

One Health and Food Security in the Caribbean

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If we agree that food security exists when *“people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”* and consider that One Health is *“the collaborative effort of multiple disciplines working locally, nationally, and globally to attain optimal health for people, animals and the environment”* then it does not take a stretch of the imagination to recognize that a One Health approach to achieving food security has merit.



Most, if not all, Caribbean countries are food insecure, meaning that they do not produce enough food to feed their growing populations and therefore rely on imported foods - a situation which might not be sustainable. Efforts to produce more food and reduce the regional food import bill (which is now more than US\$ 5 billion) should incorporate the integrated One Health approach whereby stakeholders, both in the private and public sectors, collaborate on strategies to reduce the problem of regional food insecurity.

To feed our growing population, Caribbean farmers need to produce and market more food with the recommended nutritional value needed for a healthy lifestyle. Some of the obvious stakeholders in this are crop and livestock farmers, fisher-folk, extension officers, agricultural scientists such as entomologists and agronomists, veterinarians, public health officials, food scientists and environmentalists. Others are sociologists, economists, food marketing experts



and also politicians who make policy decisions that influence areas directly and indirectly related to food security, such as management of land and natural resources, food trade and commerce.

In increasing food production, greater emphasis is needed on reducing food losses due

to pests, diseases and poor management practices on farms. Important stakeholders in this area include Ministries of Agriculture and Health, and farmers' organizations, Customs and Commerce Departments and risk communication experts.

In terms of diseases, given that poultry meat is the most widely consumed meat in Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean, the impact on food security of an outbreak of a disease such as bird flu (avian influenza) would be tremendous. A collaborative One Health effort is needed to prevent its entry and minimize its impact.

Policy makers and senior managers in government have a key role to play in ensuring inter-agency collaboration as we strive for food security. It is such an important issue that it cannot be left to any one group of stakeholders and cannot be solved by individuals or groups working independently. It requires, among other things, a collaborative One Health approach.

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