

Closing Remarks by

**Ms. Albada Beekham,
Director of Research, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries**

at the

**2022 TRINITARIO COCOA
WEBINAR SERIES' GRAND FINALE:
"THE COCOA PITCH"**

WEDNESDAY 28TH SEPTEMBER 2022

9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

SALUTATIONS:

- Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee Scoon, Minister of Trade and Industry
- His Excellency Ambassador Peter Cavendish, Head of Delegation of the European Union to Trinidad and Tobago
- Mr Sekou Alleyne, President at InvestTT
- Panelists
- Pitch participants
- Farmers, processors, investors, participants - locally, regionally and internationally

Good Morning

It is my pleasure to bring greetings to you on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries who unfortunately could not be present today.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the organizers of this event for successfully hosting this excellent three part Trinitario Cocoa Webinar Series which took us on a journey from February to today 28 September 2022. You were able to capture the attention of over 47 countries. This shows that there is tremendous interest in cocoa and cocoa products not only locally but also regionally and internationally.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is also committed towards its support of the local cocoa sector. Cocoa has been identified as a strategic commodity by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (MALF) and can bring significant investment and foreign exchange into our country. It can be a real means to diversification of our economy.

Our small country, the birthplace of the Trinitario fine/flavour hybrid, has the distinct honour of winning many International Cocoa Awards. However, our production is steadily falling whilst our farming population is ageing. In order to capitalize on the unique and prized quality of our beans we must increase our production base.

At the MALF our mission is to create an enabling environment and to provide technical expertise to support our cocoa farmers. Many Divisions within our Ministry are actively engaged in this process. Permit me the opportunity to list some of these initiatives by the various divisions of the ministry.

The Research Division, is known world over for having one of the oldest breeding programmes, which still continues today. Its output is the production of the Trinidad Select Hybrids (TSHs), its fantastic flavor makes it highly sought after by chocolatiers. In addition, these TSHs were bred to be tolerant to diseases such as Witches Broom disease and Blackpod disease. The Division is also currently working on a number of mitigation strategies for Frosty Pod Rot Disease, which is a

devastating disease and was reported in the region in 2016 in Jamaica. This is of major concern to us in the Ministry, and we have put measures in place to mitigate against this disease which includes 1) Introduction of ICS95, known to have tolerance to Frosty Pod, into the cocoa production areas 2) Continued breeding to introduce tolerance to the present TSHs 3) National surveillance of all counties. No FPR was detected in the last survey. Another survey is to commence in November 2022.

Another initiative of the Research Division is our development programme – Rehabilitation of the cocoa industry. This project seeks to provide innovative technologies which are geared towards increasing farm productivity and farmer incomes. At the La Reunion Estate, there is a model fermentation and drying facility which is used for demonstration and training of local and regional students, researchers, farmers and other stakeholders. The Division is about to embark on a solar powered drip irrigation system for cocoa production within the next financial year. It is estimated that irrigation can increase yields up to three folds.

Other divisions like the Agricultural Services Division, continue to support rehabilitation and new planting initiatives through the sale of superior planting materials for both cocoa and its companion crops such as coffee and breadfruit. These plants are provided to the farming population at a highly subsidized cost.

Another Division, the Extension Training and Information Services Division provides training in the areas of cocoa production, fermentation and drying and cocoa value add. This training is offered free of charge to participants,

The Regional Administrations North and South Divisions are also pivotal in providing services to the cocoa community by providing advice as well as processing of agricultural incentives for farmers. Farmers benefit from general incentives as well as incentives which are specifically tailored for cocoa production and processing. There are incentives for establishment, rehabilitation, fermentaries and agroprocessing.

The MALF also continues to provide support to cocoa agri-entrepreneurs, through the Agricultural Finance Support Programme. Over the last 2 years, 11 agroprocessors have been awarded grants up to a maximum of \$100,000. This grant has been instrumental to both the start up and the expansion of many of these businesses.

The MALF together with other key institutions within the country such as the Cocoa Research Centre and the Cocoa Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited collaborate to address major industry challenges such as cadmium levels in our cocoa beans and formulate strategies to overcome these hurdles.

In closing, I would like to stress that the Ministry is committed to the continued support of the cocoa sector and I believe our initiatives and platforms like these which support and connect producers with investors can help propel the conversation, which can lead to tangible outcomes and can drive the further development of the sector.
