



Hon. Michael C. Pintard, M.P.
Communique to Parliament
Monday, 6th April 2020

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND MARINE RESOURCES

EMERGENCY FOOD PRODUCTION PLAN

The Global Covid-19 pandemic has claimed more than thousands of lives and unleashed fear internationally. There has been substantial contraction in the global economy. Losses are in the trillions across the globe. The Bahamas has especially been hit hard. Our hospitality industry which accounts for approximately 58 per cent of GDP virtually shut down, resulting in more than 10,000 jobs lost in a matter of months. Furthermore, other sectors of our economy have similarly experienced devastating economic losses. Furthermore, due to our country's dependence on foreign imports which exceed 90 per cent of what we consume in general and food in particular.

There is significant uncertainty relative to the timeline when countries would be in a position to reopen their economies and when citizens can resume their precovid-19 lives. What is clear is that the longer pandemic continues to exact the toll on countries around the world international travel will continue to contract and increasingly the supply chain will experience disruptions.

Key Steps Taken

1. Our government's **survey thus far of the strength of food supplies** indicates that there is adequate food stocks in the short to medium term. The Ministry of Agriculture is now engaging both importers and domestic producers to monitor closely the pressures that the international supply chain is under. Various Governments are contemplating reducing their export of key agriculture products given their domestic demands. Major global producers are now of lockdown hence there is a slowing in production, harvesting and packaging for shipment. Cargo transfers are slowing as governments make policy decisions and as companies find new and safer ways to service their clients. Then there is the issue of some tourist driven economies having less financial resources to purchase at the levels they had grown accustomed. We must prepare for what may emerge in this fluid environment.
2. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources (MAMR) **has produced an Emergency Food Production Plan to strengthen food and nutrition security** during this time of crisis. Furthermore, we have an urgent need to diversify our economy to guard against external shocks such as this and to empower new categories of workers. Against this backdrop of Covid-19 we have an opportunity to be creative and resolute and change fundamentally how we approach our national economy and where we position food security and non-food agriculture production.

The Emergency Food Production Plan is based on the 'Food Drum' produced by the Ministry of Health which indicates the dietary intake of the major food groups. There are seven main groups: vegetables, fruit, grains/starchy vegetables, meat/dairy, fats, sugars and sweeteners and legumes/ (peas and beans). Additionally, the MAMR has identified fourteen sensitive products. These products were subject to import restrictions based on domestic production and due to their importance to the incomes of farmers, there are efforts to increase the production of these products. The Plan also used the most readily available information on the current distribution of the population which was the 2017 Election Boundary Report. The Report was used to determine the annual food needs of the population if there is a closure of the border for imports.

Mr. Speaker, please note that in order to accelerate food production, the focus needs to be on: (a) strengthening the production systems of existing farmers through the provision of inputs (seeds, guaranteed prices, feed and animals) on all islands with specific emphasis on North Andros, Abaco, Grand Bahama, Cat Island, Exuma and Eleuthera to increase production of targeted crops and livestock (b) making hydroponic systems and shade/greenhouses available to a range of producers

including young farmers and backyard gardeners. The hydroponic method is supremely efficient both in the use of water and in physical growing space. The use of water in hydroponic systems when compared to traditional farming creates a higher level of efficiency. With the use of shade/greenhouses, one (1) acre produces ten (10) acres of traditional farming methods, (c) establishing layer production units to targeted egg producers in all communities that would provide a source of protein. (d) re-establishing the Backyard Gardening Programme, (e) supporting Food Technology and Safety Laboratory to provide food processing training and advice on post-harvest storage of targeted crops since not all of the products targeted will meet fresh produce grade (f) strengthening the Feed Mill to provide livestock feed, we have just executed the purchase of extra feed so that we can send feed to Family Islands to store for ease of purchase (g) requesting the Ministry of Health's advice on nutritional value on targeted agricultural commodities, and (h) calculating guaranteed prices and cost for targeted commodities.

In order to address the possibility of reduced imports, and to implement the strategy outlined, it is recommended: (a) the purchase of three hundred and forty three (343) hydroponic systems at a cost of three hundred and forty three thousand dollars (\$343,000.00), (b) the purchase of ten thousand (10,000) Backyard Gardening Kits at a cost of two hundred and forty thousand dollars (\$240,000.00), (c) the intensification of production of roots and tubers, vegetables, legumes, fruits, and eggs (See Annex II) and (d) a program to intensify egg production estimated at \$376,217.00. This measure requires \$ 1,626,939.70 million dollars..

3. Mr. Speaker, additionally it is the intention of our Ministry to assist farmers in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas by **providing clearing and preparation of farm land** through two allocations which exceed \$ 1 million dollars. Through the IDB Dorian facility we have designated \$1 million dollars to catalyze agriculture on Abaco and Grand Bahama commencing with extensive land clearing and preparation. Mr. Speaker, in the first instance we have plans to assist nineteen farmers in Grand Bahama and forty on Abaco at a total cost of some four hundred and seventy-nine thousand six hundred dollars. Secondly, through our regular budgetary allocation we intend to utilize funds to clear and prepare lands for farmers in the remainder of the Bahamas. This week our Ministry will work with the Ministry of Transport and Local Government through Island Administrator's and Agriculture staff to accomplish this end. Funds will be transferred to the respective Islands commencing this week.
4. **Provision of farm inputs.** More than \$400,000 is being allocated to assist with seeds, plants, promix, livestock, animal feed, fertilizer etc.
5. **Build capacity of family island farmers** through provision of valuable information and technical assistance often delivered through ICTs.
 - a. **We will re-post our Backyard Farming Guide** this week on our facebook page and on social media.
6. **We are executing the repairs of three (3) packing houses** to accommodate the increased demand which we have already seen.
7. We are **identifying storage facilities nationwide** to accommodate food reserves for residents, plants and animals
8. Our Ministry will **work closely with Transport and Mail boat operators to ensure that agricultural products would be dealt with appropriately.** This would entail ensuring regularity of trips, proper refrigeration of items, proper handling of items to reduce wastage
9. **Statistical Strengthening** is crucial going forward. This week our collection of statistics go in overdrive. This Minnis led Administration is committed to evidence based decision. Having made progress toward determining the demand for food throughout the Bahamas we are now determining the amount and frequency of harvest of crops throughout the Bahamas. This predictability help all stakeholders plan carefully. This allows us to solidify purchase agreements for Bahamian products.
10. We **will release our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) list** tomorrow.
11. Steps have been taken to **order en masse the hydroponics kits, back yard faming kits and our poultry layers**
12. Our Ministry has **already ordered seeds from CARDI, family Island producers and are now sourcing additional inputs from local nurseries and the fish and farm store.**
13. Our consultation with various stakeholders has resulted in a decision to **formalize a Task Force** to address the Food Security and Import Substitution Challenge.
14. **Will strengthen national production incentive schemes**
Establish, strengthen partnerships that fix gaps, accelerate the process along the value chain including:
 - a) Logistical issues

- b) Market connectivity
- c) Storage
- d) SPS considerations
- e) Price gouging
- f) Hospital and Prison service locally

Bahamians and residents of the Bahamas we must summons our spirit of national unity; we must work across the lines that divide us and forge a collective will to tackle those things that afflict us-Covid-19 and other communicable diseases, poverty, crime, non-communicable diseases. This pandemic underscores the futility of tribalism – poverty; non-communicable diseases; crime.

We are creative as a people, resilient and have bounced back from hurricanes and recessions. We have a connection with an almighty, compassionate and wise God who cares about us and is responsive to our cries. In the midst of scarcity we have found ways to be our brothers and sisters keepers.

Keep The Faith.