

Statement of Maury Hechevarría Bermudez, Vice Minister of Agriculture of Cuba, at the Ministerial Round Table "Transforming food systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals"
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United Nations Pre-Summit on Food Systems

July 27, 2021, Rome



Dear Ministers, Delegates:

On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, the workers, farmers and rural cooperatives of the Cuban countryside, I appreciate the invitation to this Pre-Summit on Food Systems.

Cuba, like the vast majority of countries, has been affected by the health crisis caused by COVID-19, which has deepened the global socio-economic crisis, whose greatest effects fall on developing countries.

The Cuban government gives the highest priority to feeding our population, which is considered a national security issue. The Constitution of the Republic promulgates in its articles the right to food for all.

Cuba shows progress in this area, including the achievements made in the fight against hunger, recognized by FAO in 2014. Si is the first country in Latin America and the Caribbean to eliminate child malnutrition in children under 5 years of age, a fact recognized and validated by UNICEF in 2015.

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Amid the difficult challenges marked by the lack of agricultural inputs and fuel, Cuban farmers have demonstrated their capacity for innovation and commitment to food security. For example, in the months of greatest confrontation with the new coronavirus, one of the fundamental tasks was to supply food to the Health Centers for the care and isolation of people affected by the pandemic, as well as to hospitals and other health facilities.

In 2021, we faced the impossibility of importing the necessary fertilizers and nutrients for crops such as rice, just to cite one

example; as a solution to this obstacle, national variants were used to a greater extent.

In addition, more than 8,678 hectares of crops were damaged by the intense rainfall and floods associated with the passage of tropical storm Eta through several Cuban provinces.

Adverse phenomena are compounded by the restrictions imposed by the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade of the United States (USA) government, exacerbated by the 243 measures adopted by the Donald Trump government, which remain today intact.

In July 2020, the National Plan for Food Sovereignty and Nutrition Education (SAN Plan) was approved, the first of its kind in the nation's history, which highlights the need to reduce dependence on food and input imports, guarantee quality and food safety and avoid food losses and waste. The Plan aims to facilitate the organization of local, sovereign and sustainable food systems that integrate production, transformation, marketing and consumption.

The high commitment of the Cuban government to universal coverage of health, education and food, without leaving anyone helpless, is confirmed today in the work of scientists, who in the midst of the pandemic have produced 4 vaccine candidates against COVID - 19, and 2 vaccines with high efficiency and results.

In the case of Agriculture and as part of public policies, the government has approved 63 measures to benefit farmers and cooperatives, in which it works to achieve greater achievements in sovereignty and food security. The measures include tax cuts, the expansion of soft credits, price reviews and others that make producers more motivated.

A deep analysis has been carried out to improve agricultural productivity, calling on farmers, academia, companies, cooperatives from the state and non-state sector. Subsequently, decree-modifications have been approved that pay better attention to producers and more efficient systems and chains, with fewer laws and bureaucratic obstacles.

Specific actions aimed at meeting the population's food needs include prioritizing inputs and the production of bio-products, increasing areas under irrigation, promoting the creation of small and medium-sized state and non-state business organizations, with national capital and / or abroad, consolidate food production at the local level, highlighting Urban, Suburban and Family Agriculture and livestock modules.

We work in our country on the basis of the use of agro-ecological technologies, with a deep sense of territorial sustainability using local (endogenous) resources and food sovereignty. As a priority, the production of seeds, the production of organic fertilizers, the

production of biological products, digital media and direct marketing are highlighted, stimulating the circular economy. Scientific and technical achievements have been used, such as obtaining new varieties and new bio-products.

With a strategic vision and based on the National Development Plan until 2030, risk reduction plans have been drawn up, especially for the months of June to November, during hurricanes, to counteract the effects of climatic events, the attack of pests and diseases, with agro-technical and organizational practices, as well as digital technologies as guidelines that facilitate the Cuban State the organization of Local, Sovereign and Sustainable Food Systems, for their immediate implementation.

With a multisectorial approach, Cuban academic, government, business and civil society institutions have prepared diagnoses of the local food situation and the Action Plan to meet the population's food needs, taking into account the natural resources available in the localities, as well as the Territorial Development Plan. We will continue to work for a sustainable agriculture system that takes into account the improvement of nutrition and agricultural productivity.

In this area, we call on developed countries to share their positive experiences and provide technology transfer to achieve food systems for all.

We are working in the most difficult conditions created by COVID-19 and in the midst of the strengthening of the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the United States against Cuba, which in a period of one year accounts for damage to the productive chain and agriculture by an amount of 428 million dollars.

19

We reaffirm the high commitment of the Cuban State to sustainable agricultural development for the benefit of the entire population. We appreciate the support of FAO, IFAD, WFP and other United Nations Funds and Programs. We reiterate the need to strengthen cooperation and solidarity for a world without hunger and without malnutrition. We reiterate our willingness to offer our modest experiences.

THANKS