

Press Release No. 22 - Food Monitor Program

Regarding Distorted Official Narrative, FMP Reminds of the Severity of the Food Situation in Cuba

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In light of the Cuban government's request for assistance from international organizations such as the World Food Programme in March this year, a narrative of image restoration is being solidified amidst the deepening food insecurity in Cuba. Official media attribute the productive decline on the Island to the impact of the U.S. embargo, climatic conditions, the international geopolitical state, among other external justifications. The Food Monitor Program is an observatory committed to highlighting the reality of Cubans, diagnosing, and analyzing the agri-food situation in the country. Therefore, we feel the need to enumerate recent factors that describe the worsening of the structural crisis in Cuba, as well as its most immediate causes.

The Government claims to rigorously meet the indicators and controls of food delivery established by the WFP in the country and states that food and nutritional security for its population is a state priority, which "has shown progress" based on documents such as the Law of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security or the National Economic and Social Development Plan until 2030.

However, we emphasize that despite these documents, the "goodwill" within them has not translated beyond paper:

Since 2021, "63 measures to revitalize agriculture" were approved, which so far have not resulted in improvements in production programs, the cooperative system, or agricultural communities in the country. Collectively, the 16 agricultural policies, seven decree laws, 11 decrees, and 19 resolutions have not prevented the national production of more than 20 food products from the basic basket from declining by up to 90%, with some products disappearing completely. Foods such as rice, pasta, oil, coffee, eggs, and wheat flour have seen production drops of 60-91% in state factories.

This has led to delays of up to three months in basic foods distributed via the ration book, while their free sale in state networks is scarce and prices increase in private ones. Thus, a carton of 30 eggs cost 3500 Cuban pesos in April, more than a monthly minimum wage.

Although the Government has promoted a strategic development plan, investments in the agricultural sector remain negligible compared to other interests. In the first half of 2023, investments in the business and real estate services sector reached 10,406 million pesos, a quarter of the total investments in the period. Additionally, 2,325 million pesos were allocated to the construction of hotels and tourist restaurants. Despite a declining hotel occupancy rate over the past two years, and amid the urgent need to rebuild agricultural production in a country that imports more than 80% of its consumption, the Government allocated only 1,090.7 million pesos in the same period, just 10% of the aforementioned amount.

Still, Cuba continues to be praised for its "advances" in food security, even during a period of systematic increase in food, water, and energy insecurity, which are key indicators of

a structural crisis in the country. In this regard, Food Monitor Program found that last year, out of 2535 households surveyed, 90.97% reported a total or partial loss of access to food since the Task Order. More conservative estimates by organizations such as the World Food Programme indicate that Cuban households spend between 55% and 65% of their income on food. However, previous studies by the Food Monitor Program have found that since 2022, Cuban families spend between 80% and 120% of their income, with the figure exceeding total income suggesting the receipt of remittances from abroad or income from gray and black market activities.

The observatory has also reported the prevalence of undernourishment, where, although chronic hunger is not recorded, the consumption of a varied, safe, and healthy diet is scarce, with a high increase in sugars, carbohydrates, and processed foods. Moreover, due to power cuts lasting up to 15 hours and during peak hours, numerous households in the country are experiencing the loss of perishable food, as well as the inability to cook these foods, and they also cannot store, pump, or purify the water that sometimes takes up to four days to arrive.

The Food Monitor Program has been diagnosing and documenting the deterioration of food security in the country and its multiple societal consequences. This situation leads to an increase in crime; affects attention during school hours, as families have more difficulties ensuring protein supplements for their children, which educational centers do not provide; hinders work attendance for the same reasons; and increases the gender gap, with Cuban mothers having more added responsibilities.

Food Monitor Program encourages international organizations to closely and independently review the Cuban reality, and to move away from biased and outdated official figures that contribute to distorting the current context of deterioration. Food Monitor Program highlights the danger of promoting an inflated and distorted narrative, for political legitimization purposes, that continues to repress and ignore the socio-economic rights of Cubans.