



Ministerial Statement
By
The Hon. Walter Roban, JP, MP
Minister of Home Affairs
Friday, May 22nd, 2020

Promoting Local Food Security

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House about the ongoing measures being taken to ensure Bermuda's food supply and local food production.

Mr. Speaker,

We find ourselves in extraordinary times. Not only does the pandemic caused by the *Covid-19 virus* continue to test global health resources but also global food supply chains. One cannot help but read with concern in the international media headlines reports of food processing plant closures in the US, and wonder how this is going to affect our grocery

stores' shelves. Not in recent memory has our local food security been of greater importance.

Mr. Speaker,

To this I can say, the Island's supply chain has proven to be robust and our private sector suppliers resourceful. I must take this opportunity to thank our shippers, wholesalers, grocery store owners, farmers and fishermen for all their efforts over the past weeks to ensure that we continue to have good availability of food and that our shelves remain stocked.

I have been communicating regularly with our shippers, wholesalers, grocery store owners and representatives of the commercial farmers and fishermen, throughout the period from March to date. They have been forthcoming with their ideas and efforts to ensure that the essential food products continue to be available. I applaud all their efforts.

The public will, I am sure, have noticed some periodic "gaps" in the shelves and there have been some challenges in securing meat products. However the core products continue to be available, albeit with less varieties of specialty items.

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to thank the Minister of National Security and his team for all their efforts to coordinate with our key stakeholders to ensure the island's food security is in the best shape possible.

The discussions have been extremely useful, not only allowing direct communication between the Government and our local food suppliers but also between our grocery stores, shipping lines and distributors. These discussions have created an open forum to identify emerging issues, share solutions and make decisions quickly to ensure that critical food supplies reach the island as efficiently as possible.

Mr. Speaker,

I now turn to our local environment. This unprecedented situation really makes us appreciate our island. Not only are we one of the most beautiful places on earth but the island can be bountiful too.

This past growing season was good. Our farmers' fields produced well and there has been a good supply of local produce that is normally found at this time. Locally all major commercial growers continue to be busy. The unfortunate loss of sales to hotels, restaurants meant that farmers had a larger supply of local produce for direct sale to the public. The dairy farms and commercial fishermen have found themselves in a similar situation.

Mr. Speaker,

Over the past several weeks, with the shelter in place in effect, the Government has strived to keep the public safe, while also allowing our farmers and fishermen to sell their fresh vegetables, milk, fish and meat products. I would like to take this opportunity to make the public aware that while farmers and fishermen can sell directly to grocery stores, many are operating roadside stands, as well as providing pre-paid pickup and delivery services.

For the awareness of the public, roadside stands can be in operation from Monday to Saturday, 7am to 9pm. The grocery store surname system does not apply to farmers and fishermen's roadside stands and anyone can partake of their services during their opening times. For ease of finding a location nearest you, sites for farmer and fishermen stands will be posted on the government portal and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources website www.environment.bm.

However, **Mr. Speaker**, I must be extremely clear, any customers visiting these stands must practice social distancing, even though it is out in the open. Other requirements include only two (2) vendors per site; sellers and customers must wear face masks; customers must be a minimum of six (6) feet apart; and hand sanitizer must be available for the sellers.

Teams from the Ministry of Home Affairs are regularly visiting sites and have the authority under the *Emergency Powers (Covid-19 Continuing Precautions) Regulations 2020* to close a location down immediately if these requirements are not being met.

Mr. Speaker,

Over the next four (4) to eight (8) weeks our main growing season will be winding down as we move into the hotter summer season. The public can expect that there will be a dearth of local vegetables between July and September but this is due to the seasonality of the produce and is **not** related to the pandemic. It is anticipated that, supplies of fresh produce will continue to be imported from overseas.

That said, our local farmers are now gearing their short term planting schedules to address our current local situation in light of the progression of the current global pandemic. This will likely see a change in what is normally planted.

Mr. Speaker,

Looking to the short and medium terms, the Government will be exploring all opportunities to assist our local food providers; as well as encourage home growers to maximize local food production.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources has placed its annual overseas vegetable seed order, and a large supply of packaging boxes and bags has arrived for produce coming out of the fields.

The Ministry of Home Affairs is currently working on a number of initiatives to increase our local food security, which I will look forward to presenting to this Honourable House in the next several months. They will include: a study on opportunities for under produced but locally desired produce, home growing opportunities, a strategy for putting more arable land into production, new regulations to manage aquaculture, and other fisheries-related initiatives being developed as part of the *Blue Economy Strategy*, as part of the *Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme*.

Mr. Speaker,

Unfortunately I must report that over the last several weeks there has been a significant increase of theft from farmers' fields. While this is in some respects not unexpected; what is concerning is there are reports that the produce being taken is being **sold** rather than **eaten**. The public are advised that, in addition to it be illegal to be out during the curfew hours of 10pm to 6am, stealing from fields is an offense. Officers of the Ministry of Home Affairs are ramping up their oversight of fields. Offenders **will** be prosecuted when caught.

I would ask the public, that if anyone, who is not a farmer, attempts to sell large amounts of produce to them, **not** to purchase this food. I would further encourage members of the public to please report any suspicious behavior to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources at environment@gov.bm or telephone 236-4201. Members of the Public and farmers can also report any incidents directly to the Bermuda Police Service by phoning *two one one* (211).

Mr. Speaker,

I would also take this opportunity to encourage those that have an interest, to grow their own vegetables. Home gardening is rewarding on numerous fronts. It provides good exercise, time away from electronic devices, fresh air and the ultimate satisfaction of picking your own food. I would encourage anyone interested to contact local plant nurseries for availability of seedlings and seeds for hot summer vegetables such as cucumbers, squashes, peppers, corn, melons and carrots.

Mr. Speaker,

In closing I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the public to buy local and support our farmers and fishermen, so that they can continue to provide for you. Lastly please continue to follow all of the social distancing procedures to keep you and your local food producers safe during these challenging times.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**.