

Opening Statement by Minister at the SABIO Honey Fraud Workshop: 20 May 2021

Program Director

Chairperson of SABIO

Members of the Executive of SABIO

Honoured Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my singular honour and privilege that I participate in your workshop today. This workshop is taking place at the time when we are all anxious about the rising numbers of Covid-19 nationally. The Covid 19 pandemic has disrupted both our economic and social life. Given the current situation we will have to find ways in which we need to learn to live with this virus. In doing so we will have to continue using the non-pharmaceutical protocols as directed by our Ministry of Health. We also want to encourage those above 60yrs of age to register for vaccination.

It is important to appreciate what our government did in allowing that the Agricultural sector should continue to operate even during the intense lockdown level 5.

I still remember how we had to ensure that the regulations should allow the bee keepers and their workers to operate. This was critical given that Bee Keeping is part of the Agricultural sector. Secondly the demand for honey was on the increase.

This is good news for the industry, however it also spells trouble where scrupulous players commit various cases of fraud by introducing in the market products that do not meet the standards.

It is therefore important to have a workshop such as the one we are having to examine and reflect on what is happening in this industry.

Importantly this workshop is taking place during the World Bee Day.

Jose Graziano da Silva in highlighting the world bee day has this to say "World Bee Day presents an opportunity to recognize the role of beekeeping bees and other pollinators in increasing food security, improving nutrition and fighting hunger as well as in providing key ecosystem services for Agriculture"

Food and Agriculture Organisation highlight some facts and figures on the importance of this industry.

1. Three out of four crops across the globe producing fruits or seeds for human use as food depend, at least in part, on pollinators
2. Improving pollinator's density and diversity boosts crop yields- pollinators affect 35 per cent of global Agricultural land supporting the production of 87 of leading food crops worldwide.
3. Pollinator dependent food products contribute to healthy diets and nutrition.
4. Safeguarding bees safeguards biodiversity: the vast majority of pollinators are wild including over 20 000 species of bees.

Chairperson, these facts about the role of pollination and pollinators are critical in understanding the role the bee keeping industry plays in the entire value chain.

It is also important that the importance of inaction also speak to the importance of printers which are bees, birds, bads and many more. Ensuring that these pollinators continue to thrive requires a serious discussion about managing our biodiversity well.

Other issues we need to reflect on is climate change and its impact on the pollinators such as bees. Can this call for conservation of these pollinators as the debate is happening in other jurisdictions?

The changing nature of Agricultural practices might it not also pose a threat to our pollinators.

These are issues which I think as an industry we need to start to deliberate on.

Honey and other by products of honey I have spoken a bit about our Pollinators. But the sweetest product they produce is equally important for human life. Yes they make life sweet. Honey is used in a number of food products, but it also contains many other useful and beneficial substances. Some of these have been used for time immemorial by our people.

In the modern days, honey is used as a sweetener and serves as an alternative from cane sugar. It is also used in a number of beverages and other food items.

So, we need to know what genuine honey is and what is not? This is important to address issues of mislabeling and fraud. At a government level we have amended the Agriculture Products Standards Act in order to improve our regulatory framework. This will also enable us to examine claims that are at times made by producers or processors on what is actually used in the production process which makes people to make claims about their food stuff.

I do think that we will be able in this workshop to deliberate on measures that can be used to detect fraud and protect the industry.

I wish you all the success in this workshop and the celebration of "World Bee Day"

I thank you