

LOCAL FOOD BASKETS - COVID-19 FOOD SUPPORT INITIATIVE

With the Government's ongoing effort to bring relief to those persons who have had prolonged loss of livelihoods, a number of relief measures were introduced including the Food Support Programme. Coordinated and implemented through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO), the programme has brought relief to approximately 100,000 families across all 41 constituencies, since May 2021.

Each recipient would have received food baskets containing sweet potato, dasheen, cassava, plantain, squash, pineapple, citrus, pawpaw, cucumbers, bodi, sweet pepper, hot pepper and tomatoes (with slight variations). In addition, each recipient will received a package with two locally processed chickens and 1/2 dozen eggs.

Prior to this initiative, through the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, NAMDEVCO coordinated a project to distribute fresh produce hampers in May 2020 to selected recipients identified by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Fresh, high quality, local produce sourced from farms registered with the Farm Certification and Monitoring Programme, was minimally processed and distributed by NAMDEVCO's Piarco Packing House. Over the three month period, a total of 21,704 fresh produce hampers were distributed.

Additionally, in December 2020, the National Schools Dietary Services Limited, through the Ministry of Education and in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, approached NAMDEVCO to coordinate the procurement, packaging and distribution of fresh produce baskets to families whose children are recipients of meals on the School Nutrition Program. Approximately 15,000 fresh produce baskets were distributed during this phase of the project.

NAMDEVCO's CEO Nirmalla Debysingh-Persad stated, "Our farmers are in continuous production. So far, we have not had any reports of any farmer's inability to produce, so we do not anticipate any shortfalls. Our production capacity can sustain the current demand of the programme and the current demands of our market".

Over the past three months, more than 350 farmers have supplied 3,610,195kgs of produce for this initiative. Additionally, 27,000 families have received frozen chickens and soup packs through distribution from their elected Councillors. As the NAMDEVCO team continues to work assiduously to supply food

relief to our fellow citizens, notably, several Members of Parliament have expressed commendations upon receipt of these food baskets; such as the Members of Parliament for Toco/ Sangre Grande, Mayaro and Arima. Many NGOs as well echoed similar sentiments; such as the Trinbago Unified Calypsonians' Organisation (TUCO), who officially articulated their heartfelt gratitude via a letter of thanks.

Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries Clarence Rambharat, noted that "The food box programme goes from May to end of September 2021. Parliament has just approved \$57 million for the programme. Based on current estimates, we will reach 125,000 families through the 41 MPs; 50,000 families through 139 Councillors and 12 THA assemblymen with frozen chicken and peeled and frozen provision packs. We will also be able to reach another 10,000 families via NGOs, CBOs and individual requests".

While the pandemic continues to impact the local and global economy, NAMDEVCO remains committed to working with the nation's farmers to supply high-quality, fresh, safe and nutritious food from farmers, for this initiative and beyond.