

Minister eyes \$1B in agricultural exports



Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries Michelle Anne Thomas, right, speaks with Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Public Utilities Shivanna Sam and Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries Ravi Ratiram during a visit to a pumping station at Plum Mitán last Wednesday. PHOTO BY RALPH BANWARIE

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The Government is aiming to slash T&T's hefty US\$2.5 billion food import bill by ramping up agricultural exports, with a target of earning TT\$1 billion through the sale of agricultural commodities to foreign markets.

This was revealed by Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries Ravi Ratiram in an interview with Guardian Media, as he outlined plans to revive Caroni Green Limited (CGL)—a former state enterprise that once generated significant foreign exchange through the exportation of hot peppers.

According to Ratiram, a revitalised CGL has the potential to earn up to \$400 million through exports. He criticised the previous People's National Movement administration for shutting down CGL, along with the Seafood Industry Development Company Limited (SIDC), both of which, he said, were successfully generating foreign income at the time.

Ratiram also highlighted a significant decline in local rice production, stating that output had plummeted from 3,000 tonnes annually to just over 445 tonnes. He confirmed that discussions were ongoing with consultants and the ministry's executive team regarding CGL's restructuring and reactivation.

Contacted on the move, former CGL CEO Sharma Lalla said the company operated from 2013 to 2017, during which time it exported over one million pounds of hot peppers and earned

approximately \$7 million. He emphasised that the enterprise was focused on exports and did not compete within the local market.

Lalla added that the company's 2016 audited financials showed a healthy \$5.6 million in the bank and no reliance on Treasury funding.

Meanwhile, former Couva South MP and a sitting member of the UNC government during CGL's operational years, Rudranath Indarsingh voiced support for the project's return.

"Reviving CGL would make effective use of abandoned Caroni lands and contribute significantly to economic diversification," Indarsingh said.

He also criticised the PNM for what he described as a lack of initiative in revitalising agricultural lands and supporting ex-Caroni workers.

"Between 2015 and 2025, the only lands distributed were from the previous administration's efforts.

The PNM neither developed new plots nor undertook significant land distribution," he said.

Devant Maharaj, who served as Minister of Agriculture during the People's Partnership administration (2010–2015), also supported the move. He noted that restarting CGL could yield numerous benefits for the national drive toward economic diversification.