



Media Release

GOVERNMENT EXPANDS ACCESS TO GRANT FUNDING TO LOCAL PRODUCERS TO COVER ALTERNATIVES TO WHEAT FLOUR

July 22, 2022:- In response to escalating global wheat prices, the Government, through the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) has extended support to local producers of alternatives to wheat flour to encourage domestic production. Accordingly, funding under the Grant Fund Facility will now be made available for 75%, up to maximum of TT\$340,000.00 (approximately US\$50,000.00) of the cost of new machinery and equipment being acquired to manufacture alternatives to wheat flour.

According to the Minister of Trade and Industry, Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon, ***“The Government remains committed to ensuring all avenues are explored in minimizing the impact of rising food prices, which is outside of Trinidad and Tobago’s control and symptomatic of the ongoing global food crisis among a myriad of other factors. Notwithstanding the announcement by main local wheat flour producers that the price increase on the domestic market is temporary, the situation presents an opportunity for all producers of alternatives to wheat flour.”***

The MTI is anticipating that grant funding will create opportunities for new producers of flour using alternative sources, particularly locally-sourced root-crops, as well as bring about an increase in the overall production of alternatives to wheat flour. These include coconut, sweet potato, dasheen, cassava, breadfruit, plantain and pigeon peas flour, and other non-locally sourced options such as, oat flour and cornmeal/corn flour. The initiative complements the current efforts of the National Marketing Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO), which continues to encourage the public to use root-crop flour as an alternative to wheat flour. In June, NAMDEVCO stated that, ***“monitoring records indicate consistent quarterly productions of 1.15 million kgs of sweet potato and 1.07 million kgs of cassava which can readily be converted into root-crop flour. This data shows that farmers continue to successfully produce a wide range of root crops despite external factors that can affect production, inclusive of climate change.”***

Benefits to consumers

Although wheat flour alternatives may not be cheaper than wheat flour in the short-term, it is expected that the concomitant increase in the supply of root-crop alternatives will result in overall lower prices to consumers.

In addition to contributing to food security, exploring alternatives to wheat/white flour provides an opportunity to promote and improve the nutritional status of the population. The MTI is working in tandem with officials from the Ministry of Health to continually expound and emphasize on initiatives which can contribute to a healthier nation. According to the Ministry of Health, Nutrition & Metabolism Division, the many alternatives are associated with greater levels of nutrition (iron, protein, fats, vitamins and fibre), and linked to lower cholesterol, reducing the risk of hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and other non-communicable diseases.

Large scale production of these alternative flours has the potential to increase the nation's food security, promote local output, and contribute to a healthier nation. The opportunity is not only available to current food processors, but also farmers of the various root-crops, who, with the necessary machinery and equipment, will now be in a position to process and produce alternatives to wheat flour to satisfy local and even regional demand.

The current Grant Fund Facility (GFF) provides local, small and medium-sized local firms with access to financing for new machinery and equipment to improve their productivity and competitiveness, create more innovative, high-value products, and increase exports and penetrate extra-regional markets. This covers a wide range of sectors namely: Financial services, Maritime services, Aviation services, Fishing and fish processing, Software design and applications, Creative Industries, Agriculture and agro-processing, and Manufacturing. To date, more than TT\$4 million has been awarded to producers across these varying sub-sectors.

For further information on the extended Grant Fund Facility and qualifying criteria for local producers of alternatives to wheat flour, please visit: Ministry's website www.tradeind.gov.tt.

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