

Press Release No. 20 - Food Monitor Program

Hunger in Cuba Forces People to Eat Domestic Animals

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Recently, in San José de las Lajas, in the province of Mayabeque, the commercialization of dog meat as if it were lamb or pork was detected. As a result of this, the Ministry of Agriculture issued an informative note confirming the news, condemning the act, and ensuring that pertinent investigations are being conducted to apply the corresponding sanctions according to current legal regulations.

Up to this point, at least six individuals were reported involved in the theft of family pets and stray dogs to skin them and sell them for human consumption, with three individuals detained for this reason. However, the only article in the current Penal Code related to animal abuse is 281.2, which establishes up to three years in prison for those who use animals in illicit games; which is not applicable in this event. For these cases, the law only establishes administrative sanctions such as fines; although the accused have also been charged with offenses of spreading epidemics and fraud, as some reports indicate poisoning in minors due to the consumption of this meat.

This occurs just days after rumors circulated about clandestine factories in Havana selling ground dog and cat meat as if it were Cocinerito brand minced meat. However, the Administrative Council of Arroyo Naranjo municipality issued a statement denying the fact and affirming that they were only rumors to create distrust in the population.

Meanwhile, investigations by the Food Monitor Program have shown that in Guantanamo, cat meat sales are being conducted on social media and at the neighborhood level, without major consequences so far.

As happened during the Special Period crisis, pets such as cats and dogs, whether domestic or stray, are in danger of being stolen and used as meat due to the lack and increase in prices of beef, chicken, and pork. This substitution reveals some facets of the deep economic crisis and uncontrolled inflation that the island is experiencing.

Firstly, there is no health control to verify that the animals slaughtered for human consumption do not have contagious diseases; as well as ensuring that their processing meets minimum hygiene standards. This problem is related, in turn, to the lack of information to consumers about the products that the State sells to the population, with hundreds of items sold in bulk and/or non-original packaging or without the list of ingredients. This is compounded by the theft of food directly from factories or storage locations, which are then sold often even without packaging. Therefore, Cubans have been forced to rely on the goodwill of sellers, at the risk of intoxication, poisoning, etc. On the other hand, the existence of a black market for food confirms the food crisis and shortage facing the country. Despite the high prices in this parallel market, for many people, it is the only option for food supply in the absence of state offerings. This is one of the reasons contributing to price hikes, as items traded in it do not find competitive prices in legal commerce.

Thirdly, the illegal commercialization of companion animals, such as dogs and cats, shows that the food crisis is not only limited to the physical realm of survival; but also influences the moral and social sphere. The opportunism and criminal nature involved in the theft and killing of these animals are a direct consequence of the lack of state and governmental willingness to address food insecurity in Cuba.

From the Food Monitor Program, we warn that this is not an exceptional situation, but rather it is becoming commonplace and may worsen if the Cuban State and Government do not create strategies to begin alleviating the acute food crisis that the island is facing. Likewise, we recommend consumers to be vigilant about the content and conditions of the food they purchase, especially in the black market, in order to minimize health risks. Finally, we urge government authorities to implement measures and strategies to minimize the crisis and food insecurity in Cuba, and to promote the development of a domestic agro-industry to achieve the food sovereignty that the country needs.