



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism

Senate Contributions – Plant Varieties (Amendment) Bill, 2026

Presentation by
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Mr. President,

I rise in support of the Protection of New Plant Varieties (Amendment) Bill, 2026, from the perspective of the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism.

Others will address the detailed legal provisions. I want to focus on what this legislation can mean for trade, investment, exports and the diversification of the Trinidad and Tobago economy.

From my Ministry's perspective, the central question is practical:

When Trinidad and Tobago creates something of value, who owns that value, who earns from it, and where does the foreign exchange go?

The protection of new plant varieties may appear to be a narrow or technical subject.

It is not.

It is fundamentally about **innovation, production and commerce**.

A new pepper, cocoa line, fruit, flower or climate-resilient crop can represent years of research, investment, field testing and local knowledge.

It may offer higher yields, resistance to pests and disease, tolerance of heat or drought, longer shelf life or characteristics demanded by processors and export markets.

These improvements have economic value.

But if that innovation cannot be adequately protected and commercialised, we may produce the crop while surrendering much of its commercial value.

Mr. President, a small economy like ours cannot compete with large agricultural economies principally on acreage or volume.

We have to create superior value and capture more of the value embedded in our knowledge and innovation.

That is why intellectual property protection matters.

It can transform innovation into a commercial asset that can be protected, licensed and exported.

Trinidad and Tobago has participated in the international system for the protection of new plant varieties for almost three decades. This Bill modernises our framework to reflect the 1991 UPOV Convention and facilitates our accession to it.

From a trade and investment perspective, this can provide greater confidence and predictability for investors, breeders and researchers.

But our objective cannot simply be to import innovation.

We must create the conditions in which knowledge developed in Trinidad and Tobago becomes intellectual property owned here, commercialised here and ultimately exported from here.

AGRICULTURE AS AN EXPORT INDUSTRY

Mr. President, agriculture must increasingly be viewed as part of our wider trade and industrial strategy.

It connects directly to manufacturing, agro-processing, packaging, distribution, hospitality, tourism and exports.

I recently returned from a trade mission to Toronto, Canada, where I saw firsthand the significant demand within our diaspora for agricultural products from Trinidad and Tobago.

Consumers are prepared to pay premium prices for products such as local pumpkin, dasheen bush, scorpion pepper and pimento peppers.

The market is there.

Our challenge is supplying that market consistently with produce that meets international standards, withstands transportation and arrives in marketable condition.

This is where agricultural innovation becomes commercially important.

A fruit with longer shelf life can travel farther.

A disease-resistant variety can improve yields and reliability.

A pepper with consistent characteristics can provide agro-processors with dependable raw material.

And varieties suited to heat, drought and changing rainfall patterns can reduce risk for farmers.

These are not simply agricultural issues.

They are trade issues.

Exporters need volume, consistency, quality and reliability. Processors need predictable raw material. International buyers need products that meet their specifications.

Improved varieties can also increase local production, reduce imports and provide manufacturers with local raw materials for higher-value exports.

And this, Mr. President, brings me to the amendments before us today. The Bill seeks to strengthen and modernise our existing framework so that it can better support these opportunities for innovation and commercialisation.

One of the most significant changes is found in Clause 5 (read with clauses 6 and 9, which extends the application of the Act to all plant genera and species. In practical terms, protection will be available to improved varieties across the agricultural and horticultural sectors. **We can therefore utilise every resource available to us to conserve foreign exchange on one side and earn foreign exchange on the other.**

FROM INNOVATION TO EXPORTS

Mr. President, if a Trinidad and Tobago breeder develops a variety suited to Caribbean conditions, why should the commercial opportunity end at our borders?

Many Caribbean countries share similar climatic conditions and agricultural challenges.

A locally developed variety could therefore have commercial value throughout the Caribbean and beyond.

And the opportunity is much wider than exporting the crop.

A Trinidad and Tobago breeder could license a qualifying variety abroad, supply authorised planting material, provide technical services and earn royalties.

International breeders could also partner with local companies to test, multiply or distribute varieties from Trinidad and Tobago, bringing investment, employment and technology into our economy.

We can earn foreign exchange from the crop, from the planting material, from the technical knowledge and from the intellectual property itself.

But if we are to capture that value, we must ensure that the innovation behind it is properly protected.

Mr. President, that is where Clause 13 plays an important role. It gives our innovators stronger protection. That protection can extend beyond the seeds or planting material to the harvested crop and, in certain cases, products made directly from it where the protected variety was used without permission. It also provides protection where another variety is developed very closely from the innovator's original work.

Trinidad and Tobago should therefore position itself not only as a producer of agricultural commodities, but as a centre for agricultural research, testing, propagation and commercialisation.

We should aspire not merely to export what we grow. We should also export the knowledge behind what we grow.

A credible intellectual property framework can support that objective.

A pepper bred for consistent heat, flavour, disease resistance and shelf life can strengthen our sauces and preserves industry.

A cocoa variety selected for quality and local conditions can support chocolate and specialty products.

Distinctive ornamentals can create opportunities for nurseries, landscaping, hospitality and exports.

The objective must be to connect **research to production, production to manufacturing and manufacturing to markets.**

WE ARE A NATION OF INNOVATORS

Mr. President, permit me to stray briefly from agriculture to make a wider point.

Trinidad and Tobago has an extraordinary history of creativity and innovation.

We gave the world the steelpan, the only acoustic musical instrument invented in the 20th century.

We created soca music and our legendary Carnival, which has influenced celebrations around the world.

We developed the Trinidad Moruga Scorpion pepper.

And the Trinitario cocoa known worldwide as a premium "fine flavor" bean that balances rich chocolate strength with complex fruity and floral tastes.

We gave the world Angostura bitters.

And we have created distinctive foods such as doubles, bake and shark, crab and dumpling and, in my view, **the best one-pot dish in the world, pelau.**

When I am in restaurants in the United States, I often hear soca music being played.

And whenever I hear it, I ask myself:

If our music is being enjoyed around the world, why aren't more of our soca artists millionaires?

That question goes to the heart of a larger economic challenge.

Trinidad and Tobago does not have a shortage of innovative capability and creativity. We have a challenge capturing the economic value of what we create.

Other countries understand the value of protecting and promoting their cultural assets.

France's artisanal know-how and culture surrounding the baguette has received UNESCO recognition as intangible cultural heritage.

Italy has received similar recognition for the art of Neapolitan pizza-making, while South Korea's tradition of making and sharing kimchi has also received UNESCO recognition.

Portugal provides another example through Port wine, whose protected geographical indication closely links the product and its international identity to its place of origin.

These have become much more than foods and beverages.

They are powerful symbols of national identity and country branding.

That branding has economic value.

It attracts visitors, supports restaurants and producers, creates exports and sells an experience of the country to the world.

Trinidad and Tobago has the same opportunity.

Doubles, bake and shark, crab and dumpling and pelau are not simply things we eat.

They are part of who we are.

We should identify appropriate ways to protect, promote and commercialise these distinctive creations while using our culinary heritage to position Trinidad and Tobago internationally as a **world-class foodie destination.**

Imagine visitors coming here not only for Carnival, beaches and culture, but because they want to experience doubles where doubles was created, bake and shark at Maracas, crab and dumpling in Tobago and a proper Trinidad and Tobago pelau.

That is tourism.

That is country branding.

And that is economic value.

Whether it is a new plant variety, a song, a food, a brand or an invention, **the economic principle is the same:**

Create it.

Protect it.

Commercialise it.

Capture the value.

That is the broader principle underlying this Bill.

CREATING OUR OWN INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Mr. President, innovation should not be something Trinidad and Tobago merely purchases from abroad.

Our universities and research institutions must have pathways for taking successful research out of the laboratory and into the marketplace.

Our young people studying agriculture, science and technology should see a clear progression:

From an idea, to research.

From research, to intellectual property.

From intellectual property, to a business.

And from a business, to exports. But for that journey to succeed, our innovators need both protection and sufficient time to turn their ideas into commercial opportunities (Clause 11).

That is where Clause 14 becomes important. It extends the period of a plant breeder's right to twenty years, and to twenty-five years in the case of trees and vines. That longer period gives innovators more time to commercialise successful plant varieties and generate returns on the investment made in developing them.

And that matters for a small country like ours, because we cannot compete globally principally on scale.

We must compete on innovation, specialisation, quality and intellectual property.

Canada provides a useful example.

Canada moved from a framework based on UPOV 1978 to UPOV 1991 in 2015 and subsequently assessed the results.

Applications to Canada's Plant Breeders' Rights Office increased following the change, while surveyed breeders, agents and licensees reported greater economic opportunities and stronger incentives for investment and the release of new varieties.

The commercial examples are particularly instructive.

Protected late-season cherry varieties developed through Canada's public breeding programme extended the harvest window and reached premium export markets through controlled licensing.

A public haskap, or honeyberry, breeding programme at the University of Saskatchewan eventually became self-sustaining through royalty income.

Canada is not a forecast for Trinidad and Tobago, but it demonstrates an important principle:

Research creates intellectual property.

Intellectual property creates commercial income.

And commercial income can finance the next generation of research and innovation.

Intellectual property earns nothing merely because it is registered.

Its value comes from commercialisation.

TURNING LEGISLATION INTO ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Mr. President, the success of this legislation should not be measured simply by how many new plant varieties are registered.

The real measure must be the economic activity it helps generate.

Are our researchers commercialising their work?

Are our farmers becoming more productive?

Are international breeders partnering with Trinidad and Tobago companies?

Are we creating businesses, jobs, licensing agreements and royalties?

And critically, from the perspective of my Ministry:

Are we creating products and intellectual property that Trinidad and Tobago can export?

That is where this legislation connects directly with economic diversification.

For decades we have spoken about reducing our dependence on the energy sector.

Diversification will not occur simply because we say that it must.

We have to produce.

We have to innovate.

We have to invest.

And we have to export.

CONCLUSION

Mr. President, the Protection of New Plant Varieties (Amendment) Bill has significance well beyond the technical field of plant breeders' rights.

It forms part of the infrastructure of a modern, innovative and export-oriented economy.

This legislation will not by itself transform agriculture. That requires farmers, researchers, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, investors and Government working together.

But it can help us:

Turn innovation into production.

Turn production into exports.

And turn exports into foreign exchange.

Mr. President, foreign exchange begins before a shipment leaves the port.

It begins with an idea.

It grows through innovation.

It is secured through protection.

And it becomes economic value through commercialisation.

We will never out-compete the world's largest agricultural economies on acreage.

But we can compete on knowledge.

We can compete on innovation.

We can compete on quality.

And we can compete on what is uniquely Trinidad and Tobago.

Most importantly, when Trinidad and Tobago creates something of value, **Trinidad and Tobago must capture more of that value.**

That is how we turn intellectual property into economic value.

That is how we diversify our economy.

And that is how we build a more resilient Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.