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**FAO/WHO GLOBAL FORUM OF FOOD SAFETY REGULATORS**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Trinidad and Tobago are the southernmost islands of the Caribbean Chain, only 10km from the Venezuelan Coast. The two islands are 33km apart. Trinidad has an area of 4,828sq. km and is half forested, and Tobago is 300sq. km with a central spine of hills rising to 549 meters with flatter land to the south. The total population is 1.3 million (Tobago 50,000), mainly of African (40%) and Indian (40%) ancestry.

The World Bank, in its 2001 publication of “Environment matters”, shows that Trinidad and Tobago’s GNI (formally called GNP) per capita is \$4,750 – the 30<sup>th</sup> highest of the 148 countries surveyed, and 2<sup>nd</sup> of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Other figures show that Trinidad and Tobago is 5<sup>th</sup> highest in CO<sup>2</sup> emission of the countries studied. It would seem therefore that Trinidad and Tobago is an emerging developing country, but environmental problems could escalate because of its high CO<sup>2</sup> emission.

Like most countries, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is concerned about Food Safety, Food Security and achieving HACCP standards, especially in this Global Economy where small developing economies could aim at being competitive by adding value to raw material and seeking niche markets globally. The main issues faced however are;

- A scattered approach making farm to table control almost impossible
- Little or no coordination between agencies responsible
- Very little capabilities for HACCP and trace back
- Lack of accredited diagnostic capabilities, particularly in residue analysis
- Double standards – local vs. export products
- Private sector is not always aware of the importance of food safety issues
- Few cost recovery programmes

A brief look would be taken of the present system, and attempts to solve the problems would be examined.

## 2. AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR FOOD SAFETY

In Trinidad and Tobago the following agencies have varying degrees of responsibilities for food safety:

## **MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

### **1.1 CHEMISTRY FOOD AND DRUGS DIVISION**

- Food and Drugs Division
  1. Enforces Food and Drugs Act
  2. Inspects domestically produced processed food and beverages
  3. Inspects processing plants, warehouses, retail & wholesale outlets
  4. Inspects imported foods
  5. Issue export certificates
  6. Inspects fish and seafood for export
  7. Limited HACCP audit facilities
  8. Laboratory analysis: microbiological, chemical and alcoholic beverages
  9. Product recall
  
- Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Inspectorate
  1. Enforces Pesticide & Toxic Chemical Act
  2. Public Health Inspectorate
  3. Inspect premises where food processed and prepared and vendors
  4. Inspect public markets
  5. Inspect itinerant & roadside vendors

### **1.2 VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT**

1. No meat & poultry act, poultry, egg & pluck shop standards being developed
2. Ante and post mortem inspection of animals at meat and poultry processing plants ---NOT pluck shops
3. Hygiene at meat & poultry processing plants – Inspect abattoirs (Tobago and Sugarcane Feed Centre).
4. Accredited processing plants for export
5. HACCP audit capabilities, but plants don't have plan yet (in progress).

#### ***1.2.1 MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, LAND AND MARINE RESOURCES***

##### ***1.2.2 Research Division***

- **Plant Protection Sub-unit**

1. Entomology
2. Pathology
3. Plant Quarantine
  - (a) Administers Plant Quarantine Act (1975)
  - (b) Inspects imported and exported produce, planting material etc.

#### **1.2.2.1. Animal Production and Research Division**

- **Veterinary Service**

1. Administers Animal Disease and Importation Act (1954)
2. Issues import permits for livestock products (based on risk assessment)
3. Responsible for inspection & quarantine of imported & exported live animals
4. Animal disease surveillance & control programmes
5. Veterinary services laboratory

#### ***1.2.3 MINISTEY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE***

- **Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards**

1. Development and enforcement of standards for food, drugs and chemicals
2. Collaborates with Chemistry Food and Drugs Division of the Ministry of Health.

- **Consumer Affairs Division**

1. Consumer complaints
2. Disposal of rejected goods

#### ***1.2.4 MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT***

- **Regional corporations**

1. Public Health Inspectorate  
Inspects municipal and regional markets

#### ***1.2.5 MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE***

- **Water and Sewage Authority**

1. Tests water for Human consumption
2. No regulation or testing of agricultural water

### 1.2.6 MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

- **Environmental Management Agency**

1. Co-operates with Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division on disposal of toxic wastes.

From the fore going it could be gathered the legislation across Ministries could be cumbersome and difficult to manage, and that any attempt at introducing “Food Safety” regulations would be fraught with problems.

### 3. Attempts at Problem Solving

The Government has recognised the problems that could arise from multi-ministerial authority. A multi-ministerial, multi-disciplinary approach needs to be taken with the fully backing of the political directorate. Fortunately the programme has the full backing of the political directorate, but much more is needed. The steps taken so far include:

- Full participation in Codex Alimentarius Commission, with the ‘Chemistry Food and Drugs Division as the contact point.
- Establishment and operation of a National Sanitary and Phytosanitary Enquiry Point/Notification Authority within the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.
- Preparation of ‘Emergency Action Plans foe Exotic Plant and Animal Diseases’.
- Preliminary stages in forming a committee to sensitise the public, each Ministry, and all related organizations on issues of food safety, put together a document for discussion followed by a position paper. Debate would then be encouraged to arrive at a country position. The recent experiences in Belize, outlined in a paper by Dr. D. Budhram (IICA) could be used as a focal point.

### 4. Conclusion

It could be seen that Trinidad and Tobago is concerned about food safety, but there are numerous problems to overcome, and tremendous hurdles to vault. The series of fora planned by FAO would be invaluable in providing some insights in solving these difficulties.

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