



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Feature Address by the acting Prime Minister

Hon. Colm Imbert, MP

Caribbean Poultry Association's

7th International Technical Symposium & Exhibition

Sustainability & Resilience in the Caribbean Poultry Sector

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Hyatt Regency Hotel & Conference Centre, Port of Spain, Trinidad

Senator the Hon. Kazim Hosein, Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries,
Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Hamant Mahabir, President of the Caribbean Poultry Association

Chairmen, Directors and CEOs

Professors, Lecturers and other members of academia

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning,

I wish to extend a warm welcome to all our Regional and International guests, to our twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This three-day Technical Symposium and Exhibition themed "Sustainability & Resilience of the Caribbean Poultry Sector" focuses on pressing issues of climate change, sustainability, and resilience within our industry.

I'm told that the Caribbean Poultry Association is the strongest regional livestock association, with high visibility inside and outside the region and it plays a major role in the deliberations of Caricom economic and trade councils and other related Caribbean and Latin American bodies. Hence the importance of this event today, especially since the poultry sector, as you are all well aware, is a critical component of Caribbean agriculture and a major contributor to our regional economies and communities.

National and Regional Impact

In Trinidad and Tobago, as well as across the Caribbean, for several reasons, including the high cost and limited supply of other forms of locally produced meat, poultry production serves as the backbone of our food security, providing over 80% of the high-quality animal proteins consumed in our diets. It supports thousands of livelihoods, from farm workers to processors, and stimulates related industries, including feed production, veterinary services, and equipment supply.

This sector's significance extends beyond economics; it is vital to our national identity and food sovereignty. As such, the continued growth and development of the poultry industry is imperative not only to meet the increasing demand for protein as our populations grow but also to ensure that this growth is environmentally sustainable and economically viable.

The poultry industry has much potential. According to the FAO's summary of proceedings from the "Regional Consultation on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food Prices in the Caribbean", with annual gross income estimated at over US \$500 million, it is the largest regional agro-industrial enterprise in the region. Yearly production averages approximately 200,000 metric tonnes (MT) of meat and 29,800 MT of table eggs.

Some Caribbean countries, especially Jamaica and Trinidad, and Tobago, have domestic poultry industries that not only supply their local markets but also export to other regional markets.

However, the Caribbean region's producers face multiple challenges that increase the cost and risk of production, placing them at a price disadvantage

to larger, overseas competitors. Extra regional poultry imports thus continue to threaten domestic production, especially with frozen poultry. Producers in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Belize and Guyana are particularly vulnerable.

Economic Impact Analysis

The poultry sector is a significant contributor to the economies of CARICOM countries. For instance, in Trinidad and Tobago, the agricultural sector, with poultry as its mainstay, contributes significantly to the nation's GDP. Trinidad and Tobago's poultry sector recorded expansion in the number of broilers produced during the first two quarters of fiscal 2023 when compared to the same period in fiscal 2022. This increase in broiler production can be attributed to an increase in demand for chickens by the fast food industry and as well as the growing trend by grocery chains to offer pre-cooked and ready-to-eat chicken to its customers. The sector also plays a crucial role in employment, directly supporting tens of thousands of regional jobs.

Challenges to Sustainability and Resilience

Despite our successes, we face considerable challenges. The threat of climate change looms large, manifesting in rising temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns that affect feed crop yields and increase in the prevalence of diseases. The recent outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) highlight the vulnerabilities in our biosecurity measures and the need for stringent controls to protect our flocks and livelihoods.

I am certain most of the stakeholders present here will be aware of a recent outbreak near Miami airport. Our regulatory agencies in Trinidad and Tobago took swift and decisive action to implement a ban on the importation of poultry through the Miami air and seaports.

This prompt response safeguarded our industry and is a testament to the strength and agility of our institutions in managing crises with urgency and precision. However, the threat is still being monitored, and we remain vigilant while working on Contingency plans.

The importation of low-quality poultry products has also been identified as a significant challenge, undermining local production, and compromising our health standards.

The President of Guyana has pointed out that the import of poultry meat **is the region's third most expensive import product, at a value of US almost \$750 million.** Only dairy products and rice cost the region more.

In all this, the most significant challenge is the importation of cheap dark frozen meat from the US and Canada, which takes away market share from local producers who have the capacity to produce enough of our own meat. We must thus work together to counter this and continue to examine and update our tariff barriers and trade mechanisms to protect and support our local poultry producers.

Technological Advances and Innovations

Our response to these challenges must be robust and innovative. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, we have embraced new technologies inclusive of artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance efficiency and productivity. AI, for instance, is being utilized to optimize feed usage, monitor health metrics, and improve environmental controls within poultry houses, leading to better outcomes and reduced waste.

Training and Capacity Building

We recognize the importance of continuous learning and development. Our strategic focus on training and capacity building has led to numerous programs designed to elevate industry standards. These programs, often in collaboration with regional academic institutions and international partners, focus on disease management, biosecurity, and sustainable farming practices.

Environmental Sustainability Initiatives in Trinidad and Tobago

In Trinidad and Tobago, our dedication to environmental stewardship is evident through significant investments in sustainable practices. We have seen efforts to prioritize the integration of solar energy solutions across our poultry operations, significantly reducing our reliance on non-renewable energy sources. Additionally, our initiatives in waste management have set new standards within the industry, focusing on the recycling of poultry by-products. These efforts not only minimize our environmental impact but also

serve as a model for sustainable practices within the Caribbean poultry sector.

Looking to the Future

As we chart the course for the future, we envision a poultry sector that not only meets the demands of our growing populations but does so in an environmentally friendly and economically sustainable manner. This vision includes expanding our export capabilities, leveraging further technological advancements, and continuing to enhance our biosecurity measures.

For these discussions over the next few days, I encourage all participants to engage fully and share openly. The combined wealth of knowledge and experience in this gathering is invaluable. By collaboratively addressing our challenges and exploring innovative solutions, we can ensure the resilience and sustainability of the Caribbean poultry sector for generations to come.

I am heartened by your presence this morning and your commitment to this vital industry. Together, let us move forward with purpose and vision, ensuring that the Caribbean not only meets but sets global standards in poultry production sustainability and resilience. Let this symposium be a beacon of our collective effort and a milestone in our journey toward a more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.