

GREETINGS BY
HON. DARYL VAZ M.P.
MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO
(LAND, ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, INVESTMENT)
AT THE
RIBBON CUTTING FOR THE
THREE HILLS PLASTIC BOTTLE GREENHOUSE
WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 2019 AT 1:00 P.M.
AT THE
INDUSTRY PEN EMANCIPATION FARMLAND
THREE HILLS, ST. MARY

It is an absolute pleasure to be here for the ribbon cutting for the Three Hills Farmers' Plastic Bottle Greenhouse. I wish to thank Councillor Krystal Lee and the St. Mary Parish Development Committee for inviting me, and to commend both the Committee and the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), for what I consider to be an extremely innovative and worthwhile initiative.

As you are aware, we have a problem with plastic pollution in our country and plastic bottles are no exception. Plastic bottles have largely replaced the old glass bottles that our drink manufacturers used in the past. Unfortunately, the figures show that we use and dispose of almost one billion PET (or plastic) bottles annually, which is roughly equivalent to 350 bottles per Jamaican each year. Those figures are mind-blowing and unless we do something about the situation we will literally be drowning in plastic.

It is the challenge that we face with plastic pollution that prompted this administration to institute a ban on plastic packaging materials below a 25 gallon capacity including scandal bags, as well as on plastic straws and polystyrene (or Styrofoam) products commonly used in the food and beverage industry.

I am happy to say that since the ban came into effect on January 1 this year, we have carried out an extensive public awareness campaign.

The National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA), Jamaica Customs Agency and all our partners, have moved with haste to enforce the ban.

Unfortunately, there are unscrupulous persons who continue to profit off the sale of plastic bags. Very recently, there was a news item that a business man in Montego Bay was charged with breaching the plastic bag ban. He faces a fine of J\$2million or up to two years in prison.

We would rather that persons comply, rather than experience these kinds of harsh punishments, but we are faced with a critical situation that leaves us no choice but to enforce these measures.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have to decide what kind of country we want to live in ... one that is beautiful and pristine, where our natives as well as investors and tourists willingly come to enjoy what we have to offer and receive value for their hard earned money; or one that is filthy and overrun with garbage and vectors such as mosquitoes, flies and rats.

I know what kind of country I want to live in, and that is why I welcome initiatives such as this, that make use of our plastic waste. This greenhouse is innovative, cost effective and timely and most importantly, it addresses one of our most pressing issues, namely what to do with our plastic bottles.

This administration is moving to work with industry players through Recycling Partners, to implement a deposit scheme similar to the one for glass bottles. But until that comes fully on stream, we encourage more persons to use their creativity and skills to come up with ingenious solutions to the plastic problem such as this greenhouse.

I am also heartened that this is something that other farmers can emulate and I will be taking the good news about this greenhouse back to my constituency of Western Portland, and telling the farmers there that look, you don't need to spend an arm and a leg on setting up a greenhouse ... just visit the one at Three hills in St. Mary, or talk with the St. Mary Parish Development Committee and they will tell you how to get it done.

In closing, I urge all Jamaicans to learn from the example being set here by the farmers of the Three Hills community and indeed the Parish of St. Mary and do their part to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Do it for yourselves, for your children and for Jamaica, land we love.

Once again, thank you JICA, thank you St Mary Parish Development Committee, and thank you Three Hills.

Indeed, I am happy to participate in this ribbon cutting exercise today.

Thank you and God bless you all!