



POST COVID-19

# BUILDING A RESILIENT FOOD AND NUTRITION SYSTEM

A FARMER'S PERSPECTIVE

## WEBINAR

TUESDAY 16 JUNE, 2020  
2:00 pm

Hosted by The UWI Faculty of Food and Agriculture

**Chair:** Dr. Gaius Eudoxie, Senior Lecturer, The UWI Faculty of Food and Agriculture

**Moderator:** Dr. Ronald Roopnarine, Network Manager, Caribbean WaterNet / CapNet UNDP

### FEATURE SPEAKERS:



**Mr. Leekha Rambrich**, Guyana  
Rice Farmer (Production & Milling)



**Ms. Ramona Morgan**, Jamaica  
Poultry Farmer (Broiler Birds)



**Dr. Tessa Barry**, Grenada  
Lecturer in Agricultural Extension



**Mr. Paul Mural**, Trinidad and Tobago  
Retired Farmer (Vegetable Crops)

## Introduction

The Faculty of Food and Agriculture organized a webinar titled “Post Covid-19: Building a Resilient Food and Nutrition – A Farmer’s Perspective”. The primary focus of the webinar was to determine the impact of COVID-19 on Caribbean farmers and how they coped with the impacts of the disease. The webinar was held on June 2, 2020 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm.

The webinar’s attendees comprised persons from the private sector, farming communities, general public and agriculture networks (students, agencies, stakeholders). A total of 100 persons participated.

## Objectives

The Objectives of the webinar were:

- To raise awareness of farmers’ issues and perspectives on impact of COVID-19.
- To identify best practices and share experiences of coping mechanisms.
- To identify possible areas for future research for the faculty to assist the region’s farmers.

## Programme

The programme consisted of four keynote presentations, three of which were from the major regional farmers’ groups – a vegetable farmer from Trinidad and Tobago, a rice farmer from Guyana, and a poultry farmer from Jamaica. The fourth presentation was by Dr. Tessa Barry of the Faculty of Food and Agriculture, titled *Extension: The Nexus*, which outlined the perspective of Extension Officers in the Eastern Caribbean.

Each farmer described the status of farming of their particular commodity in their respective countries either from a personal or general perspective; described the coping mechanisms and best practices used to deal with the impact of COVID-19 and made recommendations for improving regional food security in the medium to long term from their perspective. Each presentation was followed by a 5-10 minute question and answer session.

A 30-minute moderated discussion followed in which presenters, as well as the Dean of the Faculty of Food and Agriculture, Professor Wayne Ganpat, and Dr. Lystra Fletcher-Paul, Lecturer in Biometrics in the Faculty, responded to general questions from the participants.

## Main Findings and Recommendations

Dr. Tessa Barry presented on *Extension: The Nexus*. She discussed the role of Extension, challenges pre-COVID-19, during COVID-19 and the way forward for extension. She identified some of the challenges pre-COVID-19 as:

- Inadequate resources (human, material, capital, transport)
- Fragmented services
- Lack of policy specific to extension
- The changing nature of agricultural development
- Trust
- Limited trained staffing.

The challenges faced during COVID-19, as reported from a survey of 11 Caribbean countries related to:

- Technical barriers
- Limited resources
- Psychological issues
- Lack of mobility
- Restrictions by Government
- Limited personal protective equipment.

## Recommendations

- Use of digital technology in Extension
- Extension Officers should be continuously re-trained
- Conduct research on the impact of Extension on the farming community
- Extension Officers should be provided with psychological support
- There should be reviews of Extension policy
- Financing/funding should be available for Extension
- There should be the formation of farmer groups and associations
- Extension should be decentralized
- There should be support for the development of rural networks
- Extension programmes should be offered at The UWI
- There should be a link between Extension and nutrition programmes
- There should be a link between Extension and agri-business programmes.

Mr. Paul Mural presented on *Perspectives of vegetable sector of Trinidad*. The challenges identified during COVID-19 were:

- Lower prices for produce
- Reduction in production levels
- Supply chain being negatively affected.

Positive effects of COVID-19 were:

- Increase in home gardening efforts
- Recognition of the need to become self-reliant because of the global impact of COVID-19
- Identification and use of local inputs.

## Recommendations

### Research

- Increase research funding
- Be aggressive with timing of research
- Areas of research to be conducted should include vermiculture and soil testing to identify active microbes.

### Healthy and Safe Food

- Need to provide safe and healthy food since COVID-19 mainly impacted persons with underlying health issues
- Farmers should adhere to best use practices of pesticides
- Reduce the use of pesticides which may have negative effects on soils and food safety.

### Interaction with Extension Officers /Communication

- Increased communication and interaction between Extension Officers and the farming community by using communications technology.

Mr. Leekha Rambrich presented on *Perspectives from the Rice industry in Guyana*.

Guyana rice industry has 65 rice mills privately owned by farmers in Guyana, employing 50,000 persons. The industry earns US \$100 million annually.

Mr. Rambrich indicated that there was no real impact from COVID-19 as there was enough fertilizer and chemicals stored for use for the current crop.

However, if there is no change in the COVID-19 situation by early September, this would negatively impact the ability to obtain chemicals and fertilizer, which will affect the production of the crop season in October.

## Recommendations

- Boost trade through better trade agreements, procedures and principles
- CARICOM should revise the policies for food security, market trade, trade agreements and tariffs among member countries, to enable greater trade among CARICOM Countries as more rice is being exported out of CARICOM than within
- Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica should restart their rice industries to help decrease their rice imports
- CARICOM should offer soft and low interest loans and grants in all sectors of agriculture to enable development and expansion among Caribbean countries
- Revision of regional agri-trade agreements among CARICOM countries needed
- The industry should be mechanized to improve productivity
- More land should be cleared for rice production
- Guyana's recent oil wealth should be re-invested into research on plant breeding etc. to ensure the sustainability of this industry.

Ms. Ramona Morgan presented on the *Livestock (poultry) perspectives in Jamaica*.

The challenges faced by broiler farmers during COVID-19 were:

- Glut of slaughtered birds in cold storage due to the closure of restaurants and businesses that normally purchase broilers
- Sourcing cold storage facilities
- Increased overheads and decreased income
- Job losses within the sector.

## Recommendations

- The Ministry of Agriculture should develop marketing strategies for purchasing of broiler meat from small farmers regionally
- Stakeholders should make agriculture more attractive to young people so that they would want to rear broiler birds
- The Ministry of Education should provide on-going training on best practices and profitability to broiler farmers
- The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture should provide strategic guidelines to broiler farmers in the event of another pandemic and/or epidemic
- Bankers/financial institutions should implement a flexible repayment policy and provide loans with low interest rate to broiler farmers.