

Press Release No. 21 - Food Monitor Program

A Country Without Food: Drastic Decline in Production in Cuba

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Official data revealing the current economic debacle in Cuba were released last Tuesday. Although Cuban authorities typically do not disclose "sensitive" statistics that could impact the credibility of their government, and they show reluctance to explicitly communicate the reality affecting Cubans, a report from the National Office of Statistics and Information this week showed a retrogression of up to 67% in national food production over the past five years.

The 23 products selected by the office, including several basic food items necessary for the family basket, have shown a sustained decline, in some cases up to a 90% decrease in production. Among the foods that seem to be gradually disappearing since 2018 are fine (74.7%) and salted (85.5%) biscuits; it is worth considering that the latter product is delivered in rural areas and is difficult to access, serving as a substitute for standard bread.

Other highly demanded products within the population that suffered significant impacts were pasta (91%), pork meat (91%), rice (90%), vegetable oils (81%), and milk (90%). In general, dairy products show declines such as yogurt (68.8%) and cheese (52%). Moreover, coffee, a product with an iconic status for Cubans, also recorded a decline of 51%. Other negatively evolving foods include tomato derivatives (76.5%) and butter, whose production went from 100 annual tons to 0%.

Likewise, products exclusively destined for the also struggling tourism industry, such as lobster and shrimp, experienced an 82% decline. Finally, the most common food in the daily socialist quota, bread, decreased by 34%, while wheat flour production decreased by 57%.

The virtually non-existent panorama of the national productive industry has indications of its causes in the same document, which indicates the collapse of foodstuffs and fertilizers by up to 70%, as well as the reduction in electricity consumption in manufacturing. Other signals were also perceived by the Food Monitor Program and

warned in press releases, such as the announcement of drastic cuts in subsidized distribution, the collapse in bread production, and the request to international organizations for humanitarian aid in the form of powdered milk.

Given the precarious situation of the 110 companies and 800 factories for food processing, authorities have historically blamed the US embargo. However, the poor administrative management stands out in decisions such as the so-called 63 measures to revitalize agriculture, which, including 658 actions announced two years ago, have had no effect according to the authorities themselves. Instead, responsible ministers have opted for inflated narratives and cosmetic arguments, far from the reality experienced by Cubans. For example, amid the serious water insecurity facing the country, Cuban Vice Prime Minister Jorge Luis Tapia proposed before the National Assembly to raise fish in neighborhood ponds for Cuban families' self-consumption.

Additionally, during the same analyzed period, agricultural and livestock investment could not compare with that destined for the tourist sector, focused on the construction of hotels and restaurants, real estate, and rental activities. In the last year, the National Office of Statistics and Information reported 96.622 billion pesos allocated to these latter sectors. Meanwhile, the Cuban government continues to advertise the so-called Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Security Law as an apparent strategy to present "governmental willingness" on paper, yet it has had no effects on the Cubans' precarious living conditions so far.

According to the Food Monitor Program's annual Food Security Survey, 94% of respondents claim to suffer from agricultural product shortages, while 90.7% confirm having significantly lost access to food since the Ordering Task. In this context, increasing food insecurity and the steep decline in state production bring multifactorial consequences in other socioeconomic sectors.

Potential structural imbalances are foreseen that could worsen those already executed in recent years, affecting not only the state but also the private sector. The implosion of the economy, the country's lack of credit, and the ad hoc dependency schemes to which the government resorts have placed the national average salary at the poverty indicator level. The devaluation of the Cuban peso and the increase in food costs have eroded the

population's purchasing power, amid a clear deterioration of living conditions, with much harder-hit groups like adults over 65, dependent on their retirement. The Food Monitor Program reminds that a plate of food can cost more than a current minimum monthly wage.

The advancement of food insecurity and the government's lack of effective measures to tackle it have generated further social and security problems in the country, such as increased emigration and thus the exponential aging of the population, the expansion and prominence of the black market and corruption, the increase in associated crime and criminality, greater dependence on imports, and the strengthening of State capitalism on the island.

The Food Monitor Program warns of the serious consequences of the exposed indicators' regression, as well as the secrecy with which authorities handle official statistics and their tendency towards evasive and revictimizing discourse. Likewise, it urges the government to take measures to curb the sustained advancement of food insecurity in the country, as well as its social, cultural, economic, and political aggravating factors.