



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

World Food Day

EXPORTT

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R E M A R K S

MR. NORRIS HERBERT
PERMANENT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

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16TH OCTOBER, 2017



INTRODUCTION

It is indeed my pleasure to bring remarks on behalf of the Ministry of Trade (MTI) and Industry and the Minister of Trade and Industry Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon, who is unable to attend owing to commitments at F&GP at this time. She tasked me with conveying her best regards to the Board of Directors, Management and staff of ExporTT for their continued service and the offering of congratulations to the Food and Beverage industry clients of ExporTT as we gather here to commemorate World Food Day 2017 and to share a viewpoint on the role of our local exporters. I would therefore like to offer commendation in gathering with the rest of the world in marking World Food Day.

This year's World Food Day theme speaks to changing the future by investing in food security. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is aware of the importance of both food security and its implications and is focused on supporting and implementing the necessary changes to positively impact our national food security agenda. At the MTI we are charged with the responsibility of growing the non-energy sector which includes the food and beverage sector while growth is desirable, the changes needed require significant commitment and considerable collaboration among ministries, departments and the various public and private sector agencies.

MACRO-ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

Our trade performance figures reflect limited activity in certain sectors of the economy. While the country continues to foster trade relationships with countries including Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and our CARICOM and other Latin American neighbours; 2016 data from the Central Statistical Office indicate that Trinidad and Tobago's exports to the rest of the world totaled TT\$48.8 billion, while the value of imports was in the vicinity of TT\$59.9 billion. Our macro-economic trade performance reflects a net trade deficit of approximately TT\$11.2 billion. On average the non-energy exports accounted for 35% of total exports in 2016. Further, the country's exporting partners continues to be dominated by the United States of America, which accounted for approximately 39% of total exports. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is focused on enhancing Trinidad and Tobago's macro - economic indicators and has embarked upon a robust package of incentives to navigate the country toward sustainable growth and diversification.

MTI

At the Ministry of Trade and Industry and our various state agencies led by our national export facilitation enterprise, (ExporTT), continues to focus on the strategic growth of the non-energy sector. While the main non-energy products exported by Trinidad and Tobago in 2016 consisted of many non-food products the Government has placed high priority on food production and agro processing.

The Government understands the challenges faced by firms in expanding exports. To this end, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has embarked on the development of several policies to assist the private sector to expand exports and increase market penetration into extra regional markets. Transforming businesses to become globally competitive and developing market presence in far flung markets translates into earning rather than the focus of consumption of foreign exchange which is now critical for the development of the economy.

The MTI is involved in an alliance with the Ministry of Agriculture Land and Fisheries to improve the infrastructure for food production. The Cabinet has approved the construction of the Moruga Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park for the growth and expansion of the agro processing sector. Scheduled to be commissioned in 2019 the facility will serve to support:

- The processing of raw materials and intermediate products originating from agriculture, forestry and fisheries, including the preservation of meats, fish, fruit and vegetables;
- The manufacture of food products and the conversion of fresh produce into semi-processed raw material or processed products, including the manufacture of bakery products, pasta products, confectionary and starch products;
- Manufacturing of beverages, wine and the blending of spirits; and
- Facilities for the canning, bottling and freezing of finished products.

Further, the MTI envisages a partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries involving the co-ordination of:

- Targeted Market Intelligence Training Workshops;
- A Fish handling facilities modernization plan; and
- Quality Assurance and Quality Control Workshops.

A very important aspect of the MTT's support is Trinidad and Tobago's Aid for Trade (AfT) Strategy 2016-2019 which was launched earlier this year and presents a coherent framework of trade priorities and provides a basis for unearthing resources based on stakeholders' views about the challenges they face in expanding trade. Addressed in this strategy are programmes focused on export diversification, trade facilitation and competitiveness.

EXPORTT

Madam Chairman, just as we at the Ministry, ExportT continues to lead in the area of export diversification by stimulating growth, increasing international competitiveness, developing new exporters and expanding exports to new competitive markets. ExportT is a catalyst driving the country's export agenda. In supporting our local food and beverage exporters, ExportT has, assisted over thirty nine (39) food and beverage companies in achieving compliance with international food safety standards to enter a number of highly competitive markets and as a consequence also increased local exporters' ability to expand trade in existing export markets. Additionally, ExportT continues to provide advisory and financial support to assist various companies with offsetting product testing and standardisation required to enter these export markets.

It is therefore apt to say ExportT continues to mobilise the export community to participate in trade missions and has partners with a number of private sector associations including the TTMA and the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber in this regard. The company has led Trinidad and Tobago's delegation to the Summer Fancy Food in New York for a number of years and supported twenty (20) Trinidad and Tobago exporters on those missions. A team has just returned from FIHAV in Cuba. ExportT has been a key actor in the Cuban market and has an office at that location. ExportT was also the first to launch an export oriented Cottage Food and Beverage Programme and has contributed in no small measure to the development of food and beverage industries for export to strategic markets.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry and ExportT remain focused on assisting local companies entering the markets of trading partners as well as the North American and British markets. Significant progress has been made regarding entry into several European Markets and plans have been developed to assist local manufacturers to enter the rapidly growing specialty food sectors in that jurisdiction. This level of support will undoubtedly positively impact not only our food security but our overall trade performance as we recognize that Trinidad and Tobago cannot be solely dependent on the domestic or regional market for its survival. Only last year with funding from the EDF ExportT implemented the Fit4 Europe Project which quite a number of firms to build competitiveness and has afforded the private sector entities the opportunity to discover new customers and pursue new growth prospects by strengthening the technical capacity to further the operationalisation of the Economic Partnership Agreement. Many beneficiaries are now able to exploit new markets based on the competitive advantage of various products and services; an appropriate response to the imperative to diversify and expand exports and earn foreign exchange from non-energy exports.

Beyond that, ExportT continues to provide Export Training to Agro Processors, including the current FSPCA Food Safety training series which is essential for exporters to comply with the US FDA Food Safety Modernization Act Inspections. Our prospects for exports continue to show promise.

CLOSING

As I close I wish to reaffirm that the Government stands ready to support our local exporters and in particular the domestic food and beverage companies to ensure that local goods and services can be made available globally wherever a market exists, understanding that when our economy grows, all our people have opportunities to prosper. A major challenge we face is food security and community development which requires an approach which is different from the old strategies of import substitution; it requires us to think and develop new initiatives. Transforming local businesses to becoming globally competitive and developing a market presence in potential markets can translate into foreign exchange earnings. We expect that the injection of new resources into the economy will trickle down contributing to a more stable economy and a higher standard of living for all citizens. The private sector's role in innovation, the development of niche products and the promotion of globally competitive products that can serve international customers, is becoming increasingly important. As members of the private sector I encourage all entrepreneurs present today to build upon the knowledge gained from your interactions with ExportT and continue to build momentum exploiting not only niche markets but production efficiencies and economies of scale.

I thank you.