WORLD POULTRY SCIENCE

ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

GOLD CREST HOTEL Q.BORNES

FRIDAY 23 SEPT AT 16H00

Professor Edir Silva, Immediate Past President of the World Poultry Science Association

Dr Dewan Sibartie, President of WPSA, Mauritius Branch

Chief Executives of AVIPRO Ltd, Innodis Poultry Ltd. and Inicia

Members of WPSA
Veterinarians, Poultry Managers, Poultry Breeders

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

- I am indeed pleased to be amongst you today not only as Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security of Mauritius but also as Patron of your Association, an honour that I highly cherish.

- I would like to extend a warm welcome to Professor Edir Silva who has travelled all the way from Brazil to honour this special
conference on poultry science and industry being organized to commemorate the 20\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of the WPSA (Mauritius Branch).

• It’s indeed a pleasure to welcome such a distinguished personality who has had a most brilliant career as Poultry veterinarian, Teacher and Researcher in many important diseases affecting the industry worldwide.

• The role he has played as Chairman of the WSPA both in his country and across the world
is known to all of us and we are delighted to have him here amongst us today.

- The poultry industry in Mauritius has indeed been a success story especially when you realize that the country is small and devoid of the main natural resources that are conducive to livestock production.

- Mauritius has achieved self-sufficiency in chicken and eggs since a few decades and has developed potential to export poultry and poultry products to countries of the region and beyond.
• We produce annually approximately 47,000 tonnes of chicken meat and 150 million eggs with an annual per capita consumption of about 40 kgs of chicken meat and 120 eggs.

• It should be noted that more than 75 % of meat consumed in Mauritius consist of poultry meat.

• Day old chicks are produced by a few industrial farms that also supply layer or broiler chicks to small, commercial and semi-industrial farms.

• Family backyard or indigenous chicken production, which used to be quite important a
few decades ago especially in the island of Rodrigues, is now insignificant, accounting for less than 3% of the total production.

- Other poultry species including ducks, guinea fowls, quails and turkeys are not well developed, as demands for these products are still low and some also tend to be seasonal.

- Free Range chicken production is being attempted but is not gathering much momentum.

- Mauritians are not only the largest consumers of chicken and eggs in Africa but from the population standpoint, we are also the most
efficient producer in terms of per capita production.

- However, the country still imports meat from other poultry species (ducks, turkeys, quails, etc.) and pre-cooked poultry products.

- In recent years, the import of processed poultry products rose from 1,200 tonnes in 2006 to 3,800 tonnes in 2014, equivalent to around 8% of total production.

- It may be relevant here for me to briefly mention the important steps taken by Government that laid the foundation for the
development of the poultry industry in Mauritius.

- During the colonial days and until the early fifties, poultry production in Mauritius was still characterized by small indigenous flocks kept especially in the villages.

- Predators and diseases killed over 50% of the flocks. Productivity in terms of meat and eggs from the available local breeds was low and a large proportion of our requirements had to be imported.
• With the arrival in the country of one Dr J.D. Shuja in 1956, a veterinarian whose services were made available to Mauritius by the Colonial Administration, poultry breeding took a start.

• A Poultry Breeding Centre was created within the Ministry of Agriculture in 1959 in a record time of six months with direct labour from the staff of the Ministry.
• In late 1959, a nucleus stock of White leghorn and Rhode Island Red was imported from Australia.

• Other layer breeds followed from the United Kingdom and by 1961, the Poultry Breeding Centre was already producing and distributing day old chicks to small holders.

• A few months later, broiler breeders were imported and day old broiler chicks were supplied to small holders as well as private entrepreneurs.
• Convinced about the success of broiler production, the local private sector did not hesitate to invest heavily in broiler and egg production.

• Within a few years, vertically integrated operations comprising parent stock, hatcheries, feed mills, slaughter houses and processing plants were firmly established and imports of frozen chickens almost disappeared.
I must here place on record the zeal and dedication that some officers of the Ministry showed to ensure the success of the industry.

I am particularly pleased to see amongst us today Mr Younous Aumjaud, whom I am told has been a true pioneer in that field. Thank you Mr Aumjaud.

I will fail in my duty if I do not mention the contribution of Mr Michel de Speville whom I understand gained initial experience by raising broiler chicks obtained from the Government.
Poultry Breeding Centre, in his garage and soon after launched the first large fully integrated poultry operation in Mauritius.

- I should also thank Sir René Seeyave who followed suit especially in the field of broiler production.

- I am pleased to see Messrs Jean Baptiste Wiehe, Bernard Montochio and Varma Aubeeluck just to mention a few, who have also contributed immensely to the development of the chicken and egg industry in this country.
• Government, having now successfully played its pioneering role in promoting poultry and egg production, the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security has toned down the production of day old layer and broiler chicks as these can readily be supplied by the industrial sector.

• However, poultry and egg production being a dynamic process and not without risk, my Ministry continues to remain in a state of alert to curb any lack of chicken on the market as seen by the shortage of broiler chicks on the market recently.
• My Ministry is now studying the possibilities of encouraging the production of other species namely ducks and turkeys that, I am given to understand, are raised by some 300 backyard farmers.

• Despite the astounding success of the industry, I am informed that there are serious challenges ahead. These include but are not limited to the following:

(1) The industry is highly dependent on imported raw materials for feed manufacture and despite efforts made by feed
manufacturers to remain resilient to price increases, high feed costs continue to represent the most important constraint to poultry production. This seriously weakens our competitiveness with respect to products coming from Europe and Brazil where costs of production are relatively much lower.

(2) Contrary to the common belief, Mauritius is not free from major animal diseases including those affecting poultry.

I am informed that with the exception of highly pathogenic avian influenza, which I hope will never be introduced in the island
territories of Mauritius, almost all poultry diseases exist in Mauritius.

I am also informed that in addition to specific infectious diseases, most of which are preventable by good management and vaccination, some disease syndromes such as colibacillosis mainly predisposed by poor biosecurity and absence of vaccination, are responsible for economic losses exceeding 3 million US dollars annually to the industry.

(3) My Ministry is presently very concerned about animal disease control in Mauritius. Recent events regarding foot and mouth
disease have shown how vulnerable we are regarding border control.

Despite the stringent control measures exerted over imported animals and animal products, foot and mouth disease virus managed to gain entry in the country almost a century after it was eradicated in Mauritius.

(4) My Ministry is fully aware of the enormous challenges facing our Veterinary Services. International Organisations such as the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have drawn our
attention to serious deficiencies of our Veterinary Services in terms of infrastructure, equipment and more importantly with respect to technical expertise.

My Ministry has initiated actions to address those weaknesses. The role of Official Veterinary Officers will be reviewed with more emphasis being placed on diagnosis, surveillance and disease control and regulatory issues regarding import and export of animals and animal products.

Emphasis will also be placed on training of technical staff at the various levels. The
Animal Disease Act of 1925 is currently being reviewed to address the various shortcomings observed over the years.

The Mauritius Veterinary Council Act will be amended to allow veterinary para-professionals to play a more active role in livestock development and to ensure that veterinarians play the role expected of them, efficiently and in accordance with international standards.

(5) The Animal Health Laboratory constructed in 1962 within six months using labour from the Ministry staff, has so far played a vital role
in the diagnosis of animal diseases. Regrettably, the services provided by that laboratory have significantly decreased over recent years.

This laboratory requires a complete uplifting not only in terms of equipment and materials but also in terms of veterinary expertise.

I am aware that the major poultry companies have their own diagnostic laboratories for the diagnosis of common diseases but they remain highly dependent on foreign laboratories for the diagnosis of important diseases, as the Government does not provide these services.
There is a clear need for a modern diagnostic poultry laboratory based on a public-private partnership scheme.

My Ministry will be pleased to take the lead in the creation of such a laboratory and I take this opportunity to encourage the private sector to give due consideration to this proposal.

(6) Mauritius is well geared to produce chicks and chickens for exports. Already we export day old chicks to several countries in Africa but we could target other regions as well.

For this to happen, producers need to enhance their competitiveness and biosecurity and the
Veterinary Services need to enhance their international credibility on inspections and certifications, a *sine qua non* condition for exports.

The country is free from highly pathogenic avian influenza and a few poultry processing establishments have been upgraded to international norms.

With some extra efforts, the Veterinary Services can create “compartments” free from Newcastle disease and all these factors can lay the foundation for Mauritius to export poultry and poultry products to “Niche” markets.
It is my sincere wish that this would soon become a reality.

(7) Despite our self-sufficiency, we still import about 8% of our needs. Most of these are in the form of processed products, imported from Europe or Brazil. As a member of the WTO, we do not think it proper to ban all such imports although all these products can be manufactured in Mauritius.

The Five Year Strategic Plan developed by my Ministry for 2016-2020 spells out clearly my vision and my mission.
The Plan also stresses on Agro-processing that provides business opportunities contributing to improved human nutrition, generation of employment and mainstreaming women in the agricultural sector.

In this respect and in order to increase the competitiveness of the sector, my Ministry, through the Food Technology Laboratory and FAREI have developed programmes to assist poultry operators and new entrepreneurs to engage in further processing of poultry meat.

I hope that private entrepreneurs will seize the opportunity to produce similar if not better
processed poultry products for local use and hence decrease the country’s dependence on processed poultry products.

• I would not like to end my speech without saying a few words on safety of poultry meat and eggs. The problem of Samonella clearly shows how vulnerable the sector is.

• Local experts believe that like elsewhere, feed intoxications arising out of consumption of poultry meat and poultry products are an important source of food poisoning in Mauritius.
• It is believed that the vast majority of cases go undetected or are misdiagnosed basically because of inadequate diagnostic laboratory facilities.

• It is well established that millions of illnesses, thousands of hospitalizations and hundreds of deaths occur in industrialised countries every year following intoxications by organisms such as Salmonella and Campylobacter most of which originate from poultry.

• In this respect, I urge the Food Technology Laboratory of my Ministry that is being further
equipped and modernized following the last Budget, to work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Veterinary Services and also the Department of Food Science at the University of Mauritius to undertake surveys and pursue research to ensure timely detection of food borne diseases in Mauritius.

- At the same time and perhaps more importantly, I urge the large companies, providers of day old chicks as well as the Poultry Breeding Centre of my Ministry, to ensure that pathogens particularly salmonella
organisms are not carried by chicks supplied by them to breeders.

• Last but not least, my Ministry will in collaboration with other Ministries review the legislation pertaining to poultry slaughter houses.

• I am aware that some companies employ veterinarians and other professionals and have set up duly accredited programmes to ensure the safety of their products prior to release for sale to the public.
• However, it is common knowledge that there is a serious lack of hygiene in many poultry abattoirs or in public places where poultry is offered for sale. Appropriate legislations will be introduced to ensure inter alia:

- Licensing and monitoring of poultry slaughterhouses;

- Inspection and certification of poultry meat;

- Monitoring of imported meat at entry ports; and

Control over the use of veterinary pharmaceutical products in the animal industry.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Before ending, I wish the WPSA (Mauritius Branch) and all of you a good continuation of the programme regarding the celebrations of your 20th anniversary and hope that you will continue to contribute significantly towards the success of the industry.

I wish you well and thank you for your attention.