

PQ B/695 The Honourable Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands (**Ms Sewocksingh**)

To ask the Honourable Minister of Agro- Industry and Food Security-

Whether, in regard to the production of potato, onion and garlic, he will state the reasons for the decrease thereof since 2015 to date?

REPLY

Madam Speaker,

The production of potato from 2015 to 2018 was as follows:

2015 - 16,427T

2016 - 16,326T

2017 - 14,124T

2018 - around 18,500T

I am informed that the shortfall in production in 2017 was because:

- a) A lesser extent was planted in that year in view of unfavorable climatic conditions resulting in delay of harvest of sugar cane fields and thus late release of land to small planters for potato growing.
- b) Dry rot problems and poor quality Delaware seeds accounting for a decrease in production by some 2,200T. It is to be noted that Delaware is the only variety that is planted in the second season from July to August.

As the House may have noted, the production picked up in 2018 to reach some 18,500T. A further increase of some 2,000T is expected this year, if agro climatic conditions are favourable.

With regard to onion, a drop in production was observed as from 2017. This is essentially due to:

- a) adverse climatic conditions over the past few years jeopardizing plantation from the months of March to May.
- b) Occurrence of Stemphylium Blight disease especially at vegetative stage; which has been quite harmful.
- c) phasing out in 2016 of the two most commonly grown varieties, NUN 7272 and Star 5529, resulting also in unavailability of early maturing red variety onions. The new varieties that have replaced them as from 2017 have still not yet been fully adopted by our local growers.

In view thereof, the AMB has, since last year, in collaboration with FAREI and local growers embarked on a programme aimed at producing some 500 to 700 kg of local onion seeds of Francia and Bellarose varieties.

These two locally bred varieties, I am informed, offer good storability and adaptability to our local climatic conditions and represent some 50% of our total local onion seeds requirement.

We are hopeful that this will contribute largely in boosting our onion production in the coming years.

As far as garlic is concerned, the local production has been on a declining trend, not since 2015, but since the 80's because: -

- a) production is highly labour intensive and labour is short.
- b) cost of production is high - around Rs 200,000/arpent and the crop cycle is relatively long - around 5 to 6 months;

- c) shrinkage is high compared to imported garlic;
- d) demand for local garlic is low. Imported garlic is preferred because the cloves are bigger in size and are easily peeled.

In order to palliate the problem of labour and facilitate farmers in the tedious task of clove preparation before plantation, the AMB has acquired a clove separator. It has also constructed a dedicated garlic seed storage facility in addition to the various incentives it is already providing to growers.

In parallel, FAREI is evaluating more than 23 local accessions with a view to coming up with varieties that will meet consumers' preference and hence create interest and demand for local garlic.