

Update from Saint Lucia Chamber of Commerce on the Situation with Supply Chain for Food. Meeting of NEMAC 17 March, 2020.

The Saint Lucia Chamber of Commerce Industry and Agriculture understands that as a strategy to slow down the spread of the Corona Virus that the Government will have to introduce and encourage certain social distancing measure. The Chamber would support these measures and would wish to be part of the dialogue that would define these measures and the development of the associated protocols.

It is important however that measures are put in place to ensure that the country maintains an effective food supply chain to ensure that the nation is able to import those goods, i.e. food and other critical supplies. The Chamber would expect that no effort would be spared to ensure that trade in goods continues and that the Seaport remain opens open to commercial cargo.

In that regard the Chamber needs assurances that SLASPA is able to facilitate trade and keep the supply chain open while maintaining a high degree of safety for all those involved. The Chamber and I dare say the wider Business Community is prepared to work with SLASPA in that regard. Dialogue is also needed with Customs and haulers / truckers to make this work.

The Chamber recognizes that the country's supermarkets and other critical retailers who are regarded as essential services will be expected to continue to operate and serve the general public. Our members are prepared to continue operations to meet the needs of the country. Yet as a country we need to plan for the eventually that these organizations may need support in delivering those services due to security concerns.

Specific mention and treatment needs to be given to the continued (even if limited) servicing of the Down Trade Channel. Our members service over 1200 0 mom and pop shops whose communities depend on them for essential items. This is even more critical during a partial or full social distancing scenario that may include minibuses. The socioeconomic status of the customers who shop at mom and pop shops do not allow them to drive a car to a supermarket or pharmacy for food or OTC items. This must be taken account of.

The Chamber urges Government to put measures in place and we will support those measures to prevent panic and or civil unrest as well as efforts to mitigate against criminal activity. Special provisions should be made for armed forces to be assigned to guard health care facilities, pharmacies, distribution warehouses, retailers and on Down Trade Vehicles to reduce the burden of additional security costs to protect against disruptive, unscrupulous and criminal behaviors in the possible wake of scarcity of products.

The Chamber wishes to advise Government that after consultation with suppliers that there are at this time no current Supply Chain Interruptions for food. In fact, members have increased orders and are working toward further increasing their stock levels. Please understand that the situation is very fluid and may change. However at this time we have not faced any challenges. Once the transportation and channels remain open there are no problems. It is critical that the GOSL identify a priority list of COVID-19 products to receive priority clearance upon arrival.

We wish this statement to be treated with caution, because this situation is dynamic and depending on the source markets of the goods or for the raw materials. We anticipate that there could be interruptions depending on how hard hit we are and how long the situation persists. Therefore we believe that maximum limits should be placed on an identified list of essential Cleaning, Disinfecting, Food, Prescription and OTC items. For example we know that Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients for certain drugs come from China and this will likely cause shortages, we know that china supplies a large percentage of the world's parent rolls for pulp and tissue so until we all investigate our supply chain deeper (including our local and regional suppliers) the above is given advisedly.

Chamber Members will, on their part, ensure that all measures are put in place to protect employees and the public as we continue to serve them.

The Chamber however wishes to inform that there appears to be challenges in availability of Sanitizing and cleaning products. In that context we wish to suggest that Government should provide all possible support to local firms able to manufacture these products or convert their operations to produce these goods as these are needed not just locally but regionally. This is critical because USA

suppliers will redirect their resources to the situation on the ground and the USA Government could intervene to decide on where supplies go.

Some local producers who may be considered for such support could include Tolyn, Natmed, St. Lucia Distillers, Chemico etc. We thus recommend that GOSL needs to give active and aggressive support to local efforts to produce cleaning agents locally. A regional approach may be possible to tap such an opportunity. This call for support is advanced to improve the availability of cleaning and sanitizing products so as to mitigate the hoarding and panic buying that appears to be occurring at this time.

The Ministry of Health has done an outstanding job as the lead Ministry in this matter and the Business Community wishes to commend the Government Team in that regard. The Business Community appreciates the tremendous pressure the ministry of Health has been under and extends words of encouragement and support for your continued efforts far. We are looking to you for even more guidance, clarity and support.

The Business Community therefore respectfully suggests that messaging from the Ministry of Health now needs to be stronger, broader and more widespread to ensure that all Saint Lucians are aware of and can find the required information needed to make informed decisions, in the event of any situation related to the spread of COVID-19.

The Business Community will, on their part, ensure that all measures are put in place to protect employees and the public as we continue to serve them.

The established protocols governing identification, quarantine and isolation of suspected case of COVID 19 need to be developed, updated and publicized so as to be placed in business houses to help spread the word and keep the nation informed.