



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

exporTT's World Food Day Commemorative Brunch

REMARKS

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

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Good morning to you all.

Let me begin by thanking the Chairman and staff of exportTT and representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for executing this event commemorating World Food Day. The Ministry of Trade and Industry is delighted to be associated with this activity focused on the theme, *“Our Actions are our Future: A Zero Hunger World by 2030”*.

It is indeed disheartening to read the reports of the rise of world hunger once again. Notwithstanding the various advances in food production practices and technologies in recent times, climate change; economic slowdown and developments are clawing back the progress that we have made in the eliminating world hunger.

The Government recognizes the importance of reversing this trend. We recognize however that this requires the combined efforts of all us from the public to private sectors, academia and civil society; across the globe.

From the perspective of the Ministry of Trade and Industry when discussing the elimination of food hunger, it is useful to examine the food and beverage sector from a trade and economic perspective. In 2017 the global food and beverages market was estimated at over \$5650 billion. This included products such as alcoholic beverages, pet food, grain products, meat, poultry and seafood, fruit and vegetable, frozen food and dairy. In recent times consumer patterns have shifted toward natural ingredients and products developed utilising chemical free farming techniques amid growing health concerns.

In Trinidad and Tobago, our own food and beverage sector has on average accounted for 50 percent or more of the manufacturing’s contribution to GDP. The sector is also home to more than 400 firms, and employs thousands. The industry is therefore very important to Trinidad and Tobago’s economy.

While the Ministry of Trade and Industry may be known for its role in analyzing trade data with the intent of growing exports, it should be noted that the Ministry of Trade and Industry’s efforts also have an indirect impact on food production and food safety in Trinidad and Tobago.

Although not a primary function, several initiatives championed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry complement the work of others including the Ministry of Agriculture Land and Fisheries. The recently launched National Quality Policy (NQP) is noteworthy in this regard. Its implementation will ensure that quality products meeting and exceeding international standards are available to consumers both locally and abroad.

The Ministry is now implementing the National Quality Policy and supporting infrastructure to ensure the efficient use of Trinidad and Tobago’s natural and human resources, improve food safety and protect human health and the environment. Introduction of the Policy will also lead to improvements in the country’s laboratory testing capacity, the governance and regulatory

practices involving manufacturing and food production practices while also ensuring both imports and locally produced foods are safe to eat and manufactured in an environmentally responsible manner.

Undoubtedly improving the quality of our food would require changes to our farming and manufacturing processes. At the Ministry of Trade and Industry, we recognize this and the likely burden such reforms would place on our farmers, agro-processors and manufacturers.

To help in this regard the Ministry of Trade and Industry offers fiscal incentives and import concessions to assist food producers and manufacturers improve their capacity to produce quality products. One such resource is the Grant Fund Facility (GFF) for which manufacturers and agro-processors are encouraged to apply. The GFF supports the acquisition of machinery and equipment up to a maximum of \$250,000 by local businesses. Consideration should also be given to tenancy at the Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park in Moruga, another project which will positively impact food production while offering sustainable opportunities for that community.

As we seek to increase participation in the agro processing sector, the Ministry of Trade and Industry's relationship with the Ministry of Land Agriculture and Fisheries is paramount. This symbiotic relationship helps shape not only agricultural trade but also food production and security. When engaging trading partners for new trade agreements and market access arrangements, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is mindful of the delicate balance that must be attained between trade liberalization and food security and sustainability.

To ensure this equilibrium is achieved the Ministry of Trade and Industry maintains a close working relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture Land and Fisheries and other related Ministries and agencies. Through the work of the Ministry Trade Industry's Technical Coordinating Committee chaired by the Permanent Secretary the Ministry ensures trade policy and negotiating strategies are developed and policy coherence achieved with the intent of attaining the country's national development goals.

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, I wish to underscore the importance of the issue of food production, sustainability and safety in Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard I must emphasize that the Ministry of Trade and Industry remains committed to the introduction of policies and creation of opportunities for investments and the implementation of strategies to contribute to the goal of ending world hunger by 2030.

This is a fight that requires a collective approach. To our private sector partners we encourage you to seek out new more efficient processes and practices in production, storage and waste reduction systems. As far as possible partner with other socially responsible and environmentally suppliers that value the well-being of their customers and the environment as much as the bottom line.

To the farmers and those in the agribusiness sector, we urge you to adopt more environmentally friendly cultivating techniques and harvesting methods. Slash and burn and the heavy use of harmful pesticides and fertilizers should be no more. More responsible use of our valuable water resources and arable land spaces is needed to help win the fight against hunger.

To the students here with us today and nationwide we encourage you to get involved into food production and the business of food production. The agriculture sector contains many employment opportunities that may appeal more to today's millennial generation and generation Z. High Technology Farming involving Robotics, ICT, Big Data, Earth Observation, etc. are now readily available options reducing the need to spend hours outdoors in harsh conditions. Leveraging these technologies can help in mitigating climate change, productivity issues and product tracking. Important considerations in today's world.

To the universities and other players in academia and civil society, your challenge is to help us innovate new ways to increase food yields and identify less harmful chemicals. Sharing the message and improving awareness on the need to do better regarding how we produce, store and consume our food, as well as, the importance of a well-nourished population.

By combining all our efforts we can make the change that we wish to see. Let us commit ourselves to the task. We owe it to our children.

Thank you for your attention.