

**Remarks by**  
**Senator The Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon**  
**Minister of Trade and Industry**

**at the**

**TRINITARIO COCOA WEBINAR SERIES**

WEDNESDAY 25<sup>th</sup> MAY 2022

10:00 AM – 12:00 NOON

## **SALUTATIONS**

- Senator the Honourable Avinash Singh, Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries
- His Excellency Peter Cavendish, Ambassador – Delegation of the European Union to Trinidad and Tobago
- Mr. Sekou Alleyne, President - InvesTT
- Professor Pathmanathan Umaharan, Director - Cocoa Research Centre, University of the West Indies
- Featured Speakers
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen
- Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

Once again, I have the honor of addressing you at the second installment of the Trinitario Cocoa Webinar Series, titled '*Trinidad and Tobago: An International Centre for Cocoa Excellence and Innovation*'. The collaboration between the Ministry of Trade and Industry and InvesTT Limited with the Delegation of the European Union to Trinidad and Tobago to host this three-part series demonstrates our country's desire to become a global leader in cocoa and chocolate processing.

Episode one, which was themed '*Exploring Opportunities in a Fine/Flavour Cocoa Paradise*' and hosted in February, was attended by over 400 guests. The event fielded thirty-five (35) investment interests in the areas of agriculture, manufacturing, tourism and hospitality, consumer products and retail. Participants representing thirty-two (32) countries, including the United States of America, Belgium, United Kingdom, Jamaica, Suriname and Dominican Republic, explored opportunities in production, land investments, and the creation of value added products through business-to-business (B2B) meetings.

## **Growth of domestic exports**

As worldwide markets continue to offer innovative techniques and competitive product development for premium and specialty chocolates, the demand for certified and single-origin cocoa has increased. In 2021, exports of chocolate and other preparations totaled approximately TT\$117 million. I am pleased to note that within the first quarter of 2022, cocoa exports exceeded TT\$58.5 million with a gross mass of 1.2 million kilograms. These exports included raw cocoa beans, chocolate in blocks, slabs/bars, cocoa butter, fat and oil, and cocoa powder. As a result, our cocoa products have been able to reach European Union countries, including non-traditional markets such as Malta and Norway.

## **Cocoa Excellence and Innovation**

This progressive expansion of production is largely due to efforts by our farmers, entrepreneurs and partners who ensure that the unique qualities of the Trinitario bean are inextricably tied to Trinidad and Tobago, and that the products we produce meet the highest international standards.

We have developed a reputation for uniqueness and quality, and it is important that our local talent and products continue to be recognized

regionally and internationally. After eight (8) wins at the International Chocolate Awards<sup>1</sup> and three (3) at the Cocoa of Excellence Awards<sup>2</sup> for unique flavour profiles and recipes, I look forward to Trinidad and Tobago also being known for our chocolate, almost as much as our Carnival.

Cocoa innovation was also demonstrated by the Montserrat Cocoa Farmers' Co-operative Society Limited, a small cooperative consisting of fifty-six (56) registered farmers who made significant strides in successfully obtaining Geographical Indication (GI) status for its Trinitario cocoa production in the Montserrat Hills. The farmers were able to sell their produce at a premium price on the domestic market as a direct result of achieving this intellectual property milestone, which also led to a considerable increase in demand from purchasers in other countries. Geographical Indication essentially demonstrates that the Trinitario bean is distinctive, from any other bean, anywhere else in the world. It is this distinction that assures buyers of superior and consistent flavour and quality, which maintains the

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<sup>1</sup> The International Chocolate Awards was founded in 2012 and operated by a group of independent international partners based in the United Kingdom, Italy and the United States of America. The rules and judging are overseen by our permanent Grand Jury members, Country Partners and independent experts, who set the rules of the Awards based on ongoing consultation with our entrants.

<sup>2</sup> Cocoa of Excellence was founded in 2009 and is coordinated by the Alliance of Bio-diversity International and the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), headquartered in Italy. This group responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Programme and ensuring that rules and regulations are applied, confidentiality is respected and anonymity is ensured during the evaluation and nomination process.

competitiveness of the Montserrat Cocoa Farmers, and by extension, Trinidad and Tobago, in the industry.

Furthermore, cocoa excellence and innovation also stem from the source – well-maintained cacao estates grown in suitable conditions, best practice harvesting techniques and modern preparation methods. Thus, our farmers play a critical role in maintaining agricultural sustainability in order to meet and maintain cocoa standards for the European, international and local markets.

### **Government Incentives and Policies**

Our domestic manufacturers recognize the significance of attracting new consumers who demand new, gourmet products, by matching innovative flavours with locally grown food and local cuisine, which adds value, emphasizes the bean-to-bar model and broadens the benefits to other sectors. Given the unpredictability of markets and supply chains, it is important that the Government continues to provide relevant support and incentives to entrepreneurs and innovators to develop and grow their businesses.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry's Grant Fund Facility has increased the possibility for cocoa and chocolate manufacturers to purchase new capital assets for the production of new flavour profiles and to improve processes. ExporTT, the national export facilitation organization, has also approved tiered funding through the Research and Development Facility to assist entrepreneurs in bringing concepts and ideas emanating from this industry to reality. In addition, under the International Certification Fund, entrepreneurs have received funding for international certification in food and beverage to meet the quality and safety standards of international markets.

The Government's commitment to our cocoa and chocolate producers is built into our long-term National Development Strategy, Vision 2030, and the more recent Phase 2 Roadmap to Recovery. This underscores our commitment to diversify the economy through the non-energy sector by building on our unique product offerings, giving priority to an innovation-oriented and entrepreneurial culture in technology, and enhancing the competitiveness of the local private sector, among other initiatives.

As I close, I wish to highlight the importance of innovative trends that are emerging in the chocolate market as consumers seek products that are both palatable and healthy with more nutrient-rich ingredients.

Two weeks ago, I toured the manufacturing facilities of Angostura Limited and Trinidad and Tobago Fine Cocoa Company Limited and was pleased to see the level of innovation being incorporated, both in the production of Angostura's Cocoa Bitters and also the production of chocolates by Trinidad and Tobago Fine Cocoa. I was privileged to sample their gourmet chocolate truffles that incorporated local fruit flavours. I must commend local chocolatiers who have been introducing local fruits such as pineapple, coconut, guava, mango, sorrel and peppers into their confectionary profiles. These types of niche products show the potential for innovation and value-added, and unwrap opportunities for new export markets and increased foreign exchange earnings.

Manufacturers are progressively discovering opportunities to increase their influence in this niche market. As a result, I encourage you all to further collaborate to take advantage of the thriving e-commerce platforms, which have enabled firms to improve their customer exposure. I implore



discussions from the panel on the exploration and implementation of new techniques and technology to boost production, best practices, product sustainability, proper land use and the creation of jobs in the agricultural sector and enhanced market targeting and segmentation.

I wish to express my gratitude to His Excellency Peter Cavendish, Ambassador – Delegation of the European Union to Trinidad and Tobago for his insight to collaborate with invesTT to execute this webinar series with specific emphasis on Trinitario cocoa. The MTI looks forward to the third installment scheduled for September 2022, which will focus on foreign investor matchmaking opportunities, innovation and technology applications, capacity building and knowledge exchanges.

These efforts will ensure that our cocoa sector remains a top priority as the Government continues to develop the sector and generate investment opportunities for our fine/flavour Trinitario cocoa.

I wish you another successful event. Thank you.