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International trade and food safety. Are we ready?

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Abstract

With a rising food import bill in the region, many CARICOM countries are faced with the challenge of increasing domestic production to achieve some level of food security to be able to compete on the local and international markets. Price is no longer the only important parameter in the marketing of food. Consumers are becoming more aware of food safety issues and are so inclined towards purchasing foods that are safe, wholesome and competitively priced. Regional food producers, manufacturers and suppliers are faced with the daunting task of supplying food of an international standard while operating in an environment where the necessary policy, regulation and support mechanisms are not implemented and in some cases not in place. This scenario effectively creates an opportunity for extra regional food to enter the region and displace local production. This paper presents a case study of the food safety programme implemented by NAMDEVCO in managing the trade protocol between Trinidad and Barbados over the past five years and looks at the critical issues to be addressed at the regional level and the way forward.