



Office of
the Prime Minister

PRIME MINISTER HON. PHILIP EDWARD DAVIS

CONTRIBUTION TO PARLIAMENT ON

BAHAMAS AGRICULTURE AND MARINE

SCIENCE INSTITUTE BILL, 2022

FEBRUARY 16TH, 2022

Madam Speaker,

I rise today in support of the Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute Bill 2022, which will facilitate our progress towards a better future for this country.

Food Security

In our Blueprint for Change, this administration paid keen attention to the issue of food security. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the critical supply chain issues and related costs that have driven prices up, it is clear that we cannot return to business as usual in this country when it comes to reducing imports and making steps towards balancing the trade deficit. One of the first areas we will majorly push towards is food security. The Bahamas must begin to feed itself!

Madam Speaker,

Food security must be embedded in our national development plan, and it must be at the forefront of strategic development goals. In our Blueprint for Change, we committed to providing resources and access to funding for agriculture and fisheries-related enterprises. Our farmers and fishers will play a vital role in the new paradigm that emerges over five years.

When the former PLP administration launched BAMSI over seven years ago, it was with the vision of a day when Bahamian farmers played a significant role in feeding the country. We knew then what we know now: to build an industry-led and owned by

Bahamians; we must prepare and educate the next generation of leaders and innovators in the field to have financial and creative capital to meet these lofty goals.

Institutions like BAMSI work at the foundational level in nation-building. Through education and access to opportunities, we will address existing socioeconomic inequalities and diversify the avenues for wealth generation in The Bahamas.

Of course, this work won't be easy. Guiding the local agriculture and fisheries industries to the next level is heavy for any government. Fortunately, in the Member of Parliament for Central and South Eleuthera, we have a Minister of Agriculture who is more than up to the task.

He wants to bring the "sexy" back to the industry.

More and more, you talk to young people in this country, and you hear them say that they are studying sustainable farming, agribusiness, horticulture, and other related fields. There was a time when to explore these areas meant you intended to leave the country. People would ask you, "well, where are you gonna use that?" Because, of course, the impression was that there was no opportunity for farmers in The Bahamas.

Looking around, we can see farmers markets springing up and more local businesses that use homegrown agricultural products within their manufacturing processes. The progress is slow, but we are changing the perception of farming as a viable career in this country, and we are making it sexy again.

By leveraging advancements in agricultural techniques and tapping into the latest technologies, we find more efficient and sustainable ways of growing the industry. Take a look at Eden Farms – soon to be Eden Acres – as an example of what is possible within our borders. That one initiative is expected to significantly impact the number of food products imported into the country. These pioneering young Bahamians are taking advantage of containerised agriculture and AI, which allows for a consistent and efficient yield in a country vulnerable to the impacts of major hurricanes and the forces of climate change.

But just having one Eden Farms isn't the goal. Our objective is to empower young Bahamians to see these kinds of innovative, nation-building initiatives springing up all over The Bahamas. It should be a source of pride for all that successive PLP governments have laid the groundwork for future success in this area.

BAMSI

Madam Speaker,

The Progressive Liberal Party as an organisation prides itself on laying the foundation required for our collective national development. Much of that development happens through the national institutions that we have launched that continue to contribute to the strength of our nation.

With BAMSI, we understood from the onset that if we met the challenges of genuinely addressing food security, we had to educate people in the skills necessary to build a modern agricultural industry.

I cannot express my disappointment that the previous administration did not value using BAMSI to re-energize agriculture as a career pathway for our young people. The issues of national development, food security, and creating opportunity for our people must transcend politics. We must have the political maturity to embrace continuity in developmental plans. As a former Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources himself, the Member for Marco City, I'm sure that I would agree with the central role that agriculture must play in our continued national development.

And BAMSI will play a massive role in that development.

Madam Speaker,

BAMSI is a catalyst for growth for the Androsian people. My colleagues from both sides of the political aisle must agree that it is in all our interest to wake up the sleeping GIANT that is Andros. We are talking about the largest landmass in The Bahamas, which contains one of the world's largest natural marine nursery systems producing fish that feed an entire region if there is an island ripe with potential for agriculture and marine resources Andros.

Imagine what happens when we prioritise investing in research, sustainable development, and opportunities for our people. This should not just be an exciting prospect for the people of Andros; it should excite the entire country.

BAMSI is the answer to how we nurture local talent as a nation while leveraging the Bahamian people's intellectual might to solve the age-old problem of feeding ourselves. Education is the critical first step in empowering our next generation of sustainable businesses.

The next step is to secure opportunities for our people. This is why my Government, in our Blueprint for Change, committed to establishing the Agricultural Marine Development Bank – to go beyond education and provide financing for agribusiness to improve the scalability of the industry and build capacity.

We have to ensure that Bahamians work at every level within this growing industry – from the ground floor straight up to the executive suite. And most of all, we must prioritise creating opportunities for Bahamian ownership within the industry. Our people will build this industry with their own hands, and they deserve to own a piece of the pie.

Thanks to bright Bahamian minds like the member for Central and South Eleuthera and BAMSI president, Senator Dr. Erecia Hepburn, who has vast experience in the field and is one of our foremost experts in Agricultural Policy and Agricultural Economics, I am confident that we can successfully make this transition towards a prosperous and

sustainable future in agriculture and fisheries within The Bahamas. Many other bright, young minds emerge who will accomplish far more than what we can imagine with the foundation that we are building for them.

Tackling the Issue of Price Inflation

Madam Speaker,

Our country remains challenged by this inflationary period. Rising shipping and fuel costs, the breakdown of the global supply chain, and other economic and logistical challenges have exposed a core vulnerability in our national development model.

Without the ability to contribute in a meaningful way to feeding our people, we are entirely at the mercy of global trade winds when importing food into our country.

As these costs have risen internationally, Bahamians have seen prices rise locally.

What's even scarier than the costs of being dependent on international forces beyond our control is that the supply itself is dependent. Should an international crisis ever occur that delivers a crippling shock to the global shipping industry, we would be hard-pressed to bring in enough food to feed our nation over the short-to-medium term.

While this is an extreme scenario, we live through a revolutionary method right now in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we emerge from this pandemic, we must take lessons away from this crisis to mitigate the impact of future problems should they occur.

The lessons of price inflation and supply issues have shown us that the time for talk to grow our food is over. This is a time for action.

The role of BAMSI, BAIC, and the Ministry of Agriculture must be to advance domestic industries to fill the gaps for bringing Bahamian grown produce to market to offset the cost to Bahamian consumers. This means that we must find sustainable, efficient, and cost-effective ways to get this done so that our products can be competitive in the local market, both at a cost and quality level. Government policies and funding priorities will go a long way towards realising this reality.

Conclusion

Madam Speaker,

I believe that there is a brighter future in store for The Bahamas. My government remains committed to creating a fair and more equitable society for everyone. BAMSI has a vital role as we take steps towards that vision. Of course, we're not talking about something that will be achieved in a day or two. This is a vision that spans years, decades even. When a painter puts the first stroke of his brush on the canvas, he can often already envision the painting as it will be when completed. Onlookers will not be able to see what he is creating with that first stroke, but they will learn to appreciate what he is doing by the time he is finished.

BAMSI was launched amidst much criticism. We all remember it. In BAMSI, we have a first stroke in what will eventually amount to a finished work in creating sustainable

opportunities for enterprising Bahamian entrepreneurs and enhancing food security for the nation.

I fully support the BAMSI 2022 Bill, and I look forward to all of the exciting developments that will emerge as a result.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

And may God continue to bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.