PARLIAMENT
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Summary of Proceedings
Public Hearing
Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs
Held on Friday May 20, 2016

Subject matter: An Inquiry into food fraud in Trinidad and Tobago.

Venue: The Committee held a public hearing on **Friday May 20, 2016 from 10:17 a.m. to 12:39 p.m.** at the J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, The Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain.

Committee members

The following Committee Members were present:

- Ms. Sophia Chote, SC (Chairman)
- Mr. Michael Coppin (Vice-Chairman)
- Mr. Randall Mitchell, MP
- Mr. Clarence Rambharat
- Dr. Lovell Francis, MP

Witnesses who appeared

Officials of the following entities appeared before the Committee:

The Ministry of Health

- Ms. Donna Ferraz, Permanent Secretary;
- Dr. Clive Tilluckdharry, Chief Medical Officer (Ag.);
- Mr. Adrian Mc Carthy, Chief Chemist & Director, Chemistry, Food and Drugs;
- Mr. Farz Khan, Food and Drugs Inspector II; and
- Mr Christopher Saith, Chief Public Health Inspector

The Ministry of the Trade and Industry

- Mr. Norris Herbert, Permanent Secretary;
- Mr. Dexter Morgan, Director, Consumer Guidance and Protection;
- Ms. Feroza Matthew, Senior Research Officer; and
- Ms. Sandra Peter-Sarabjit, Senior Project Analyst (Ag.)

The Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards

- Mr. Theodore Reddock, Executive Director;
- Ms. Adrienne Stewart, Standard Officer (Standards Written Division); and
- Mr. Gerald Maxwell, Head Implementation Division

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the main issued highlighted during discussions with the Ministry of Health:

i. The term "food fraud" is not defined in the Food and Drugs Act;
ii. The Testing Laboratory of the Chemistry, Food and Drug Division is not operational and whether the public can be assured that food items are safe for consumption and that the labels and contents are not misleading;
iii. Systems in place to inform the public about food items that are inaccurately labelled;
iv. The need for the Chemistry Food and Drugs Division (CFDD) to be restructured;
v. The regime or framework for testing high risk foods products such as canned meats;
vi. Whether arrangements are in place to test of all imported food products;
vii. The setting of standards for food products;
viii. The existence of offences under the Food and Drugs Act and the Ministry's failure to facilitate the prosecution of alleged offenders;
ix. The role of the legal department in the Ministry of Health in supporting the efforts of the CFDD;
x. Labels written in foreign languages that may not have an English translation;
xi. The number of random samples done over the past five (5) years and the number of breaches of the Act recorded from conducting these random sampling;
xii. Action taken on discovering that the labels of food items contain misleading or inaccurate details;
xiii. Red flagging of products suspected of food fraud;
xiv. Redress available to consumers who are victims of food fraud;
xv. Decentralised establishment to conduct emergency testing;
xvi. The variation in lab reports from different labs across various countries and industries;
xvii. Whether any state agency responsible for scrutinising "wonder health products"
xviii. The Ministry's position on expired goods;

xix. The avenues for lodging complaints regarding food fraud and the investigation of these complaints.

The following are the main issued highlighted during discussions with the Ministry of Trade and Industry:

i. Integrity in the labelling of food products.
ii. Whether there are any legal barriers preventing the Ministry from informing the public of the content of products;
iii. The "dumping" of chicken in Trinidad that did not meet the required food standard in the United States of America;
iv. The procedure for making a complaint to the Ministry;
v. The action taken by the Ministry on products not labelled in English;
vi. Public outreach sessions to educate the public about food fraud;
vii. Whether food testing should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Trade and Industry;
viii. The ability of the Ministry to trace the origin of each product imported in Trinidad and Tobago;
ix. The interactions between the Ministry and the Food and Drug Administration Department of the United States of America;
x. Preparation of a legal brief for the attention of the Minister of Trade and Industry concerning labelling to be in English.

The following are the main issued highlighted during discussions with the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards:

i. Some of the requirements for establishing food standards in Trinidad and Tobago;
ii. Lessons learnt from the TTBS as a regulatory body that can assist in regulating the food industry;
iii. Whether the absence of specified food standards is linked to lifestyle diseases;
iv. Whether there were any International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) relevant to the food industry;
v. The ways in which the Bureau may influence legislative change;
vi. Workshops facilitated by the Bureau to raise awareness about standards and encourage compliance;
vii. Whether any persons have been persecuted under section 7 of the Food and Drug Act;
viii. Whether the food advisory committee is an effective avenue for effecting the regulation of food items.

YouTube Video

Video of this meeting can be found on the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago's ParlView Youtube Channel at the following link: https://youtu.be/tTxkkna7CBU

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

Friday 20th May 2016