harvesting condition, but it has caused 160 punts of burnt canes to be discarded due to the deteriorated condition at a value of G\$15m.

The actions by the workers, are doing very little to help the Corporation adjust to the price cuts from the EU, and the damaging effects of which will be felt in October, when a further cut will be felt ahead of the full impact in October 2009. It is forecast that the annual loss in revenue to the industry will be in excess of G\$8Bln.

In the tenth week of grinding, the industry had recorded just over 80,000 tonnes of sugar chasing a reduced target of 108 tonnes.

Chief Executive Mr. Nick Jackson explained that at the beginning of the year, the industry had in excess of 200,000 tonnes of cane brought over from 2007 and the late start of grinding due to the effects of the La Nina weather phenomenon at the beginning of the year, strike protests, the decrease in attendance due to bad weather were additional debilitating factors influencing the

reduced target for the First Crop and from all appearances, there is little prospect that the target will be met.

He reminded that the achievement of the target is essential to meeting current market demands in both the Caribbean and the EU and in the remaining five weeks of grinding for the Berbice estates, the Corporation calls for the immediate improvement in workers' attendance from the current 64%; so that they can earn more money and hence mitigate against the increases in the cost of living. Of the six days per week workers are required during the cropping period, only 3.2 days are recorded for cane harvesters.

Despite the challenges, the 33,086 tonnes of sugar the Demerara estates' delivered in the 1st crop they were able to meet the expected 40% of the industry total. For the remaining five weeks of grinding, the Berbice estates are depended upon to bring in the remaining tonnage. Workers need to maximize on the available days and take advantage of the good dry conditions to take off as much sugar as possible before the mid year rains come.

INTENSIFIED PROGRAMMES PLANNED IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

The observance of Occupational Health and Safety month is likely to see the beginning of even more intensified programmes that address the principles of prevention, hazard identification, risk assessment and information and training in order for workers to appropriately apply instructions designed for their protection from exposure to occupational hazards in the workplace.

Themed "My Life, My Work, My Safe Work" the month of April will additionally bring national recognition to agencies where Occupational Health and Safety practices are entrenched in the day-to-day activities and workers who perform outstandingly will be equally rewarded.

In a message to mark this year's observance, GUYSUOs Company Health and Safety Officer Earl Morris acknowledged the contribution of management and workers and attested to his team of Estate Safety Officers' intensified efforts to manage risks in the work environment.

"The attitudes of employees in safety have, in recent time, begun to reflect a consciousness as we readily embrace and demonstrate this

year's theme as the company accelerates efforts to move up from the second place last year to claim the prize of being the most safe company. We also hope to increase the number of individual awards for work done in HIV/AIDS Awareness," Morris promised.

This year's activities, which have been tailored to include inter-gang competitions; spot the-hazards, and more involvement of Union representatives in the counselling and investigation sessions, will serve the three fold objective of involving every employee industry-wide in the safety requirements stipulated in the Occupational Safety and Health Act No 32 of 1997 while effecting the necessary changes in behaviours on estate locations and at service centres of the industry.

"Our team members will be required to conduct more training sessions and the gangs that have improved in their safety practices will be rewarded with specially-designed caps," Morris said.

On April 18, the Department also publicly recognized Albion's Health and Safety Officer, Raymond Haniff at the launch of the

inaugural awards ceremony for the industry's Best Safety Officer selected from secret ballots cast among the Officers.

Minister of Labour Hon. Manzoor Nadir in his message referred to an ILO report which recorded an increase in the number of work related accidents and that more people are dying from workplace injuries and illnesses. The Minister echoed the call of ILO Director – General Juan Somavia to nurture a safety culture through partnership and dialogue – government, employers and workers by creating safe and healthy practices.

"Every injury sustained or life lost is deemed one too many, as the victims/workers are our most valued resource... This year's theme will prod us into ensuring that we all continue to strive for and maintain higher standards of safety and health practices at the workplace," Nadir said reminding of the mandate of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, Occupational Safety and Health Division to police and persecute all those who are negligent in their responsibilities under the OSH Act No 32 of 1997.

IMPROVEMENT IN HEALTH CARE MANDATORY AS A RESULT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Over the past 50 years, human activities – particularly the burning of fossil fuels – have released sufficient quantities of carbon and other greenhouse gases to affect the global climate. The atmospheric concentration of carbon gases has increased by more than 20 percent since pre-industrial times, trapping more heat in the lower atmosphere.

The resulting changes in the global climate bring a range of risks to health, from deaths in extreme high temperatures to changing patterns of infectious diseases. From the tropics to the arctic, climate and weather have powerful direct and indirect impact on human life.

Weather extremes – such as heavy rains, floods and disasters endanger health. Rising sea-levels is another outcome of global warming and it increases the risk of coastal flooding and could cause population displacement. Research has shown that globally, water scarcity already affects four

out of every ten people and poor water quality compromises hygiene and health. Intense short-term fluctuations in temperature can also seriously affect health and lead to increased death rates from heart and respiratory diseases.

GUYSUOs Chief Medical Officer Dr Kissoon is joining the national call for health care to be taken seriously and for awareness to be heightened so that employees and their families can protect themselves from the diseases that will emerge as a result of climate change and global warming.

"The effects of climate change bring on an increase in diseases and even resurgence of old diseases – especially water borne diseases and diarrhoeal diseases," Dr Kissoon noted "so it is necessary for us to begin taking steps to improve our health through exercise and maintaining a healthy diet."

Climatic conditions affect diseases transmitted through water, and via vectors such as mosquitoes. Climate-sensitive diseases are the largest global killers i.e Diarrhoeal diseases and malaria.

Increasing global temperatures affect seasonal patterns of both man-made and natural airborne particles which can trigger asthma. Asthma deaths are expected to increase by almost 20 percent in the next ten years if urgent actions to curb climate change and prepare for its consequences are not taken.

Steps to reduce greenhouse gas emission or lessen the health impacts of climate change could have positive health effects. For example, promoting the safe use of public transportation and active movement - such as biking or walking could reduce carbon dioxide emissions and improve health.