SMALL PLANTERS - 2014 CANE HARVEST SEASON - COMPENSATION

(No. B/228) Mr D. Sesungkur (First Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the 2014 Cane Harvest Season, he will state if –

(a) there has been -
   (i) a fall in sugar production, and
   (ii) delay in the harvesting of the sugar cane fields, in particular, those of the small planters, and

(b) some sugar cane fields have remained un-harvested and, if so, indicate the -
   (i) extent of the sugar cane fields concerned therewith, and
   (ii) quantum of compensation, if any, being contemplated for the small planters who have been prejudiced as a result thereof.

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) (i) of the question, I am informed that, according to provisional figures, sugar production for the 2014 crop is estimated at 403,603 tonnes and is short of around 21,000 tonnes since about 119,200 tonnes of cane were left un-harvested in the fields as at 02 February 2015.

Regarding part (a) (ii), I am advised that there were 17 cases where small planters have reported delays in harvesting.

As regards part (b), 5.7 hectares of sugar cane fields belonging to small planters and 1,424 hectares belonging to the corporate sector have remained un-harvested. I am informed that no compensation is payable for un-harvested fields as the Sugar Insurance Fund Act makes no provision for same.

Mr Sesungkur: Madam Speaker, can the hon. Minister consider a compensation at the level of the Ministry, is it a normal situation to have such huge area of cultivation of cane not harvested and what action the Ministry is taking to avoid this kind of situation in the future?

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, you are probably aware that last year there was an industrial dispute between the JNP and the Mauritius Sugar Planters Association and that resulted in the stoppage of the milling. That lasted for about 10 days and beyond that the crop season had to be extended up to the end of February. But given the fact that we had very bad weather conditions in the first few weeks of January, we could not carry out with the harvesting and these are the two reasons that explained the fact that so much areas of cane were not harvested.
**Mr Lesjongard**: Madam Speaker, may I ask the hon. Minister if he has information with regard to the decrease in sugar production over the past three years and what is expected as decrease over the coming years?

**Mr Seeruttun**: Well, it is a fact, Madam Speaker that over the last five years the surface area under cane cultivation has been going down. In 2009, the amount of surface area that was under cane cultivation was about 60,380 hectares and for the crop year 2014, it has gone down to 50,693. So, it is something that is happening and based on that, obviously, the production of sugar is going downward. But we, at the Ministry, are doing our best to curtail that downward trend to encourage people to continue with the sugar production. But as we may be aware, the price is no more attractive given that we have no more that privileged price with the European Union and with the effect of the Euro going down as well, the planters are not too keen to keep on with sugar production.

**Madam Speaker**: Yes, hon. Sesungkur!

**Mr Sesungkur**: Madam Speaker, being given that the small planters have suffered severe prejudice with this kind of situation, is there any way for the Ministry, for Government or any other institution to compensate those small planters who are suffering a lot from bad financial situation, and what measures is the hon. Minister contemplating?

**Mr Seeruttun**: Madam Speaker, as you may be aware, if we go through the Budget Speech, the Ministry of Finance has announced that cash compensation will be paid to all sugar producers and a special effort is being made for small planters producing up to 60 tonnes of sugar. Cash compensation of Rs3,400 is being paid to small planters per tonne of sugar produced.

**Madam Speaker**: The Table has further been advised that the following Parliamentary Questions have been withdrawn: PQ B/233, PQ B/243 and PQ B/245.