



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**

**Dr Renata Clarke  
Sub-regional Coordinator's  
Remarks - World Food Safety Day 2020**

**Food safety is an important public health, trade and economic development issue**

600 Million sick annually and 420 K deaths annually ... and this is only a partial count as data on food borne illness are weak and the impact of only a few of the most common disease agents were considered

The World Bank issued a report in 2019 which estimated that unsafe food costs lower and middle income countries over 100 billion USD annually mainly due to lost productivity

We are looking to economic diversification in the Caribbean intra-regional trade and extra-regional exports are a significant part of that equation. Accessing markets means that you have to be able to meet national and international food safety requirements.

As individuals and as countries, we need to spend more time thinking about food safety...

We generally speak about the food chain: food is produced, it is harvested, it is handled in various ways, it is transported, it is stored... at each step there is the possibility of contamination from the environment, from animals, from birds, from people...

We need assurances that all of those people are following good food hygiene practice and that governments are providing appropriate oversight to guide the definition of those "good practices", to facilitate compliance and to enforce as necessary...

Food safety is everyone's business... next time you put food into your mouth, think about where it has been and all that is required to make it safe...

## **There is no evidence of transmission of COVID-19 through food – It is not a foodborne disease.**

But there are implications for food safety.

- We feel very strongly, at the moment, our vulnerability to fragile global food supply chains and there is a recognition that countries need to consider the regional dimension of food security and not just the national dimension. We can't have efficient intraregional trade unless countries have confidence in each other's food safety systems. Facilitating intra-regional trade requires that CARICOM countries have transparent, robust and science-based systems of food control. There is a need for investment.
- Many countries have developed COVID response Plans for food and agriculture. They envisage the adoption of new technologies to make agriculture more competitive and sustainable. Innovations in food production necessarily requires vigilance and proactivity in terms of identifying new patterns of food safety risk and controlling them to ensure that the public's health is protected. This celebration of WFSD should serve as an instigation for a reflection on the adequacy of current food safety monitoring and surveillance.

### **Safe Food in Markets**

For this year's WFSD, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WHO, have put a focus on the theme "Safe food in markets". ***I would like to state out front, that there have been no cases of COVID-19 being transmitted by food. It is not a foodborne disease.*** However, in the context of COVID-19, food businesses and food markets need to re-inforce hygiene practices and enable safe physical distances during all operations. Traditional markets and farmers markets play an important social function both in terms of providing food and in terms of providing income. With loss of jobs in the tourism and service sectors, in some Caribbean countries we have seen upsurge in street vending of food. Very often the management and the infrastructure of the markets do not allow adequate bio-safety and food safety. Repeated incidents of the emergence of zoonotic diseases (caused by germs spread between humans and animals) that are linked to poor sanitation and hygiene in markets demonstrate clearly that we cannot be complacent about hygiene management in markets.

### **There is a strong link between food safety and the Environment**

We are here to commemorate WFSD which is 7<sup>th</sup> June, but I also like to flag that today – June 5<sup>th</sup> – is World Environment Day.

It has long been recognized that there are interactions between human health, animal health and environmental health and that we need to understand very well these interactions so that we can manage the risks effectively and ensure that protect overall health and resilience of food systems. This is the basic idea behind One Health paradigm.

**One Health** Approaches are a win-win for food safety and for environmental health.

We need food safety authorities; Agriculture, Livestock and fisheries Authorities; environmental authorities all working together sharing information and intelligence to keep people, food systems and environment healthy.