

**Opening Address by the Hon. Indar Weir, M.P.,
Minister of Agriculture and Food Security at the
Genesis Law Chambers' 4th Annual Barbados Food
Law and Industry Conference at Accra Beach Hotel,
Hastings, Christ Church on Wednesday, August 8, 2018**

Master of Ceremonies

Dr. Tom Jondinko, Director of Ingredient Formulations at
PAK Group, Bellarise, California

Attorney-At-Law, Susan Seal, Managing Attorney of Genesis
Law Chambers

Dr. Cheryl Rock, Assistant Professor of Food Science and
Nutrition of California State University, Long Beach

Ms. Nicole Henry, Quality Assurance Manager of Barbados
Dairy Industries

Dr. Beverley Wood, Director of the Government Analytical
Laboratory

Ms. Ena Harvey, Representative of the Inter-American
Institute of Corporation of Agriculture

Dr. Lystra Fletcher-Paul, Sub-Regional Coordinator of Food
and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations.

Dr. Elizabeth Metzger, University of Southern Florida,
Coordinator of Produce Development

Members of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning!

It is truly an honour for me to address you this morning at the 4th Annual Barbados Food Law and Industry Conference being hosted by Genesis Law Chambers under the theme “Legally Fit for Consumption”. I wish at the outset to commend Genesis Law Chambers for highlighting the issue of food safety which is very critical to the achievement of food security and wellbeing in any country and is certainly a priority for Barbados.

Ladies and gentlemen, today’s world, considered a global village, has seen increased trade in many commodities, including agricultural produce and products, and various manufactured food items. The movement of animals, plants and processed food from one geographical region to another has resulted in increased risk of diseases and food

contamination which threaten the health of our people and impacts our nation's public health system.

It has therefore become necessary for Barbados, a net food importer, and other importing and exporting countries to examine their national agricultural health and food control systems to ensure compliance with the many international agreements, standards and codes of practice, in order to mitigate these potential risks.

Modern national agricultural health and food control systems are risk based and embrace a "farm to fork" approach that seeks to ensure the safety and quality of food from production to consumption. These systems therefore place the onus on our producers, who are entrusted with the primary, responsibility for food safety and quality, such as farmers fishers and manufacturers, our processors, transporters and vendors to implement food safety systems that guarantee that

the food they offer for sale is safe. This is critical if we are to protect the consumer from food-borne illnesses which can be fatal and which can contribute to public health burdens and the medical costs incurred as a result.

The Agricultural Health and Food Safety System also allows for preventative measures at all stages of the food production and distribution chain rather than only inspection and rejection at the final stage. Of course, the implementation of such a system necessitates an adequate legislative framework which sets out certain mandatory requirements as well as effective enforcement procedures. In this regard, several Government regulatory entities in Barbados are responsible for auditing performance of the food production and distribution sectors through inspection, monitoring and surveillance activities and for enforcing the legal and regulatory requirements to ensure that food producers and

retailers implement the necessary requirements to protect consumer health.

These agencies are Veterinary Services, the Markets Division and the laboratories under the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security; the Environmental Health Department, the Port Health Division, Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Barbados National Standards Institute and the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Small Business, Entrepreneurship and Commerce.

Indeed, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security recognized the weaknesses within the Barbados system and through the National Agricultural Health and Food Control Programme has therefore sought to enhance its animal health, plant health and food safety legislation. The Ministry, in consultation with stakeholders, both in the public and private sector, and with the assistance of development

partners, has prepared draft documents which allow a modern risk-based approach to the protection of animal, plant and consumer health. In addition, a national food inspection manual and food-sampling plan are being developed to better coordinate the inspection programmes of the various departments.

I therefore wish to acknowledge the role of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) which have assisted with the development of draft legislation, sanitation standard operating procedures and standard operation procedures manuals for public markets, fish landing sites and vending operations; assisted with the development of a traceability manual in selected poultry, fish and condiment businesses; and conducted training for officers in pertinent areas.

These programmes compliment the day to day activities within the various departments, activities such as the milk sanitation programme, the salmonella and campylobacter programme in poultry, the inspection programmes at the ports of entry, and the testing of samples at laboratories; all of which seek to ensure the safety and quality of our food.

Ladies and gentlemen, in spite of our efforts, I would be the first to admit that there is still room for improvement in the Barbados system and that there is greater need within public sector agencies to continue to develop and promote sustainable policies of food safety for all consumers and to foster greater participation and dialogue between all stakeholders. However, I also wish to call on private sector businesses to enhance their food control management systems and to fully embrace their primary responsibility for

food safety and quality by ensuring that the food they manufacture, distribute or offer for sale meets the required standard.

My Ministry sees this Conference as a means of fostering greater participation and dialogue among stakeholders, providing a platform to create awareness of food-related problems and ultimately achieving better management of food within the industry.

In closing, I wish to again commend the organizers for their efforts and to assure them of my Ministry's continued support.

I wish you a successful session. Thank you.