

Floods drive up market prices

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PIMENTO prices fell to 15 for \$5, while tomato prices rose to \$15 per pound in the aftermath of last weekend's floods, which affected communities including Aranjuez, Piarco, Las Lomas/St Helena, Bamboo No 2, Cocorite, and Diego Martin, according to public relations officer of the Charlotte Street Vendors' Association Junior Lewis. Lewis and fellow vendors like Sharon Daniels and Martin 'Son' Alleyne also said generally 'business was slow'.

Lewis, who once farmed pimentos in Penal, said: 'When rain falls, it's a crop that will melt fast. Tomatoes tends to spoil quickly, too. It will get swollen and split. After one shower, disaster struck. Pimentos on the ground. I had to stop farming because it was costing me too much to transport the produce. I have to get a vehicle.'

'Aranjuez needs plenty work. The land is flat. Then it dips like a belly. And the water settles. It flows back. I know a farmer who bought four pumps to get the water out of his land. But the water will go to another farmer's land. Caroni River needs to be cleared. Especially the mouth of the Aranjuez River. I feel they might have to put in some retention ponds. It's the only way to get the water off. Otherwise we will continue to have flooding and food prices will rise.'

On the way forward, he added: 'I am happy the new government said non registered farmers can get access to some of the services that registered farmers are getting. I have to check it out.'

In the area of farming, he said: 'We import potatoes and carrots from the United States and Canada. These crops can be grown here. We have sandy soils. Some of the potatoes are marked up because they were grown in stony soils.'

Cost of coconuts up

After purchasing a packet of Toco seamoss (\$20), Daniels said: 'Market is slow. It's very slow. Few shoppers. Tomatoes went up. Carrots went up. Cabbage went up from \$3 per lb to about \$5 or \$6 wholesale. Coconuts are expensive. It's about \$12 for one. Most of them are coming from St Vincent and the Grenadines. The cheapest item is plantains at \$4 per lb.'

Daniels said he hopes things will pick up this week.

Pumpkin vendor Mamoral added: 'It's 'trust week'. People are waiting to get paid at month end. It's slow. It might pick up next week.' Alleyne said: 'It's slow. Flood or no flood. I have to come out and work. I can't question the Creator. But I am grateful for what cash I got.'