

GRADUATION CEREMONY- 4TH NOVEMBER 2020

FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE

Guest Speaker- Speech of Hon Maneesh Gobin, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security

Dr Jean Claude Autrey, Chancellor ;

Prof Dhanjay Jhurry, Vice Chancellor;

Pro Vice-Chancellors;

Members of the Congregation;

Learned Academics;

Distinguished guests and

Young Friends, graduands of Class 2020

Good Morning.

Thank you Chancellor for inviting me to this morning's ceremony that marks a milestone in the journey of the graduands present today and thank you indeed for allowing me to address this learned gathering.

Distinguished guests,

I wish to make a judicious use of my 8 minutes to drive home three points –

- 1. a message for the graduands;*
- 2. a message to the Faculty; and*
- 3. a message of hope for a new partnership with the University of Mauritius on agriculture.*

My first message for the graduands of the Faculty is – do take a moment whether today itself or shortly thereafter to acknowledge and thank your lecturers and staff of the University of Mauritius and also your parents and loved ones, for their care and support to make today's event possible for you.

My second message is this – as graduates in agriculture you will be called upon to assist farmers, breeders and the agriculture community as a whole.

This community has – as is the case in any part of the world – gathered a collective knowledge of the practical realities of agriculture. The attributes of our agriculture community are multi-faceted and will never cease to amaze you. As young graduates you should look up to them for their knowledge of the practical and multiple realities of the world of agriculture. Learn to appreciate their intuitions, their predictions and take the time to appreciate and validate the knowledge they have acquired over generations of cultivation and farming.

My third and perhaps more important message to you young graduands. As young graduates in agriculture you will be called upon to assist and guide the agriculture community with your scientific and empirical knowledge which you have preciousely acquired at this prestigious Faculty.

In assisting and guiding our farmers and the agriculture community as a whole take a moment to realize that you are also a source of inspiration to them. When a farmer looks up to you as a provider of scientific solutions to their basic problems, do also take the time to share their emotions in times of distress. For instance, the problem of thrips in onion fields is not just a scientific problem. It is also a human tragedy for our farmers. Learn to read the distress in the eyes of a farmer whose fields get invaded by this insect.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My message to the Faculty of Agriculture.

Since its creation as the School of Agriculture in 1914, this Faculty has been playing a major role in the development of agriculture in Mauritius. In 2014, the faculty marked its 100 years of training, research and outreach in agriculture.

It is a fact that the Faculty has been constantly reviewing its existing programmes to stay abreast with national priorities, bringing on new technologies and following international trends at specific period of its history.

The interaction between this prestigious Faculty and the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security, is a long established one. The Faculty provides the bulk of technical staff working within my Ministry and other institutions falling under its aegis. For example, the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority (MCIA) and the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI), just to name these two. For instance, the majority of the 56 Agricultural Support Officers recruited by the Ministry in 2019 hail from this Faculty.

The collaboration between my Ministry and the Faculty, including the fields of research has to be placed on record. I wish to highlight the testing of pathogens using rapid molecular methods which is one of the joint achievements. The collaboration with my Ministry also encompass joint discussions at the level of the National Codex Committee, the sharing of knowledge via the laboratory facilities, Student Placement Schemes, etc.

I therefore take this moment to place on record the contribution, the initiatives and the achievements of the Faculty of Agriculture. The prestige of this Faculty is well known and appreciated well beyond our shores and this for many years now.

Graduates from this Faculty have and continue to shine at various levels of responsibility in Mauritius as well as in various international organisations.

I wish this Faculty to build on its history to achieving greater heights but at the same time maintaining its specificities in the academic legacy of Mauritius.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My last point concerns avenues for a new partnership. A new partnership between the University and our beloved country. In short, on behalf of Government, I am seeking your help!

I seek the help of academia in fields in dire need of local expertise as opposed to foreign consultants. Curriculum development at the University should take into consideration the current requirements of the current socio-economic, environmental and political drivers. I have in mind 3 such fields of activity requiring the attention of academia –

1. The Livestock and Veterinary Sector. The development of new courses to form students as Veterinary Technicians and in other related fields should receive our common attention, since Government is in the process of revamping the sector.

There has always been a dearth of veterinary professionals on the market. For eg, Whilst the Ministry can accommodate 29 Veterinary Officers on fully funded post, we have only 14 in service. And the last call for application from the Public Service Commission yielded very few response, if at all!

The creation of new courses on Animal Science and Food Economics and Agri Business, to name but these two, requires our attention for a renewed partnership with particular emphasis being laid on bio security.

2. Biodiversity conservation is yet another field which I believe, deserves a renewed partnership. I say renewed because the partnership is there but we need to revamp it.

I am given to understand that very few courses are devoted to this subject. My humble suggestion would be that a field of studies has to be elaborated for providing and building capacity amongst the younger generation. I have in mind, Wetlands management and conservation. I also have in mind Native wildlife and terrestrial biodiversity. On this subject matter I also highlight the very important sub category of the human-wildlife conflict which, in our country, regularly takes the form of passionate debate on the conflict between humans and bats as well as between humans and macaques.

3. The University could also explore on providing and integrating courses on emerging issues relevant to forest sector to promote food security whilst at the same time protecting our natural resources namely; Agroforestry, Urban Forestry, Arboriculture, Integrated Landscape restoration, Bio-energy, Sustainable Land Management amongst others.

I will keep to the time allocated to me and no more at this stage.

May the Almighty's blessings rest upon you all.

All the best. I wish you success.

Thank you for your kind attention.