

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE TENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, IN THE ARNOLD THOMASOS ROOM (EAST), SIXTH FLOOR, (IN CAMERA) AND IN J HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM (IN PUBLIC) TOWER D, OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2017 AT 9.45 A.M.**

**PRESENT**

Miss Sophia Chote SC	Chairman
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	Member
Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member
Mr. Wayne Sturge	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Ms. Shanice Ramdhan	Asst. Secretary
Ms. Sacha Singh	Research Assistant

**ABSENT**

Mr. W. Michael Coppin	Vice-Chairman [ <i>Excused</i> ]
Mr. Prakash Ramadhar	Member [ <i>Excused</i> ]
Dr. Lovell Francis	Member [ <i>Excused</i> ]
Miss Marlene Mc Donald	Member

**Madam Chairman:** Good morning members; thanks in particular to Mr. Mitchell without whom we could not have got started. I know that Mr. Rambharat has restrictions today. What is the absolute latest time you can go?

**Mr. Rambharat:** I will stay as long as I am needed for a quorum.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, much appreciated. The meeting is called to order. We have been advised that Mr. Ramadhar, Dr. Francis and Mr. Coppin will

not be able to attend. We have had no word from Miss Mc Donald, and just as a matter of housekeeping I wish to indicate that I will have to write to the President of the Senate perhaps, for an alternative to be suggested, because it means that we are one less when it comes to finding a quorum.

If we go now to the confirmation of the Minutes of the Ninth Meeting—can we go to that. It was the meeting held on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, 2016. Does everyone have a copy?

**Members:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** It is just two pages, so I will ask you to take just a minute or so to review the two pages and see whether there are any amendments that you wish to propose.

**Mr. Rambharat:** Chairman, I know you like to be perfect. In 6.1 the word should be—

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, absolutely. Are there any amendments to page 1? Page 2, apart from the one just brought up by Mr. Rambharat? Can someone move then that the Minutes be confirmed?

*[Confirmed by Mr. Sturge]*

*[Secoded by Mr. Rambharat]*

**Madam Chairman:** We move on to Matters Arising from the Minutes. I have been asked to bring to your attention item 5.5 on page 2 of the Minutes to update you to say that the First Report on Criminal Case Flow Management was presented in the House on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, and in the Senate on 15<sup>th</sup> of November, 2016. I take it that all members had an opportunity to look at the final product?

**Members:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** And all members found it satisfactory? Does any member wish to raise any matter arising from the Minutes? Mr. Ogilvie reminds me that

procedurally when a report is laid in Parliament that the Minister is supposed to give some sort of response, or at least it falls to the Permanent Secretary to prepare it. So the time for that passed and we did write to the Permanent Secretary in the Attorney General's Office to have some feedback, so we are still awaiting feedback from him or her.

The next thing that we have to determine is what our work programme for the second session is going to be. I am very disappointed that we have spent so much time away from committee work, but this has become unavoidable because there were just too many clashes with sessions set up for parliamentarians as a whole. I will have to discuss with Mr. Ogilvie to see perhaps whether changing the day or the time of this session might make it easier for people to attend, but it is not acceptable that we could only have met in January since September. That is not acceptable at all.

We had asked members to consider what you wanted to work on next. When we thanked the enquiry on food fraud essentially we had sort of half committed ourselves to follow that with an enquiry into anti-competitive practices. What Mr. Ogilvie and his team did is that he polled the members of the Committee to see which topics were, I guess, most likely to catch your interest, and he gave us all a tabulated sheet. Do you have that?

**Mr. Ogilvie:** It is on the screen just in case. Just zoom it a bit.

**Madam Chairman:** Could we have some input as to which one we should go with?

**Mr. Sturge:** Madam Chairman, on the finance side I believe No. 3 might be the best; no. 3 might be best because this issue of the fees charged by commercial banks has arisen several times, with several different speakers raising it in the Senate. It is something that is widely discussed in the public domain, so maybe

that might be something worth looking into as a priority.

**Madam Chairman:** What is the view of other members?

**Mr. Mitchell:** I agree, Madam Chair. Are we talking about an enquiry into commercial banking fees after we do the anti-competitive practices?

**Madam Chairman:** No, I think we are looking at instead of at this point, whether we intend to push back the enquiry into anti-competitive practices.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I certainly agree that the enquiry into commercial banking fees is important. I think equally important is the enquiry into anti-competitive practices. So I think we can go with the anti-competitive practices first and then on to commercial bank fees.

**Madam Chairman:** Do you have any thoughts on that, Mr. Rambharat?

**Mr. Rambharat:** Yes, Chairman. I think on Mr. Sturge's proposal, the management of the debt, I think it might tend to be very topical in the PA(E)C and it might be covered there to some extent, but I do not have a difficulty with the topic, it is just what may be covered elsewhere.

**Madam Chairman:** You are talking about No. 2?

**Mr. Rambharat:** No. 3, the one that Mr. Sturge proposed.

**Madam Chairman:** Enquiry into regulation of commercial bank fees?

**Mr. Rambharat:** No, into the management of the state debt portfolio.

**Madam Chairman:** That is No. 2.

**Mr. Rambharat:** I am looking at the wrong list, sorry. I support Mr. Mitchell, commercial bank fees, in terms of the ones that—I would say commercial bank fees. There is one that I had proposed on waste management, which I do not believe anybody is likely to cover in the country, but it is a serious problem and we have not been addressing it, and that one on the effectiveness of the tax collection mechanism. Those are the ones that are of priority.

**Madam Chairman:** According to this list we had four people—this list does not include my input nor does it include the input of Miss Mc Donald. So we have four people wanting to enquire into the effectiveness of tax collection and four wanting to enquire into the effectiveness of systems and policies intended to alleviate anti-competitive practices among firms in Trinidad and Tobago. Those were the two main ones. However, because of the publicity of commercial bank fees which seem to be largely unregulated and which I think may appeal to a wider audience than a scrutiny of anti-competitive practices, I am suggesting that perhaps we should go with that one. What do you all think?

**Mr. Mitchell:** I think one plays into the other.

**Madam Chairman:** Also, I do not think that it is necessarily going to be a long enquiry. You see, it is a topic that we can do pretty quickly, do a report on, because so far in the Committee we have only been able to file one report. Quite frankly I am very competitive, and when I see other committees putting in three reports and this kind of thing, I start to become a little embarrassed. So I think that we can start with this enquiry. Are we all agreed?

**Mr. Mitchell:** Just to enquire whether the Secretariat would be prepared, because I know they would have done some work on the anti-competitive practices, whether the Secretariat would be prepared so that we can have an enquiry as soon as possible.

**Mr. Ogilvie:** Thanks for that, Mr. Mitchell, because yes we did draft an enquiry proposal for the anti-competitive practice enquiry. But the next designated meeting date is February 15<sup>th</sup> and we could work towards preparing an IP. It is just for the members to provide feedback on time.

**Mr. Rambharat:** Chairman, the topic restricts us to commercial banks, but do you think it is necessary for us to go into, like, credit unions? That is one, and do

you think it should go beyond fees into practices?

**Madam Chairman:** Well, we would have to look at the legislation to see if we can go into practices at all. I do not want us to assume that we could enquire into that, but in looking into the issue of fees and how they are set and how they are applied, it may lead us to enquire into their practices, but I guess we just have to wait and see how that plays out. So we agree that the next topic is bank fees?

**Mr. Sturge:** Madam Chair, I know the question was asked already, and I neglected to look lower down. I do not know if we can perhaps foreshadow what is another burning topic, No. 14 under Office of the Attorney General, an examination of the feasibility and potential impact of the decriminalization of marijuana in Trinidad and Tobago specifically for medical purposes. I do not know.

Since the enquiry into commercial bank fees might be discreet and perhaps can be dealt with in short order, I am wondering if this is something we can raise now to perhaps start doing the research and so on, so that we can get to this soon after.

**Madam Chairman:** The thing about that is I am wondering whether we should be looking into that or whether it should be an issue for the Ministry of Health.

**Mr. Sturge:** If we limit it to medical purposes then yes, it would be an issue for the Ministry of Health, but I was actually thinking about it in the context of the criminal justice system, since it was raised by the Lord Chief Justice a few years ago and it has been raised quite recently and quite frequently by other stakeholders.

**Madam Chairman:** I think members can certainly consider it, because this is the second time we are going to be pushing the anti-competitive practices down the line.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Madam Chair, I think that the enquiry into the commercial bank

fees is very much linked to anti-competitive practices and the behaviour of oligarchies and cartels, so I think that we should do one after the other.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, it logically flows. So the Secretariat is now duly warned. So we are looking at fees, but in any event you have already done a brief on anti-competitive practices so that is likely to be the third thing that we look at.

Credit unions—if we include credit unions then we are looking at a much larger, wider, broader category than before.

**Mr. Rambharat:** The credit union has a wide membership base, one. I do not know if they are any better than the commercial banks. There was a time when the credit unions were run in a particular way, but that has changed and it is just how much of the commercial banks we bring before us and how much of the credit unions. They are well organized so I could see that they would come in one appearance. I just wondered if we were signalling in the topic that there were concerns with the commercial banks but not the credit unions.

**Madam Chairman:** I see. The thing about the credit unions is—I think it may be useful in the sense that it may force the legislators to look at finally passing a new Credit Union Act or a new legislation to govern credit unions, because it seems as though every year a new Bill is proposed—every year perhaps for the past 20 years and nothing has happened with respect to that. Some credit unions have grown quite large, and even the ones we thought had been doing well, like the Eastern Credit Union, it turns out massive fraud had been taking place, and so on, in it.

Certainly we can push it in that direction, but let us keep our focus on the banks for the time being, and our time. When you look at the fact that we have not been able to meet for so many months, it may mean that what we may have to do is simply do the banks and then move on to another topic and deal with the credit unions separately. Let us take it as it goes.

**Madam Chairman:** Mr. Ogilvie is asking who we will invite. I suppose all the registered banking institutions.

**Mr. Rambharat:** They have an association.

**Mr. Mitchell:** There is a Bankers' Association.

**Madam Chairman:** Is the association regulatory?

**Mr. Sturge:** No.

**Mr. Rambharat:** No, no, it is entirely the Central Bank, under the Financial Institutions Act. They just advocate, they lobby and they trade, but they do not have the power to enforce. I was just going back to credit unions, if you felt there was value in inviting the credit unions to make a submission on commercial banking fees.

**Madam Chairman:** Certainly we could do that.

**Mr. Rambharat:** But the commercial banks will come through the Bankers' Association and individually if we ask them to. We have at least two. We have FCB which is 100 per cent owned; we have RBC and Scotia, First Citizens. We have another category that is multinational and that may influence fees and power to charge fees and trying to create—across the region in particular. So you may have a difference when you have a regional bank as opposed to a local institution.

**Madam Chairman:** Well, I am thinking that on the day we invite the Bankers' Association, we should also invite a representative from the Central Bank so that we would be able to get a full picture of whatever rules and regulations there are which control how banks operate or set their fees and standards.

**Mr. Rambharat:** We must start with Central Bank, because the Central Bank is the regulator.

**Madam Chairman:** So we can start with them.

**Mr. Ogilvie:** And there is a Financial Services Ombudsman I think.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I was just about to raise that, whether we can get some written evidence from the Ombudsman, so that we are clear as to what are the complaints that they receive.

**Madam Chairman:** I think what we need to do first is that we need to get clear in our mind where we see loopholes or problems because we do not want the Ombudsman to come and tell us or send a written thing saying what he does. What I think we should be trying to do is to see what are the problems existing in the current systems in operation in the banking institutions, and what role, if any, the Ombudsman has to play in seeking to reform or ameliorate or even mediate, I do not know, in that context. That is the way I was seeing it.

**Mr. Rambharat:** I think we want to get from the Central Bank, because they are the regulators, but they operate through different offices—including the FSO is under the Central Bank—and particularly to ask about complaints and what are the major complaints and what powers do you have and what powers do you need to have. I was just wondering again—because commercial banking fees also cover the cost of borrowing, including for mortgages, whether we would want to have TTMF, because they perform banking business, and then whether we would want to have ADB, because they also perform. That is a very contentious issue with ADB and lending practices and the cost of borrowing and all of that.

**Madam Chairman:** Another entity I was thinking about was the Unit Trust.

**Mr. Rambharat:** Which also is a financial institution under the Central Bank. It is not a commercial bank, but it provides commercial banking services, so they have credit cards, but the way it is structured is different, but the services are the same.

**Madam Chairman:** I think they should certainly be included. I suppose we could separate it into indigenous banking, then international banking, that is to say where

the head office is in another country, and then we could deal with groups such as the Unit Trust and—which was the one you spoke of?

**Mr. Rambharat:** TTMF and ADB.

**Madam Chairman:** Does that sound reasonable to all? Yes? Then we will go with that. Mr. Ogilvie assures me that we will all be getting information with respect to these areas before the next meeting.

Today we are expecting representatives of the Supermarket Association of Trinidad and Tobago. I feel so badly because the last time the people came here and waited and waited and waited, and had to be sent away with apologies. The Farmers' Union is expected to be here as well.

**Mr. Rambharat:** They are here.

**Madam Chairman:** Have you all got your paperwork with respect to their submissions—Supermarket Association and Farmers Union?

On the things that I am supposed to discuss is PAHO's response. It happened a long time ago, but essentially what had happened is we had invited PAHO to attend a session, and PAHO said because of the fact that it was a WHO organization, they were not allowed in law to participate in a public hearing such as this. I think you all got notification of that since November of last year.

**10.20 a.m.**

Now, because I want to get on with the meeting with the people who have been waiting for us for so long. Our next meeting date is going to be the 17<sup>th</sup> of February. Is that convenient for those members here?

**Madam Chairman:** When is Carnival? “Doh tell meh” the following Monday? All right. Okay.

**Mr. Rambharat:** The only questionable date is the June date which falls after Corpus Christi and before the Labour Day long weekend.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Rambharat:** And you yourself may turn that into a long weekend but I will not.

**Madam Chairman:** [*Laughter*] Well, Mr. Ogilvie can remind me as we get closer to the date so that we could try to reschedule. Right.

What I want us to do, we are having trouble getting a quorum and we need to have four people to have a quorum and we must have each House represented. So today even though three people were here, we could not start the meeting. I am thinking that perhaps we can have a resolution moved by one of the members here today to say that once we have three persons in attendance, one from each House, that would constitute a quorum. Would somebody be amenable to propose such a motion? [*Discussions with the Chairman*] Yeah. Is there anybody—

**Mr. Rambharat:** Chair, I will propose the motion.

**Madam Chairman:** That the quorum moves from four to three?

**Mr. Rambharat:** Yeah. That the quorum moves from four to three. A member from each House.

[*Moved by Mr. C. Rambharat*]

**Madam Chairman:** Right. Anybody to second?

[*Seconded by Mr. W. Sturge*]

**Madam Chairman:** Excellent. Is there anything else that we need to discuss before we go downstairs? You are staying for the live session? Right?

**Mr. Rambharat:** I will stay. Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Good. Thank you very much, appreciated. Okay then. Well, we suspend and we will reconvene downstairs.

**10.22 a.m.:** *Meeting suspended.*

**10.30 a.m.:** *Meeting resumed.*

**Madam Chairman:** Good morning all and welcome to the public hearing of the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs: Enquiry into the issue of food fraud. I know that members of the Supermarket Association of Trinidad and Tobago are here and we are very grateful that you have made the time to come to meet with us because I know that you had come on an occasion before when we had not been able to move forward. So, I want to express my special appreciation for your attendance today.

The hearing is being broadcast on the Parliament channel, Parliament radio which is 105.5 FM and the YouTube channel *ParlView*. So, please, be aware that if you have to smile at the camera make sure it is your nicest smile and remember that when you speak, the persons listening to you, there are persons who are listening to you who may not be able to see your face when you speak, so you have to remember to speak to all of these audiences.

I welcome as well the Trinidad and Tobago Farmers Union and the members of the public who I see sitting in the room. I will ask, even though your names are to the front, because we have some people who are simply listening by the radio I will ask each of you from left to right to, please, introduce yourselves. So could we start with you, Mr. Bhaggan?

**Madam Chairman:** Is your mike on?

#### **SUPERMARKET ASSOCIATION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Dr. Muhammad Yunus Ibrahim	President, SATT
Mr. Prakash Bhaggan	Committee Member
Mr. Rajiv Diptee	Committee Member

#### **TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FARMERS UNION**

Mr. Shiraz Khan	President, TTFU
Mr. Kent Vieira	Executive Member

Mr. Colvin Jacob

Trustee

Mr. Chervaughn Quow

Executive Youth Representative

Mr. Christian Jacob

Youth Representative

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, gentlemen. Well, I suppose I should have introduced myself before getting into all of this. I am Sophia Chote. I am a Senator and I am the Chairman of this Joint Select Committee.

I am now going to ask members present to introduce themselves to you starting from Dr. Francis.

*[Introduction of members]*

**Madam Chairman:** Now, some of you may have known or met Mr. Ogilvie, who sits to my left, before because he is the man responsible for making all of this happen. He coordinates the work for the Committee and I suspect that you may have been sending in your correspondence to him or certainly speaking to him on the phone or emailing him. So, Mr. Julien Ogilvie sits to my left.

Because we have had such a long lapse since our last meeting I am going to read out the three objectives of the enquiry so that we can focus our discussions accordingly.

The first objective is to understand the extent to which food fraud occurs or is perceived to occur in Trinidad and Tobago;

The second is to assess the effectiveness adequacy of existing systems, policies and laws aimed at preventing and alleviating food fraud in Trinidad and Tobago;

And thirdly, to make recommendations for the improvement of standards in the local food industry, (both in the short and the long term).

I acknowledge the receipt of your written submissions. We have them and we have read them, but we certainly feel that a more in-depth discussion may be

had by a meeting such as this.

So, I am going ask for opening statements from each of the groups represented. So, Dr. Ibrahim, would you be so kind as to make some opening remarks on behalf of the Supermarket Association? Sorry. I beg your pardon.

**Mr. Khan:** Do you normally start with a prayer or something like that? A session like this, do you start with a prayer because from the legacy of Butler, you see, even though you are going into battle you always start with a prayer and ask for strength to do that. So, I do not know if it is a policy or not, I just ask.

**Madam Chairman:** It is not, and I think nothing prevents us from praying quietly in our minds.

**Mr. Khan:** We do that too.

**Madam Chairman:** And I do not see us going into battle here. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Khan:** No problem. It is just a suggestion.

**Madam Chairman:** Certainly, thank you. Yes. Dr. Ibrahim.

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning to all present, members of our committees. On behalf of the Supermarket Association we thank you for this opportunity to add in the discussion on the health of our nation and more so for the protection of our consumers. SATT remains to be a unified body whose purpose is to lobby on behalf of its members on matters that affect us and our trade especially with the government agencies who we see as partners, suppliers and the consumer as we identify as our major stakeholders. Categorically, we must say that SATT is a non-profit organization and we are not in the practice of singular buying, food procurement or production, price-fixing nor are we in the habit of margin setting. In fact, one of our agreements and our tenets is to remain as competitive with each other, because at the end of the day, the consumer is the one who benefits.

We must say at this point that we are at the end of the food chain or the product cycle. Recognizing this, we will realize that our assumptions as retailers is that all of the products, every last one that we sell in our own individual stores have been tried, tested and screened by the relevant authorities.

If we take a look at what we are defining as the food fraud, a definition of food fraud, and we recognize what the Supermarket Association does as singular members, we really exercise due diligence as much as we can when it comes to the weights and displays and turnover of our product.

Food fraud by itself is indeed a food industry issue, eh. It is important to emphasize that although the cause or motivation is economic or financial, the reality is that the effect is often a public health threat. The UN Sustainable Development Goals numbers 2 and 3, which are extremely pertinent to this discussion, states the goal is for no hunger, good health and well-being, emphasizing the importance of having an available, equitable supply of food and a good nutritional content for the public, for the entire population.

In Trinidad and Tobago, we have recognized that even in the discussions from what we have read on our committee on the past meetings with the other stakeholders for this discussion, we recognize that we have a weak regulatory system where the absence of policies centred around food fraud, the lack of enforcement of outdated legislation compounded by an under-resourced Chemistry/Food and Drugs Division potentiates the risk of food fraud and the health of the nation.

Ideally speaking, food entering Trinidad and Tobago must be accompanied by the following: a certificate of health; certificate of free sale; an import licence especially for meats. And these documents are examined by food inspectors through the single electronic window currently.

The inspection of containerized cargo must be carried out by the public health inspector at the ports at Point Lisas and Port of Spain or at the recipient's warehouse prior to clearance.

Suspect food then can be sent for testing at the Chemistry/Food and Drugs lab or the Trinidad and Tobago Public Health Laboratory. The Public Health Ordinance, Ch. 12 No. 4 under the unsound—Food and Drugs Act provides somewhat of a legislative framework to dispose of suspect food in the interest of the public's health. Now that is ideal. We, in summation, must recognize that the following challenges do exist which are: the non-standardization of certificates; the lack of routine testing; poor systems for inspection of containerized cargo in non-functional laboratory, and availability of a testing protocol for food fraud contaminants and lack of enforcement of the Public Health Ordinance for persons in contravention of this sound Act. That would summate our introduction on the topic.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. Before we go into the meat of the discussions, I will invite Mr. Khan as president of the TTFU to make a few opening remarks.

**Mr. Khan:** Okay. Thank you very much for having us. The farmers union and the farmers of Trinidad and Tobago are very privileged to be here this morning to be part of this. Because for a number of times in years gone by, farmers have not been involved in the discussions that affect the sector in more ways than one. And this morning we, as a farmers' union and farmers' rep and farmers ourselves, are clearly going to show the link with food fraud of the imported food linked back to the health of the nation in more ways than one, and more so the rampant increase of imported food in a number of ways within the last 10 years. We have figures to show.

What is critical to this whole discussion is the link between food fraud and the health of this country. The health of this country is spending more money on dealing with sick people rather than improving the sector. The health bill is much bigger than the agriculture bill. And every doctor or nutritionist and my friend Dr. Ibrahim right on the side here will tell you how important nutrition is to good health.

We intend to show the linkages and proof of our information by sharing with you later on when the questions are asked. But what is critical at this point in time, hence the reason why I have two youth members on my team, is that we have not been, as a country, as governments before and Government present, been able to attract young people into agriculture. We have an ageing agriculture sector and the CSO report in 2004 will tell you that, and since that time to now, we have never had an agricultural survey done.

So, we think that it is critical at this point in time we make a serious input into the discussions in trying to change the way business is done, not in the interest of people's pocket, but more so in the interest in the health of the country and our citizens, the farmers, the poor people of this country, the working people who—you know it was mentioned in a report that almost 300,000 of—30 per cent of our population live under the poverty level. Right? It was on a Sunday's newspaper that was printed and shared to the world. So we are saying at this point time, the Trinidad and Tobago farmers that is, that we should take a close look to that. And also, when people are living under those conditions, diseases and sickness will attack there first.

I learnt in this honourable House—is a house they say it is or?—Committee, that something as critical as the Chemistry/Food and Drugs has not been functioning since 2014. And I think as a country who looks to be a developed

nation, why it is that that has to be allowed into 2017? I cannot, as an ordinary citizen, understand that.

Additionally, there are a number, a number, a number of businesses that take advantage of the shortage of foreign exchange to hide their goods. We have a situation in the farming community where we bought, and I have proof of it, I just could not bring it here today, that we bought drugs last year, early last year with the same batch number, with the same expiry date, with the same lot number, and it was increased by 25 and 35 per cent simply with a sign on their counter saying, "Due to the foreign exchange problem we have to increase our prices". And I think that is very, very wrong. And today our request will be to importantly get involved with the food prices commission that we had requested in 2007, finding the solution, at Trincity, put in place, but never functioned.

And those are some of the things that will assist Trinidad and Tobago, not the farmers' union, but the citizens of this country in dealing with food fraud. And we hope that coming out of this we will not have to repeat a session such as this in the not too long distant future from now, because we tend to—in fact, when I sent out a facebook page, and I am going to this, they all tell me, about 15 people sent back that "You are wasting your time".

Madam Chairman, I really hope that we are not going to waste our time today because we as farmers, time away from our farm is money lost, and I am really hoping and praying all the time when it started I am praying that we do not end up like other talk shops and really solve some of the problems that the farmers in this country which will generate betterment and development for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** I like that prayer that you offered because I too would not want leave here thinking that we had wasted our time by inviting you to share your

thoughts at this Committee level. So, I am hoping that we can get some good material from both organizations that may be useful for us in our report and recommendation. So thank you, gentlemen, for your opening remarks.

Now, the way it works is that you have to make sure when you speak you put your microphone on because it is not going to be recorded otherwise. And generally what happens is, members will direct their questions to individuals through the Chair, that is to say, me, and when you want to direct a question or if you wish to direct a question to any of the members sitting here, you also do so through me. Okay? So, I am going to ask first of all whether any member sitting here has a question for either of the groups represented. Mr. Sturge.

**Mr. Sturge:** Good morning. Dr. Ibrahim, from your opening statement, would it be correct to say that there is little or nothing you can do to effectively combat food fraud with respect to goods imported? Because you rely, in essence, on other agencies to do that for you?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Yes. That would be true.

**Mr. Sturge:** And with respect to goods that are not imported, what exactly do you do to combat food fraud?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Dates for foods that are locally produced goods, we actually would rely upon the same agencies, such as Chemistry/Food and Drugs, to check the product before it is allowed to be released for sale. Most cottage-based industry individuals, they go through the tedious processes, to the best of our understanding and knowledge when it comes to production, you know, of foods and treats on a local level. They have available to us, their registration information, their clearance information, their certificates from the Ministry of Health and, of course, the clearance on the food badge, that they would have been able to produce and sell.

So, we do due diligence for the cottage-based industry individuals as we get that ruling. As the products come to us, so do we make available these types of documentation. Throughout the membership you would have many people coming from different locations and locals for the purpose of selling food and we would ensure, because it is now a liability on ourselves if it is we do not have those items facing proper scrutiny such as labelling, packaging, handling, and ensuring that what we buy and what we put for sale and consumption to the consumer has met those standards. So we do have more control on a local level because of the document line. However, it is the importation aspect that we realistically do not have the control in our corner.

**Mr. Sturge:** Can I just ask one more question, one more issue? And I will limit it to an example I got from someone whilst I was shopping for groceries on a Sunday. The lady pointed out to me that there was an advertisement next to the Blue Waters section saying that, Blue Waters is 100 per cent artesian, water from artesian wells. I do not know that we have artesian wells in this country so I am going to ask you if we do. And if we do not then, I guess, Blue Waters might be importing water, which I doubt. Can you provide any light on issues like this?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Well definitely, my limited understanding of what artesian water would be, would be natural filtered water through mountain, rock collected in an underground well and so on. It would be beyond my scope or competence to actually classify water at this stage. However, that would definitely be an issue for labelling and advertising. That would be a trade issue most definitely. From what I know about artesian water being classified as, I do not think that that particular brand may meet that concept. It all depends on how we classify artesian.

**Mr. Sturge:** Thank you.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To the Supermarket Association. In your opening statement, at the

beginning of it you seemed to rely on the legal systems and procedures to prevent food fraud, but then at the end of it you accepted that there were problems with those legal systems and procedures. To you, do you believe that you all have a moral obligation to put in your own systems and procedures to prevent food fraud from happening?

And let me just go on, because internationally it appears to be best practice for supermarket chains to go back into the value chain to determine quality and to ensure best quality. So, I am asking you now whether it is a moral obligation or whether it is a practice of the supermarkets in Trinidad to go back into the value chain. Perhaps to visit those who you import from, ensure that everything is up to our legal standard.

**Mr. Diptee:** Good morning. First of all, we do consider it a moral obligation amongst ourselves as supermarket operators. In the event that we detect unscrupulous packaging and food items to that extent, what we would do, we would consult our membership. We would circulate the information amongst ourselves to be able to inform the industry, first of all, about the ongoings, the unusual ongoings. We would communicate with our suppliers to raise the red flags as these items may appear. So, yes, we would go back into the value chain.

**10.55 a.m.**

We would make phone calls, we would make visits, if necessary. Also, given the competitive nature of the industry that we operate in we encourage and adhere to best practices, because as the competition increases, we have to be able to show the public that we operate in the interest of the consumers, and engage in best practice to that effect. So, yes, that goes back down to the moral obligation that you are talking about. We also conduct training programmes and even foreign

training programmes to the extent that our staff is able to engage in those practices that highlight the instance of fraud in particular. Most fraud that occur are mainly limited to packaging and labelling issues. Those occurrences, although rare, are never intentional on behalf of the supplier.

**Madam Chairman:** Maybe it is the lawyer in me, but I do not quite understand how you can make the assumption that misrepresentation of fact is not intentional. Is it that there have been investigations into food fraud and it has been discovered that there was negligence as opposed to intentional misrepresentation?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** On that point, yes, Madam Chair. It is a good question simply because, what we are talking about and what is realistically within our remit and it answers the last two questions also in addition to yours, it is an approach to that. When we do our due diligence based upon documentation and so on, of the production, we have gone as far as creating modules for training for the purpose of merchandising, seafood handling, meat handling, that has the scrutiny of our national training agencies in addition to a Caricom standard. But to go back to your question specifically, when it is that we see our purview it can only be what we see. Our purview of control, when it comes to this wide arena and wide topic of food fraud, realistically speaking comes down to the labelling; it comes down to the weights. Remember that we are not equipped with laboratories for the purpose of testing. Okay? If it is that a question comes up based upon an ingredient or an additive for the purpose of preservation or extension of shelf life, that is way beyond our remit with respect to that. We can only say what we are capable and tooled for.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. I think Minister Rambharat has a question.

**Mr. Rambharat:** I just want to open with two questions. The first is—well, to say first that I was taken aback by your opening and the extent to which you sought

to limit your responsibility. That is the first thing. And second, I was even more surprised that we entered into this moral obligation, and I would start off by saying—unless I misunderstand completely, and I will get to my second question. I think your obligation is far more than a moral obligation to the consumers in the country. I think it is a legal obligation.

The second question I want to ask, based on your opening, is what is the role of the Supermarket Association of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** As stated in the opening, we basically are a non-profit organization, lobby group, solely for the purpose of maintaining the regular trade and regular commerce between the supplier to the consumer. The lobbying in the sense of legislative frameworks and also for the purpose of coming together for the betterment of our industry and standards.

**Mr. Rambharat:** Your membership, in terms of coverage of what I will call the—I know that the supermarkets are large, medium, small, and there are some shops and parlours, and all of that. Your coverage in terms of the country—I do not know if you could quantify it in terms of consumers, the geography, but you represent what percentage of the trade in grocery items in Trinidad?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** For the local brands of stores, our membership encompasses way beyond 60 per cent of those individuals, and so be it when it is that we do lobby and we do face issues the entire industry who follow us and who come to us in times of need they stand to benefit also. So, open communication exists between all stores who are our members with the non-membership stores standing to benefit also.

**Mr. Rambharat:** So, do you believe—is it your business what happens at, say a large supermarket in Trinidad? Is it your business what happens at a large supermarket in terms of what is offered for sale, the way it is presented and

labelled, and so on, do you consider that to be part of your responsibility or your role?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Direct responsibility, no. This is why we stated at the beginning that we have always agreed to remain individual traders and as competitive as we are. We can only have best practices when we do share our information. And it is really and truly on a voluntary level, because there is no legislation pushing for the continuous advancement of standards. It is actually the competitive spirit that has pushed us to the level of where we are at right now, where handling and storage has grown over a period of time, and how food is displayed and so.

**Mr. Rambharat:** Just to give you a real example, we are faced in the country with a request from Suriname for quite some time for duck meat to be imported from Suriname, and based on visits that have been made to Suriname the Government previously determined that duck meat should not be allowed. And there has been a persistent lobby to allow it in, and at this time the Government is giving further consideration to it. But, in December duck meat from Suriname was in the supermarkets in Trinidad to my surprise, and I suppose to the surprise of people intimately involved.

Now, we have a strong duck meat sector in Trinidad that is in the minds of the local producers quite capable of filling the need of the local consumer, so there is no issue. The local producers are confident of their ability to fill that market. More importantly, if the Government and the people who are charged with the responsibility for the safety of meat products are not convinced that that meat has so far met the standard, does it not trouble you as an association that this meat finds its way onto the shelves of your members?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Most definitely, and in so doing, we have to ask ourselves just two questions on that. How did it get pass our scrutiny at our ports of importation?

And, furthermore, that would not be just from place of origin only, but it will also be on the allowable list, and the country would also have to be demarcated for clear import. I think it goes back to the reality of what was discussed in one prior meeting when it was recognized that 20 per cent of containers probably face proper scrutiny while 80 per cent is out. Now, once that is allowed to happen and the proper paper trail is not demanded from the relevant authorities, you will have slippages for that there. Furthermore, if it is that it is unacceptable and not allowed just yet in Trinidad and Tobago, those individuals who actually accept the product miss their moral responsibility or bypass that when it is that they did not ask their suppliers for the documentation. So, it is a little tricky situation, because if somebody is a meat supplier they have been granted a licence already. Or, if by utilizing that licence the meat actually passes through them and is allowed to bypass, that is a red flag in itself.

**Madam Chairman:** Dr. Francis, I believe you had a question.

**Dr. Francis:** Actually more than one. Good morning again, Dr. Ibrahim. There was no direct response to member Rambharat's suggestion that Supermarket Association has a direct legal responsibility to the wider public. So, I am going to ask, do you accept that your responsibility goes beyond an amorphous moral responsibility to? And to Mr. Khan, to get a farmer's perspective, do you think that the issue of food fraud in this nation is solely concerned with imported food, or is there a local food component in this? Thank you.

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Most definitely, Sir, it is and it does go beyond moral. It is also legal, seeing that the Health Inspectorate visits our stores randomly throughout the year and inspects our facilities. We adhere to those legal requirements, and we go through the processes where they make recommendations for certain areas to be cleared, re-cleaned, tested and closed until. So, yes, it is beyond the moral—no, it

is legal and moral, I cannot say it is beyond the moral. So, we do adhere to that and we agree. I do not want to take away from the second question, which was asked of Mr. Khan. But, the local goods, and let us take agricultural goods, we were asking ourselves a question the other day, and looking at the actual definition of food fraud, it is a deliberate act for the sole purpose of economic gain.

We have had in this country and other countries around, who produce agriculture, additives that can be placed on plants and picked fruits to appear redder, riper, plumper, yellower—or more yellow, if that is a word. If it is that we are stating that the appearance of that fruit now, or that vegetable, is red, in the case of tomatoes, but realistically speaking it is not ripe, that is the only level of local food fraud that we may see, or we have identified on our end, which, in my opinion has to stand up to the level of scrutiny by the public.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. Mr. Khan, could we have your input on that?

**Mr. Khan:** Yes, thank you very much, again. Now, I just want to respond to my friend here, that some of those tomatoes that you are talking about is redder, and plumper, and firmer—it is really imported tomatoes that you think comes from Trinidad, it is imported. It is just like the apples that we see on the roadside for months, packed up on the same shelves and being sold. You are seeing the tomatoes and the other kinds of things that are being imported are doing the same thing in terms of the chemical treatment.

Yes, Dr. Lovell, there is a level of food fraud with our local farmers. More so, because we tend not to have proper education from suppliers of chemicals. We have a number of chemicals that come into this country, and hence the reason why we placed Ken Vieira on the chemical board to look into those things. There are chemicals that are banned in Europe and in the US, finds its way into Trinidad and Tobago. They find their way in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is not being used in

some of those countries. Now, when you have a farmer seeking information for some new pest or disease that comes about, he goes to the supplier and gets a chemical. Who is looking after that chemical shop, and what it is that is coming in here, if it is banned in other countries, why it finds its way into Trinidad and Tobago? We need to have proper regulations insisting that they are standby in terms of being honoured.

Now, you have a situation, and Chemistry/Food and Drugs is not operational, who are giving the permission for when these come in to place into the market? Who is looking at it? Where is the evaluation? I listened to the last JSC from here with the Bureau of Standards, and they have a serious fault in terms of being efficient in some of their testing and going about our resources to go out and do testing. I find it very difficult to have these agencies not efficient in terms of identifying some of those problems, that not only for imported goods, but also local goods, because the Bureau of Standards, Chemistry/Food and Drugs, they can test your product locally.

There is another problem, we have a strict regulation to export an animal out of Trinidad and Tobago. You got to have the animal tested, you got to have a certificate from the veterinary. But when things come into the country, who checks? Where are the checks and balance for things coming into the country? I have a problem here in that we had—as a Muslim I can talk about pork, because our pork farmers are to the back.

Last year there was a big problem—not last year, 2015 there was a major problem in Trinidad and Tobago for the Christmas season where pork producers stayed back into their pen—we went to the hon. Minister we got a little bit of assistance—because of the importation of pork into this country. I have figures to show that, which, when asked I will produce. If not, once the Chairman gives me

permission I can produce it. But what you have happening, is that the pork that comes into the country is being dipped into a chemical, which is bad for the human body, and is being sold as fresh meat. But, that meat supposed to come in for processing into a bonded warehouse, not for the local market. But, it finds its way out there and thereby putting your country at risk in terms of health. So, the problem you have with food fraud, both local and imported is that we have no standards, no policy to put what we have in place in law into effect.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, I have a few things that I want to ask at this point. Who was refurbishing the pork?

**Mr. Khan:** Not the farmer.

**Madam Chairman:** If refurbishing is the proper word to use.

**Mr. Khan:** Not the farmer, the distributors. It had, it was sold at supermarkets and on roadsides.

**Madam Chairman:** Who were the distributors?

**Mr. Khan:** Pork is normally a roadside product sold, fresh pork. So if you take something and dip it into a solution and it becomes fresh you then sell it at the roadside. Additionally, it is labelled and there are billboards all other the country where supermarkets are selling pork much cheaper than what is being produced locally, because it is dumped pork into the country.

**Madam Chairman:** Was any report made to the Ministry of Health with respect to this?

**Mr. Khan:** We have made a report to the Ministry of Agriculture; we tried getting to the Chemistry/Food and Drugs. I personally tried calling the office to make some reports, we went and had public press conference on it; since 2015 and up to today it happened that we have farmers with 600 pigs in their pen, 50 pigs, 100 pigs, people who make a living out of farming to survive, end up with their animals

and thereby putting your farmer at a big risk of underselling to match the import. Because if you have imported pork selling at \$8 a pound and you have local—it cost a farmer \$20 to produce a pound of pork, how do you compete with that?

**Madam Chairman:** Sure. Now, I just want to clear up one thing which came out at one of our previous hearings, which is that apparently the Food and Drugs department in the Ministry of Health has been non-functional for something like two years because it had been shut down—

**Mr. Khan:** 2014.

**Madam Chairman:**—by Mr. Duke, because it was said to be an unsafe working environment. Now, the funny thing about it is, apparently the Bureau of Standards has an excellent lab, but, of course, they are not legally responsible for doing the testing. So, there is this sort of makeshift arrangement which, I believe, still holds when foods have to be tested. I think they are sent to CARIRI for testing, am I correct? Is anybody able to throw some light on that?

**Mr. Khan:** The CARIRI do the testing but at a cost, and hence the reason why a lot of people refrain from going there and bypass all the laws. You have to pay at CARIRI. It is not free as in Chemistry/Food and Drugs, or Bureau of Standards.

**Madam Chairman:** Sure. Now, Mr. Vieira I wanted to enquire of you, now that you sit on the board which looks at chemicals which are being brought in, whether in feed, or on plants, and that kind of thing, have there been chemicals identified which have been brought in which would be harmful to the population were it to get into the food supply?

**Mr. Vieira:** As I sit here, we have had just one sitting of the pesticide board, but there were 12 products to be assessed, and of the 12 there were some concerns with about three of them in that light. I do not think that the issue really sits at that committee, though, because they would do the proper screening and they would

identify. Where the opportunity exists is, as in the case of the ducks, somehow or the other the not accepted chemicals are finding its way through our borders and getting to a point where it could be offered for sale to the customer, and that is, I think, a more significant issue. As identified, there is no permission to import the duck, but how the duck reached into Trinidad in order to be placed on the shelves in the supermarket?

There is a discussion as well with regard to fish, and tilapia in particular, where there is a large membership shopping kind of opportunity, and they actually bring frozen tilapia into Trinidad, and we package it—tour it out and repackage it and have it with garlic butter and other things in a tray, suggesting that you could just take it home and stick it in the oven, but they have serious food safety issues there. In thawing it out the bacterial proliferation and stuff like that, you know, those are the issues that the consumer—and it is nicely packaged and everything, but, as I say, the bacterial component of it which is not really visible to the eye, is not made known to the consumer, and so these things are available.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. Just before I get to Dr. Francis' question, it seems to me hearing what is coming from both groups, it seems as though there is no regulation, or if there is regulation it is an informal regulation from the association which suggests that there is no penalty if something illegal, or if something poisonous is put out into the markets for people to consume. Is that an accurate statement?

**Mr. Khan:** It is. In fact, at this very said sitting we learned that chickens were being dumped and being used for pet food or finding its way onto the market in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to share something with you, if permission is given. I have a document here that was printed on April the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 in the *Express* newspaper, and it says:

Lifelong weight risk tends to begin early. In 2010 the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute found Trinidad and Tobago obesity rates in primary and secondary school approaching one in four.

These are not my saying, eh. I am just reading.

Last year the Government took out US \$110 million loan solely to improve childhood obesity care—Madam Chairman—Trinidad and Tobago tabled at number 10 last year, but far from being cause for celebration the country rate has not improved.

Now, this is obesity in children, and I want to link that to a document that PAHO sent out stating that Trinidad and Tobago has the highest cancer mortality rate in the region. This is a PAHO document, and that is why I am linking the whole thing with the food fraud back to the health of the country, and if you look at the cancer and the cardiovascular diseases, we moved from—and the thing about it is that this data that I am giving you came out of the Ministry of Health, and they have data only up to 2011. We can go Australia, America, New Zealand and get data as up to 2015 or 2016, but in Trinidad and Tobago, it seems like when you want true data it is very difficult to find. So, there it is that this document up to 2011 it shows that in 2002 we had only 1,260 cancer patients that were discharged from the hospital. Then in 2011—it went to 2,206 in 2010 and 2,308 in 2011. We had a massive jump.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. I think we are all agreed on that, because we have been reading the information in the public media as well. Minister Rambharat.

**Mr. Khan:** Madam Chairman, if I could just get one second minute from you again?

**Madam Chairman:** Ah ha.

**Mr. Khan:** I have data of the US—I am not talking by guess, and I can show on

this data here where the importation of boiler meats moved from in 2006 from 3,132 metric tons that was imported into this country, into 2015—I have not had the last month in 2012—to 22,409. You are talking about a 750 per cent increase of meats. So why I am trying to raise this, in 2006 we started with 8,000, but in 2010 it went the 21,000 metric tons. And there it is that when you look at 2010 figure from PAHO and other people, is when the disease started to increase. Now, if I go to go through all the details of the figures it would take me all day, but I am just showing you the link of where we need to have, and very urgently, because these figures are showing, together with the importation, the increase of these diseases.

**Madam Chairman:** Right, Mr. Khan, I am very interested in what you have to say, but unfortunately the time for our Committee sessions tends to be short because elected Members of Parliament have Parliament this afternoon at 1.30. So, do not think by any means that I am trying to cut you short. I am extremely interested in what you have to say, as are the other members here. With respect to those statistics, do you think there is any way you can bundle them up and give us a copy of what you have?

**Mr. Khan:** I would love to.

**Madam Chairman:** It certainly is quite important for us to have. Now, before I go to Minister Rambharat, I had seen Dr. Francis touch his microphone, is there a question you wish to ask?

**Dr. Francis:** Just a comment. Mr. Khan, you sort of bottlenecked the whole issue of food fraud on the local front, centring it on chemicals, use of chemicals that might be dangerous. I want to add that there might be, and there might have been in the past, there might still be now, a number of cultural practices that also constitute food fraud by farmers. For example, at one point those who exported

cocoa from Trinidad, the international market was sceptical about buying cocoa from Trinidad because farmers were helping to modify the shape of their beans by using mud, de-privileging our cocoa on the international market, even though we have the highest quality in the world. But, I want to ask, Dr. Ibrahim just accepted that the Supermarket Association has a moral and a legal responsibility in terms of safeguarding the public from food fraud. As the head of the farmers' association do you accept the same responsibility? Now, we understand that you are at the end of a long chain, and we might be questioning the regulations and the policies that create the scenario within which you operate, but do you also, like the Supermarket Association, accept that farmers have a responsibility where this is concerned?

**11.25 a.m.**

**Mr. Khan:** Dr. Lovell, just to inform you. As of Sunday coming, Kent Vieira is contesting the seat for presidency of the Agricultural Society. And “Inshaa’ Allah” he will be the President of the—and then it will have a lot more closer collaboration. Because what we are trying to do around this table is invite and pull people together so that we can have a little more responsibility as the farmers’ organization and the union and the Agricultural Society, that we can—towards education. Our main plot in this new quest for the Agricultural Society is more so to educate and bring our farmers to an understanding of where we can go.

I take responsibility for a minimum portion of that because we only have 110 members in the Farmers’ Union. But the thing about it is—and I can take responsibility for myself because I produce one of the best goat milk in the country and goat meat. I prize myself of my goat milk better than Viagra, and my goat meat, Dr. Ibrahim here will tell you what lovely goat meat I produce.

So the thing about it is that we all have to take responsibility and the thing

about it is that we should not, and think that the one farmer that was using mud to mould his cocoa is not everybody, because we still remain the best cocoa in Trinidad and Tobago in the world. The thing about it is that, yes, in everything there is going to have some unscrupulous practices, but what we need to do is minimize that through education. And what we are doing here today is by giving the farmers an opportunity to come out and have more opportunities like that, because I would tell you something.

We had a meeting with the Minister of Trade and Industry on April 17<sup>th</sup> of last year. Up to now, we have written a number of letters to our Minister is trying to nail her down to a meeting because the trade is responsible for the importation. And what we need to look at, Madam Chairman, there is a system in place that some people outsmart the system. We have honey appearing in our country from China, but not from China. It has gone to another country and relabelled and bring into here. That is dangerous. Actually you are drinking plastic. We have plastic rice coming out of China making our way, and probably Dr. Ibrahim should be able to address that for us. So there is a number of things happening that we need to look at.

**Madam Chairman:** Sure. Dr. Ibrahim it just struck me as Mr. Khan mentioned honey. I thought honey was one of the things that you could not move from country to country. That has changed?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** No. That has not changed. That is actually correct. We are not allowed to import honey and if so, it has to be under special licence. I mean, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries would second that.

**Madam Chairman:** So if it is imported, how does it find itself on the shelves then? Because I have seen imported honey on the shelves of different supermarkets.

**Dr. Ibrahim:** That would have to be an application under special licence if it is allowed.

**Madam Chairman:** I see.

**Mr. Khan:** Madam Chairman, could I—

**Madam Chairman:** Just a second, no. I will get back to you Mr. Khan.

**Mr. Khan:** It is the same honey thing.

**Madam Chairman:** I am not cutting you off. Mr. Rambharat had a question.

**Mr. Rambharat:** Thank you, Chair. Yes, I had on my list honey and I will get to honey just now. Or maybe I can deal with honey right away. I have spoken so much about honey. But that is a classic example of how, and I spoke at the Supermarket Association dinner in November 2015 and I asked the Association to help with respect to honey in particular. I also spoke about fish and some other products. And honey demonstrates that the Supermarket Association has more than a moral obligation but a legal obligation. Because there is no imported honey in Trinidad, there should be none. The Ministry has not allowed honey to come into Trinidad. That is your typical case of how things fall down.

I have said in the Parliament, for example, that we have a very good honey sector that has stood up to all the challenges. Honey is a very important economic activity in rural communities and Trinidad produces a superior product that up to today has remained pest free, disease free and pesticide free. But I have gone around the country and at that dinner I made reference to certain brands that are on the shelf and there are two issues with the imported product.

One is, of course, it is illegally in the country. And then the other product which I dealt with last year, for example, is a major US wholesaler that is based in Trinidad selling a brand of honey that is 48 per cent sugar. And we have specifications. And that to me typifies the food fraud and any—and we have what

are called honey blends, we have pancake syrup that is described as honey, and the law is very clear that any honey product being sold in Trinidad must be labelled with the apiary number and a series of things.

So honey demonstrates the Association having a very clear responsibility in my view and I may be wrong. But I just want to quickly highlight four examples of how both the Association and the retailers could deal with the issue of food fraud. In this room, we have heard from the Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division, we have heard from Customs and we know the borders of this country and particularly the ones on the Port are porous. We know that the Chemistry/Food and Drugs lab has been down. We know that the testing is not—we have heard all of that.

Let me give you four quick things. Mr. Diptee mentioned labelling and labelling to me and he just mentioned it in parts. But that is a very critical point at which food fraud takes place and the Chairman in previous sessions talked about that and when we talked about labelling in beverages, for example 100 per cent fresh juice. Well, I had 100 per cent fresh juice this morning and I know what that tastes like. So beverages, but this issue of labelling—in fact, you know my eyesight is not what it was 30 years ago and I have problems reading labels on our products. And those are labels in English. And a lot of the labels are coming in languages that I cannot read and its font sizes that I cannot read. And I believe that the retailer and the Association you have a responsibility on the issue of labelling, that is one.

This issue of meat, I could and you know that in North America if meat has been frozen and thawed out and offered for sale, there is a label on that meat and whether there is a legal obligation or moral obligation it is the same to me. Meat that has been previously frozen and has now been thawed out should in my view be

labelled, “previously frozen”. Because in a previous session in this Committee we talked about, I talked about food laundering, meat laundering and the mixing of local chicken, for example, with previously frozen foreign chicken and the thawing out of meat and the placement of that meat for sale in a way that it appears to be fresh meat and the consumer does not know better. So in meat I think you have responsibilities in relation to expiration date, in relation to packaging date and a lot of things.

The third thing relates to expired food. I mean, when I go to the supermarket I buy yogurt frequently. When I go to the supermarket and I see the yogurt at quarter of the price I normally see it at, I know for a fact that it is expired or soon to be expired. Now I will give you a story because I lived out of Trinidad for a little while. One day I came home and I saw all my bread on the floor of the kitchen. My children had learnt that week about expiration dates and they decided to enforce the law in the house and they took all the bread that I had in the freezer and they checked the expiration date and as far as I am concerned frozen bread does not expire and they decided to dump it.

But the practice and it goes across the board and you are talking about people with eyesight problems, people buying in a rush and not being informed that this product has either expired or is soon to be expired and in many cases at least this retailer offered the product at a discounted price. In many cases, the retailers do not change the price on account of the shelf life. I know there is another argument about expiration dates and when it really goes bad and all of that, but that is an area in which I feel the Association and the retailers could play a role.

And then the last one is on the area of organic. Organic has to be one of the most abused concept in food and we know in Trinidad we do not have a regulatory framework, a food standard framework dealing with organic versus non-organic.

But really I can think of very few food producers in Trinidad and Tobago who are actually producing organic foods. And again the consumer is going to be misinformed, may make a purchasing choice that they should not be making and some local producers may be suffering on account of something being misrepresented.

So I do not—I go back to my opening point, I do not believe it is a moral obligation. I believe it is a legal obligation, a responsibility and I feel that the Association could do more in relation to their membership in assisting with this issue of food fraud, recognizing that up the chain the difficulties are greater when we talk about the importers and the Port and the Customs and the Chemistry/Food and Drugs Division. I believe you are the group that stands between fraudulent or misrepresented product and the consumer and your responsibilities are great.

**Madam Chairman:** Mr. Sturge has a question.

**Mr. Sturge:** To the Supermarket Association for the benefit of the public. Do we have genetically modified food in our country?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** On that point, it is present in Trinidad and Tobago. When we do our research and we recognized that the UPC codes, user price lookup code for items, always done currently on a voluntary basis, on an international level, codes that are either five digits long and start with a nine on food and vegetable that we actually see in most stores are GMOs. But there is a grey area, it is black and white because it is not allowed. There is no legal framework for the offering of GMO in Trinidad and Tobago.

However, we cannot get away from it and something needs to be done to bring that level up, simply because, let us look at any major foreign cereal brand. We are consumers of cereal based upon corn and flour. This corn and flour is GMO corn and flour that are being used abroad. Coming back to even Sen.

Rambharat's point, we have the labelling of those GMO foods coming from abroad being labelled clearly but yet we do not have a GMO status, official status for Trinidad and Tobago and it is sold on shelves.

**Mr. Sturge:** So what you are saying is that when I go into Massy on Sunday I can clearly identify which foods are genetically modified and which are not.

**Dr. Ibrahim:** If it is processed foods packaged in the United States and Canada, you will see the labelling clear especially on the cereal boxes, for example, yes you would.

**Mr. Sturge:** Just one more thing. There have been instances in the past where, for instance, there is an expectation the Government may raise prices or impose taxes on foodstuff and you already have that stock in your supermarket before the measures are implemented. Yet the day the measures are implemented, you raise your prices. Do you not consider that fraud?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** That question has been raised several times over the last three years, especially with the removal of items from the VAT list, for example. It would appear not as fraud but somewhat unscrupulous activity. Now, that does not also apply to food as across all trades. There must be a position whereby we have a backstop of something to sell. We do not run out before we buy. So you will always have that window that there is an overlap. In today's day and age nobody overstocks.

**Mr. Sturge:** Right. Having regard to your answer, do you not believe that the Supermarket Association should get together to ensure that this practice does not occur?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** We do speak about it—

**Mr. Sturge:** That is all? Just talk.

**Dr. Ibrahim:** And we do formulate measures whereby the prices with our

individual relations with our suppliers, where the price passed on or mitigation of price passed on for a period of time would address that problem, yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Could I just reassure you because I suspect that the members of the Supermarket Association may be thinking, we are businessmen, our business is selling food and it seems as though there are obligations being placed on us when in fact there are none. And it really depends on the moral position of each supermarket owner with respect to whether he or she would purchase goods from a certain supplier, whether he or she would purchase goods not properly labelled or GMO products. I want it to be clear that we are not ascribing blame to you. What we are trying to get from this, I think, is whether there should be some, I do not know, it is just a thought, some umbrella regulatory body which would call supermarkets and farmers into account to make sure that they adhere to certain standards. I see Mr. Vieira raising his finger. Would you wish to say something at this stage?

**Mr. Vieira:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Mr. Vieira.

**Mr. Vieira:** I just wanted to highlight a programme that the Ministry of Agriculture had. When we first found the mealy bug in Trinidad, Barbados closed all their imports from Trinidad into Barbados. And in order for trade to continue the Ministry embarked on a programme of certifying farmers. Now, unfortunately, the Ministry has a bias towards crop and crop production. The issues of livestock and stuff like that never really fell under the ambit of this programme. But I think it worked well, in that, on a monthly basis the field technicians would go to the farmers, would take their records, would observe what chemicals they are using and stuff like that. And it helped to raise the standard of the farming.

So that is one such opportunity that could be encouraged and enforced in

that sense. The whole issue of GMOs and the opportunity for it to be available for the consumer, the manufacturer of feeds for livestock in Trinidad used soya bean meal as their opportunity for protein. And soya bean is a significant GMO product, internationally. In fact, tilapia has gotten a bad name because tilapia fed on soya bean based feeds, they tend to have a higher Omega-6 than Omega-3 balance. And so in some quarters they say where fish supposed to have a higher Omega-3 than Omega-6 or a better ratio so as to assist in terms of cardiovascular disease and stuff like that. Because of the Omega-6 being higher than the Omega-3, it really has a kind of reverse and as I say if you look on the Internet they are saying tilapia is not good to eat and stuff like that.

But the issue is really, again as I say, in terms of the responsibility, whether it be legal, moral or otherwise of the Supermarket Association. We have other players in Trinidad as it pertains to food as I say it may be a more primary product in terms of the import of the soya bean but it directly affects, because when the farmer buys the feed to give to his livestock in turn they are exposing themselves. I will tell you just as I explained with the fish, likewise as Shiraz has been trying to promote, we are what we eat. And if we make bad eating choices then we have developed lifestyle diseases.

When the PNM Government came into the power and there was the removal of the VAT and the whole shake-up, the hon. Prime Minister said that we had to look—but there was no real campaign in developing how we should improve our nutrition and what we should look at. So even this whole opportunity and this discussion about food fraud really has further implications where we could better sensitize the public about better food choices in that sense.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you. We have a question passed up to the front by a member of the public and the question is: do supermarket owners ensure that they

receive any certificates from their suppliers, for example, fit for human consumption certificates from the US FDA? Would anybody from the Supermarket Association care to answer that? I do not want to make Dr. Ibrahim feel that he has to answer every question.

**Mr. Bhaggan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. At the inception, all foodstuff that come into a supermarket or retailer, I think is the better word, that is fit for human consumption has to originate either as we have said earlier out of Trinidad or produced in Trinidad, either manufactured in Trinidad or produced from the farmers or agriculturists in this country. And where the imported product is concerned in the first instance it has to meet certain requirement by the various government agencies to the extent even with meat. With respect to the Muslim sector, you have to display in your supermarket or in any retail outlet selling products, whether it is halal, before you could put it out for sale. The same applies with foodstuff coming out of the developed countries or most countries coming in, there is a reliance that the various agencies will have sat and we have spoken to that ad nauseam at least within this room this morning that they have to meet certain requirements and the various agencies have to approve it. That then moves to the suppliers/vendors who would sell it to the retail sector including the supermarkets.

With respect to local meats produce, again there is a procedure and the supermarket, to add on what our president said, that we have developed within recent times as an Association publications that talk about nutrition, food preparation, food consumption. In fact, we have just developed a website as well to add to some of the questions the various Ministers and Senators asked about, informing the consumer and there are discussions now to take that further but that is for a another place. So, yes, where it is required, either it is produced I suspect

to the various agencies that have that primary responsibility and/or where the supplier locally from a manufacturer's point or importer produce the various pieces of documentation for the retailers, not only the members of the Supermarket Association.

**Madam Chairman:** But you see on the last occasion, I think we had people from Customs here and essentially they were talking about a sort of unified computerized system and we were trying to ascertain well, yes, information could be put into this system but is there any way to check if the information being put into the system is accurate in terms of its certification. And I do not think we had got a clear answer on that one.

Now, I want to direct our minds for a bit to two things which people would purchase if they have children. One, milk and the second is juice. With respect to juice, why is it our supermarket shelves are filled with juice drinks as opposed to juice? Is there a problem with juice products being available? And secondly, if you look at the milk section of a supermarket, you really cannot tell how much real milk you are getting in the packet. Am I making myself clear?

**Mr. Khan:** Yes, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** Is there any way that that could be answered for our listeners?

**Mr. Khan:** Madam Chair, if I could go a little before Dr. Ibrahim, I had planned to talk about that, right. In terms of the milk, we tend to have importation of milk but there is not only the GMO guard that we have to take into consideration, it is the over abuse of antibiotics. When we are importing products how much information is placed there or how much monitoring goes into knowing where that milk comes from? Whereas in Trinidad and Tobago we can put measures in place to monitor that and probably eradicate it. Now, we have gone from producing 50

per cent of milk consumed in this country in 2000, down to just less than 3 million litres of milk in this country. We lost almost 95 per cent because of the importation.

**Madam Chairman:** When you say lost, what do you mean?

**Mr. Khan:** Because importation has heavily subsidized, imported milk into this country has put our farmers out of business, actually run them out of business. I have a sheet here, but based on the milk you asked I want to specifically talk about that use of antibiotics. It was made known in Europe that some countries were over using it and people eventually died. How much protection is made on the citizen of this country to ensure and that is the same question you asked. What is there to protect the citizen, the poor people of this country of using this?

Now, what caused that to happen, Madam Chairman, in 2002 we did a cost of production survey and our Minister is fully aware of that, so the country should know. In 2006, we did a cost of production survey of saying it cost the farmer—this was done by the Ministry and the livestock board with an independent non-farmer person. It cost the farmer, average cost in 2006 to produce a litre of milk, was \$4.50. Up to today in 2017 the farmers are now being paid, with the help from the Government and Nestlé, only \$3.85. This is reality, if I had my Qur'an I would hold it up to you.

The reality is that nobody wants to continue to live in that condition. Nothing has been done. But what happened is the importation of heavily subsidized milk and cheap milk, probably not healthy milk, I am not going to think, is coming into the country and taking over the local production. So what is happening within that period of time, importation took over the thing because it was cheap and we lost our farmers, our dairy production gone down that way. But when you lost that dairy production, you did not only lose dairy you know, you

also lost the beef industry because Minister Rambharat will tell you that all the young males that come from all those dairy cows would have gone into the meat market.

So you have a situation here that a number of things went wrong and the ship is out so far it is going to take a lot to bring it back on the shore. But we need to put things in place that our younger people would be encouraged and my normal term is that we got to make agriculture sexy, but who has the reins to correct this to encourage that sort of production inside of here. And I am hoping that today we enlighten the place, the country I mean, to see the reality of figures. It is not just that I am talking.

**11.55 a.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** I get your point. With respect to the Supermarket Association, Dr. Ibrahim, could you, very quickly, give us some assistance with respect to the juice and milk issues?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Sure. Primarily speaking, we have to put out—as we run our businesses we have to put out what is required or what is requested from the consumer. When you made the comment concerning the juices as opposed to drinks versus juices, the demand between both is heavy. However the supply on the pre-packaged end is much higher than the demand. The local producers of

juices who keep their juices fresh and have limited shelf lives, the product does exist, and we have very many brands of that. However, for the purpose of consumption and the purpose of consumer use and ease of use, the consumer has accepted and driven that part of the market for the purpose of convenience, and that is the reason why you actually see the consumer choice based upon convenience.

**Madam Chairman:** But is it made clear in the supermarket displays? Because, you see, if one of us goes into a supermarket we may say, okay, I understand there is a difference between juice and juice drink, right?—so we will take up the package and try to read it. But is it a matter of labelling or putting up a sign to say, “This is not juice, this is juice drink?” Because if you look at the part in the supermarket where they section off the products, you will see along that aisle, a sign saying “juice”. Now, someone who is busy or somebody who does not know, may say, okay, well if the supermarket is saying that this is juice, it means that this is the real thing. Does the Association ask its members to ensure that when consumers are being directed to certain products, that the directions are accurate?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Within the training modules created for merchandising and presentation, yes, those elements are present. Upon us enforcing the best practices, that is actually left to the independent store.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. Now, does your Association include the large number of, what appears to be Chinese-operated groceries?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** To this date, with the heavy proliferation of them, especially—those brands of stores, especially over the last five years, to this date they do not remain members of our Association.

If I may, there were a couple points since Sen. Rambharat had asked a couple issues and I would like to clarify, if I may be allowed to. First and

foremost, we agree, and we have already established the fact, it is a legal and moral responsibility for ourselves to conduct the best practices, especially when we realize that the health of the nation is very much so in our hands with respect to food, cross-contamination and so on.

As it applies to all the topics discussed, with respect to the close-to-date expiration, best-buy-before, the meat issues with respect to the thawing process and so on; local versus foreign meat, there is not just the mixing issue, there is also the reality that the local brands do provide us with both fresh and frozen products. We tend to go along—and we do go along—with the labelling requirements that are stipulated by the Food and Drugs Division or—is it the Ministry of Health?—Ministry of Health. However, we must recognize that when it comes to labelling, the requirements for our labelling in Trinidad and Tobago, I do not think it will meet the international scrutiny, simply being that our labelling requirements here is to actually show products present and products present in the order of most to least in all the ingredients. Furthermore, there is no need for nutritional information on our labelling products at this point in time. I think that was reiterated in an earlier meeting. And once it is that the trade name, the ingredients and the correct weight and the label is in “or any part thereof” in English, that meets the local standard right now. Right?

**Madam Chairman:** Mr. Mitchell—I am sorry. Are you finished?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Not quite, but you can go ahead.

**Madam Chairman:** Mr. Mitchell had a question.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I have several questions. You said earlier that it is your competitive spirit among the members that drives the continual improvement. But what you are really competing for is profits and it is not farfetched to assume that some of your members, or other supermarket owners would take a shortcut to

profits by participating in food fraud. I want to know whether the Association has received complaints about your members or other supermarkets. I also want to know the frequency—if you are aware of members or other supermarkets being sued for injuries caused by food fraud.

I want to know with respect to the Chinese groceries and the so-called Chinese groceries and other groceries where you go in and you see labels in Chinese or in Arabic, what do you do when faced with complaints about that? And, lastly, in a previous hearing we had evidence from the Bureau of Standards and it appeared, to me at least, that the Bureau of Standards, they have an excellent track record in establishing standards and causing the adherence to standards. There was also the suggestion that perhaps the Bureau of Standards could take over the laboratory responsibilities with respect to imported foods. But in your submission you indicated that you had some sort of reservation or objection to the Bureau of Standards taking over that remit. Can you tell us why?

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Okay. In an attempt for a pull everything together, let us just remind ourselves that the Supermarket Association is in no way a registered regulatory body. However, on our last point of submission that we made late last year for the previous meeting, we had suggested that for moving forward that we establish a Food Protection Authority in Trinidad and Tobago, which can either fall under the TTBS or the CFDD to effectively administer and mediate—issues of food fraud but which can be eventually expanded to include the related issues of food safety, food quality and food defence, all being separate entities and separate topics by itself. And we mentioned that the entity would be responsible for developing public awareness of the issues involved, detection of food fraud and safety violations via audits, collaboration with Customs and Excise, collaboration with TTMA and also the establishment of a consumer hotline, collection of

information to refer cases to prosecution with the ability to enforce stipulated penalties, maintaining—and this is very simple here—but maintaining a simple data base with information to be defined that will assist importers and local manufacturers to improving the resilience of the supply chain to food fraud.

The Supermarket Association, not being a regulatory body, we have positioned ourselves whereby we would actually uphold and we would love to have the opportunity to be involved as a service industry, to be somewhat of the regulated industry whereby the Association can assist the Ministry of Health; it can assist Customs and Excise and we can assist for food safety and food fraud issues whereby we can be a rubberstamp check for the purpose of establishing outlets for the purpose of selling food. Now this is a very wide scope. Food is sold roadside in Trinidad, from cooked to uncooked and it is also sold in stores. If it is given the opportunity to allow inspectorate teams to certify with the proliferation of many new stores in this country to be actually labelled a supermarket and be fit for OSHA standard and any other given standard or have health and safety, we would love to be given the opportunity to go forward along those lines.

As it applies to the last question: what is the Association's reservations with the Bureau of Standards becoming responsible for food quality? We believe that the Supermarket Association does have a role to play in addressing these shortcomings by working hand in hand with the CFDD to take part in aiding those processes like testing and having a key role in regulation. We would be part of a collaborative inspection team establishing synergies that would focus on improving the capabilities in this area: detection, reporting, arbitration and inspection and collaboration. Given the opportunity to establish a functional framework for all of this, it would contribute greatly to the nation's food security.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you. I wanted to ask one of the youth members

brought by the Farmers Union what was his or their perspective on how food fraud may be found out and/or regulated in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Quow:** Thank you very much, Chair. On this question, and on some of the questions that we discussed today, especially with regard to the moral and legal considerations of farmers, I would say that our legal obligation is a bit diminished because of the system that exists surrounding food fraud and food production in Trinidad and Tobago, so we more have to lean on the side of morality—on the moral obligations.

For instance, we have the pre-harvest interval that we use on chemicals that—I mean we use in our industry. There is also the pre-slaughter interval and also the pre-milking interval for every chemical or drug that we use in the industry. A lot of these chemicals, they range from five days to about two weeks, and we, as farmers, we are morally obligated to honour those intervals so there would not be any residue on the consumer end.

Now, on the side of the system, there is not a proper system set up to test for residue in any goods—I mean, you do not go to the market and see a label on a bundle of celery. However, if the system was set up in such a way where we can send persons there to randomly check and test these goods for residue, for instance for a very dangerous, in my opinion, active ingredient, which is Glyphosate, which was developed I think in the 1970s by Monsanto—if we do not—and this chemical is, in my personal survey, probably 80 per cent of the herbicides on the market, and there are many other active ingredients that when you research them you see that it is dangerous for human health if you do not honour these harvest intervals, or slaughter intervals, or milking intervals. There must be a system set up where we can make farmers, or make anyone, legally obligated to honouring these intervals, so that the residue would not end up in the bloodstreams of the people of Trinidad

and Tobago and the world.

**Madam Chairman:** That is actually very interesting. If there is excess or unused chemicals or pesticide, what becomes of it? Where does it go?

**Mr. Quow:** Well, in Trinidad—when you say, excess, in the plants or in our stores?

**Madam Chairman:** Well, in the plant after you have used it and you find, okay, well I was supposed to use one gallon and I bought two.

**Mr. Quow:** From my research, what the labels would say is that there is no activity in the soil in laboratory testing on the side of the producer of those chemicals, or the plants' natural system would excrete the excess chemicals.

**Madam Chairman:** Is that so?

**Mr. Quow:** Well, I am not a scientist so I cannot tell you if it is there, but, as I said, if we have the systems to test—as a matter of fact, I was doing some research recently and I saw that in Europe—because this is research from just reading labels of the chemicals that I used—there is a specific note there on one of the chemicals that if I, as a farmer, intend to export to Europe, there must be a minimal amount of residue in my goods. There is no way for me to know how much residue of that particular product here, if I choose to, as a young person, go into the European market and export my stuff there.

**Madam Chairman:** Um-hmm.

**Mr. Quow:** So to answer your question directly, I cannot know at this point, whether or not there is residue in my goods.

**Mr. Khan:** Madam Chair, he mentioned plants, right, but it is also a lot in animals, because, as I said earlier on about the antibiotics used, there is a withdrawal period on all bottles, all labels of, especially the chemicals that come in. In his case, in terms of the vegetable, it has that withdrawal period of time

which most people—I came out of the poultry industry because I did not want to be a part of destroying the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because there were some chemicals that were being used and they set a withdrawal of 14 days, but you use it today, and tomorrow they pick up the chickens.

In terms of de-wormers, you de-worm an animal today, you cannot have that meat consumed within, according to the different product, different days. But in mass production that is being overlooked, and that is a problem we have. And he is correct. What testing do we have—on-spot testing or random testing—in terms of diseases in animals. Our labs have not been efficient to test—random testing of diseases in animals. In fact, some years ago we had a breakout of brucellosis, and it was discovered by the workers drinking the milk that got sick at an institution.

So we need to have these systems up and—the policies are there, some of it, but it is not being enforced, just as the littering Act and all the different Acts. It has it in place but we are not enforcing it and like we do not have the institution or the fortitude to do it. We need to get those things happening because we are getting bad names for selling something that is not healthy on the market, but actually the testing is not there to assist the farmer. Okay, take for instance in Ken Vieira's presentation of the fish, what is there to test that fish or have a testing done? It is done worldwide. And I am sure in some of those labs you go there, you will find a Trinidadian doing the testing—in one of the overseas labs. We need to get the thing working here for us to protect, not the farmers' pockets, but the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, the poor people of this country.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Gentlemen, I want to try to wrap up by 12.15 because, as I say, a couple of our members have to be in another place shortly. But I will invite closing remarks from the President of the Supermarket Association, as well as closing remarks from the President of the Farmers Union. So gentlemen,

you can choose which one of you wants to go first.

**Dr. Ibrahim:** Thank you. The reality here is not necessarily in the spectrum—the part of the spectrum that we are looking at when it comes to the conquering of food fraud. What we see to be able to achieve this is literally a multipronged approach whereby all agencies have to come up to speed and to be capable of the tasks ahead. The Supermarket Association remains committed to helping the country and the community along the way in any way it can to better the standards for the purpose of keeping the health of the nation. On that point I would like to just—Mr. Mitchell had asked a question and I would use it as part of my summation here. The reason we raised the point of not migrating the testing lab to go across to the Ministry of Trade is that we see that the Ministry of Health, in all of their faculties, being better poised and tooled to be able to deal with any problems that may arise out of food fraud.

To close, we need to, not just for this topic here, but we really have to get on the topics of detection and we really have to get on to the topics nationwide on adherence to law. If it is we do not conquer detection and adherence to law, we, as an industry and as a wider society, will continue to slide along the spectrum to the bad end of the spectrum. Thank you for the opportunity once again to speak on the concerns of the nation. Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. Mr. Khan?

**Mr. Khan:** Thank you very much again, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, when we first prepared to come to this consultation, I know it was mentioned that the Supermarket Association was going to be here, but we had prepared for an extensive discussion because of agriculture not treated with respect in the years that have gone by. It continues to be treated as the bastard child of the economy and we would like that to change coming out of this session.

One of the things that I think is critical for us to also bear in mind is that we have a prevalence of violence, and so on, in the country, and farmers are faced with a number of larceny problems also. So we think it is very critical that we highlight the responsibility of that happening if there are no markets. Right? So we need to control some of those markets that are really assisting the larceny of goods in this country. Right? And I hope that the Supermarket Association has ways and means that some of its members would not encourage some of those things.

Additionally, our young farmers continue to face the brunt of a number of problems: one, lack of land, and we know the Minister is working on it; a lack of support in terms of financial and economic help, in terms of going forward. I think that this session here, if it is one thing it is going to do is to show that agriculture is very prominent in the country and come Sunday, with the team of Mr. Vieira and I contesting the ASTT election, that we will create that unity again and try to move things a lot more forward in terms of benefiting the country, in terms of providing more healthy and reasonable food to this country.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, gentlemen. I have to say that the information which you shared with us today was tremendously helpful and hopefully when we conclude our report, it would be made available and you can have a read and give us your feedback as to whether we represented your views accurately or whether there are recommendations which you wish to add to the ones which we will make. Please feel free to write to us with respect to any matter which you felt had not been cleared up properly during the course of this session today. We will take whatever you send in to us on board and we will use it as best as we can when we come to deliberate on the contents of the report.

So, I want to thank you all for attending. I also want to thank those of

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you viewing on the Parliament channel and on YouTube and to those of you listening on the radio. So this Committee stands adjourned.

**12.19 p.m.:** *Meeting adjourned.*