



**Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**  
Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

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**AGR: 5/3/5 Vol. VIII**

January 14, 2025

**The Honourable Brigid Mary Annisette-George**

Speaker of the House  
Speaker's Chambers  
Office of the Parliament  
Parliamentary Complex  
The Red House  
St. Vincent Street  
Port of Spain

Dear Honourable Speaker of the House,


**The Eighteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) for the financial years 2014 to 2021 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Public Accounts Committee's Twenty-Third Report from the Eleventh Parliament**

Reference is made to your correspondence **Parl: 5/2/120 dated November 20, 2024** with subject at caption.

Please find the response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the recommendations contained in the Report at **Appendix**.

Submitted for your consideration, please.

Yours sincerely,

  
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**Ms. Nela Dwarika-Ali**  
**Permanent Secretary (Ag.)**

**OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARY**

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**Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**  
**Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries**

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER  
Senator the Honourable Haji Kazim Hosein

**AGR: 5/3/5 Vol. VIII**

14<sup>th</sup> January, 2025

The Honourable Brigid Mary Annisette-George  
Speaker of the House  
Speaker's Chambers  
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PORT OF SPAIN

Dear Speaker of the House,

**The Eighteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) for the financial years 2014 to 2021 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Public Accounts Committee's Twenty-Third Report from the Eleventh Parliament**

Reference is made to your correspondence **Parl: 5/2/120 dated 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2024** with subject at caption.

Please find the response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the recommendations contained in the Report at **Appendix**.

Submitted for your consideration, please.

Yours sincerely,

**Haji Kazim Hosein**  
**MINISTER**

**Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries**  
**Corner Narsaloo Ramaya Marg Road & Soogrim Trace, Chaguanas, Trinidad, W.I**  
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## APPENDIX

**Comments of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries on the Eighteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) for the financial years 2014 to 2021 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Public Accounts Committee's Twenty-Third Report from the Eleventh Parliament**

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The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (MALF) reviewed Eighteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) for the financial years 2014 to 2021 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Public Accounts Committee's Twenty-Third Report from the Eleventh Parliament.

The MALF provides input towards the recommendations proposed to improve the operations of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) as follows:

### 1. Status of Outstanding Audited Financial Statements

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
(i.) NAMDEVCO should provide a status update on the submission of its financial statements for financial years 2023 to the AGD for audit by January 14, 2025	(i.) The NAMDEVCO has indicated that the financial statements were submitted to the Auditor General's Department on August 23, 2024.

### 2. Auditor's Opinions on NAMDEVCO's Financial Statements

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
(i.) The Commissioner of State Lands (COSL) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries should provide Parliament with an update on the preparation of the leases for all properties used by NAMDEVCO by January 14, 2025.	(i.) The COSL has indicated that in 2023, the NAMDEVCO requested leases prepared for all its sites. The COSL requested the NAMDEVCO to nominate Land Surveyor(s) to prepare cadastral survey plans to attach to the various leases. The COSL are awaiting the survey plans from NAMDEVCO.

### 3. Government Subvention

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>(i.) The MALF should report to Parliament on the result of its review of Draft Estimates submitted by NAMDEVCO for each FY from 2014 to 2021 detailing the difference, if any, between the sum initially requested by the NAMDEVCO and the sum submitted to the MOF and providing the rationale for the changes made by January 14, 2025</p>	<p>(i.) The Estimates for Recurrent Expenditure would have differed if the Ministry of Finance requested the MALF to reduce its estimates by a percentage to meet the financial ceiling imposed.</p>

### 4. Strategic Plan

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>(i.) NAMDEVCO should submit the following to Parliament regarding its 2022-2025 Strategic Plan by January 14, 2025:</p> <p>a. A document outlining the steps undertaken to ensure compliance with OPR regulations in the selection of the consultant for the development of the Plan</p>	<p>(i.) The NAMDEVCO submitted the following status:</p> <p>a. The steps undertaken to ensure compliance with OPR regulations in the selection of the consultant for the development of the Plan include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request for Proposals (RFP) Ref: REC/001/2023 Consultancy Services - Development a Five (5) year Strategic Plan was developed;</li> <li>• Consultants were shortlisted from the Procurement Depository (Line of Business – 80101504 – Strategic planning consultation services and market research;</li> <li>• RFPs were sent electronically to the shortlisted consultants;</li> <li>• Deadline date for submission of proposals June 2, 2023;</li> <li>• Proposals were opened June 20, 2023;</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposals were evaluated on November 15, 2023 as per evaluation and scoring criteria set out in the Request for Proposal document; and</li> <li>• A Note to Board was submitted by Management on January 31, 2024 with a recommendation to approve selection of the RFP with the highest score.</li> </ul>
<p>b. The anticipated timeline and estimated cost for the development of the Plan.</p>	<p>b. The anticipated timeline for the development of the plan was fifteen (15) weeks from the date of issue of the contract at an estimated cost of \$180,200 (VAT exclusive).</p>
<p>(ii.) The NAMDEVCO should submit to Parliament an update on the status of the development of the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan and the approaches developed to ensure a more proactive approach to the development of the strategic plans in the future by January 14, 2025.</p>	<p>(ii.) Due to lack of availability of funding the consultants have not been engaged. The NAMDEVCO will seek alternative revenue streams to secure funding for the development of future strategic plans and develop in-house capacity to prepare Strategic Plans in the future.</p>
<p>(iii.) NAMDEVCO should identify the expanded services that it could offer in an attempt to broaden its revenue base and, if feasible, an estimate of the positive effect that these additional services could have on NAMDEVCO's internally generated revenue</p>	<p>(iii.) Some services that can be expanded to broaden revenue include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sub lease of Packinghouses (Public Private Partnership arrangement);</li> <li>- Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification;</li> <li>- Low temperature storage facilities at Orange Valley Wholesale Fish market;</li> <li>- Car Park rental;</li> <li>- Food Court Operation;</li> <li>- Sale of Technology Packages;</li> <li>- Training programmes; and</li> <li>- Increase user fees per market.</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
	<p>It is not feasible at this time to estimate the amount of revenue that can be generation from these additional services in the absence of stakeholder consultations.</p>
<p>(iv.) NAMDEVCO should report to Parliament on the following regarding the opportunities identified in its SWOT analysis by January 14, 2025:</p> <p>a. The ways in which the Corporation could work with the ADB to promote agricultural enterprise development.</p>	<p>(iv.) The NAMDEVCO can collaborate with the ADB to promote agricultural enterprise development through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Capacity building and training</b> in financial literacy, management of loans, development of business plans, and financial management skills;</li> <li>- <b>Support for agro processing enterprises</b> to provide financing and market access to agro-processing businesses by identifying export markets, organizing trade fairs, and building linkages to commercial buyers;</li> <li>- <b>Market Linkages</b> to connect agricultural enterprises to regional and international markets while ADB can provide the financing;</li> <li>- <b>Export Financing</b> to support agricultural enterprises that are interested in exporting their products and ADB can provide financing for packaging, certification, and other export-related costs.</li> </ul>
<p>b. The ways in which the Corporation could work with the Trade and Investment Promotion Agency to boost exports in the agricultural sector.</p>	<p>b. The NAMDEVCO and the Trade and Investment Promotion Agency can continue to collaborate in various ways to boost exports in the agricultural sector including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Market Research and Intelligence</b> to identify high-demand agricultural products in international markets;</li> <li>- <b>Trade Missions and Fairs</b> can be organized to showcase Trinidad and Tobago's</li> </ul>



Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
	<p>agricultural products to global buyers, increasing visibility and creating business opportunities for local producers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Training and Capacity Building</b> through export readiness programs for local agricultural businesses;</li> <li>- <b>Certifications and Standards</b> to help agricultural producers obtain the necessary certifications to access specific export markets; and</li> <li>- <b>Regional Trade and Export Networks</b> to leverage existing regional and international trade agreements to expand export opportunities.</li> </ul>

### 5. Human Resources Capacity Challenges

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>(i.) NAMDEVCO should provide the following to Parliament by January 14, 2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A list of the critical skills which need to be brought into the organization;</li> <li>b. A list of the posts filled since May 01, 2024 public hearing; and</li> <li>c. An explanation of whether the newly recruited staff have fully addressed the Corporation's skills gap</li> </ul>	<p>(i.) The NAMDEVCO provided the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The critical skills which need to be brought in to the organization include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project management;</li> <li>• Sustainability and Environmental Management in developing eco-friendly and sustainable development strategies;</li> <li>• Change Management;</li> <li>• Capacity building;</li> <li>• Public relations and communications;</li> <li>• Digital Transformation and Information Technology;</li> <li>• Monitoring and Evaluation;</li> <li>• Risk Management;</li> <li>• Data Analytics and Market Research;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supply Chain and Logistics Management;</li> <li>• Agribusiness Development; and</li> <li>• Human Resource Management.</li> </ul> <p>b. The list of positions filled since May 01, 2024 includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager Quality Assurance;</li> <li>• Research Assistant I (2);</li> <li>• Procurement Officer;</li> <li>• Chief Executive Officer;</li> <li>• Market Field Officer I;</li> <li>• Auditor I;</li> <li>• Special Outreach Field Officer I;</li> <li>• Special Project Team Leader;</li> <li>• Special Project Field Officer I;</li> <li>and</li> <li>• Administrative Assistant.</li> </ul> <p>The Corporation placed a hold on recruitment and selection as of October 2024 due to budgetary constraints.</p> <p>c. The newly recruited staff have been able to address some of the skills gap experienced by the Corporation. Although the budgetary constraints halted the filling of vacancies, there has been development and improvement in all functional areas across the Corporation, and it is foreseen that the desired standard will be achieved.</p>

## 6. Issues with the AgriPrice Mobile App

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>(i.) NAMDEVCO should continue its thrust toward app redevelopment addressing the issues experienced in the previous app and report to Parliament by January 14, 2025, on the status of the following:</p>	<p>(i.) The MALF acknowledged the issues regarding the finalization of the AgriPrice Mobile App and the following was noted:</p> <p>a. The Corporation has yet to commence work on this project due to a lack of funding. In June 2024, the Corporation submitted a request for grant funding to the Food and Agriculture</p>



Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>a. The new mobile app's development;</p> <p>b. The timeline for the development of the new mobile app as well as the projected cost for development;</p> <p>c. The source of funding or whether a grant was accessed; and</p> <p>d. The lesson learnt from the development and launch of the previous mobile app which were applied to the development and launch of the new mobile app.</p>	<p>Organization (FAO) however no feedback has been received.</p> <p>b. The development of the mobile application is estimated to take four (4) months from the issuance of the purchase order and the estimated cost for development is TT\$120,000.00.</p> <p>c. The Corporation has explored both grant funding and budgetary allocations for the project. Unfortunately, no positive feedback has been received from either source.</p> <p>d. The major lessons learnt include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secure a reliable funding source for ongoing maintenance;</li> <li>- Develop a comprehensive sustainability plan;</li> <li>- Ensure the Corporation has access to all source codes;</li> <li>- Establish a maintenance contract with the developer to guarantee timely updates, adhere to Google policies to prevent removal from app stores, address errors promptly, and ensure the application remains available for stakeholders at all times.</li> </ul>
<p>(ii.) NAMDEVCO upon the development of the new mobile app should consider the development of the following and provide to Parliament a</p>	<p>The considerations for the new mobile application were noted:</p> <p><b>a. Continuous Improvement Plan</b></p> <p>The Corporation has adopted a strategy to engage developers under annual support contracts. This approach ensures timely updates, error resolution, and uninterrupted</p>

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>status report by January 14, 2025:</p> <p>a. A continuous improvement plan, including regular updates and dedicated technical support, to maintain the app's reliability and relevance; and</p> <p>b. The integration of the app development into NAMDEVCO's broader digital transformation strategy, ensuring it aligns with the organization's goals for data collection, dissemination, and stakeholder engagement ensuring the app's long-term sustainability and impact.</p>	<p>availability for stakeholders, addressing the concerns highlighted above.</p> <p><b>b. Integration into NAMDEVCO's Digital Transformation Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As part of its mandate, the Corporation manages a comprehensive market information system and has consistently provided pricing information to agricultural stakeholders for the past 20 years.</li> <li>- The Corporation's investment in cutting-edge technology supports its efforts to digitize operations, improving efficiency and effectiveness.</li> <li>- The AgriPrice mobile application will be a vital tool in NAMDEVCO's broader digital transformation plan, aligning with the Government's vision for a digital economy. This initiative will further enhance data collection, dissemination, and stakeholder engagement, ensuring long-term sustainability and impact.</li> </ul> <p>In the interim, the Corporation has successfully developed and deployed two mobile applications, the <b>NAMDEVCO Market Info</b> in April 2024 and the <b>NAMDEVCO Crop Production Monitoring Application (NAMDEVCO CPMA)</b> in December 2024.</p>

## 7. Internal Audit on Cash Account

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>(i.) NAMDEVCO should to Parliament a status report on the development and implementation of staff training protocols, regular audit and reviews</p>	<p>(i.) This status update on the development and implementation of the staff training protocol, regular audits and the review of the cashless system within NAMDEVCO is as follows:</p>

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>of its cash-less system by January 14, 2025.</p>	<p>This initiative aims to enhance operational efficiency, improve staff competency, and ensure reliability and security in our financial transaction</p> <p>This project is currently on-going, focusing on a phased approach that starts with the largest market, Norris Deonarine Northern Wholesale Market (NDNWM). Collaboration was initiated with the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre to explore the feasibility of implementing a cashless system. In September 2024, an initial survey was carried out to improve understanding of the processes involved and to identify any challenges faced at the facility. Participants were exposed to various gaps, barriers, and their willingness to adopt cashless payment solutions. The development and implementation of the staff training protocol will continue alongside regular audits of the cashless system aligned with the completion process.</p>

### 8. Accounts Receivable

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>(i.) NAMDEVCO should explore alternative debt recovery strategies for small amounts, including the following and submit an update by January 14, 2025 on the strategies which could be developed in this regard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Offering settlements;</li> <li>b. Using automated systems for ongoing</li> </ul>	<p>The MALF acknowledges that the bulk of the receivables is due to NAMDEVCO are from very many vendors whose individual balances are small, old and statute barred. Notably, the Corporation has since stopped granting credit to its vendors and customers except for a few who use the Packing House facility. For those, a number of measures are being implemented an upfront payment policy to be implemented.</p> <p>However, the strategies by the PAC were considered as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <b>Offering settlements:</b> Two different collections agencies</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>reminders and collections;</p> <p>c. Utilizing print media or online platforms to publicly list outstanding debts; and</p> <p>d. Alternative legal and financial strategies to recover statute-barred debts through negotiations or settlements.</p>	<p>were employed in the past with little or no success;</p> <p>b. <b>Automated Systems:</b> The NAMDEVCO is currently upgrading its IT infrastructure before testing this strategy;</p> <p>c. <b>Print Media or online platforms:</b> Due to the age of the debts, the most appropriate strategy was to engage a collection agency;</p> <p>d. Alternative legal and financial strategies: Given the debts are statute barred, there are limited legal alternatives, however, the Corporation remains committed to recovering all debts.</p>

### 9. Customer Service Issues

Recommendation	Comment of the MALF
<p>(i.) MALF should provide Parliament with a status update, by January 14, 2025, on the implementation of ongoing training programs for frontline staff at the regional office to ensure the provision of accurate and consistent information that aligns with the Ministry's official communications outlining:</p> <p>a. Number of training programmes conducted/planned; and</p> <p>b. Number of employees targeted disaggregated by regional office.</p>	<p>(i.) The MALF provides training for its frontline staff to ensure accuracy of information to stakeholders.</p> <p>a. In 2024, six training programmes were conducted to train frontline staff;</p> <p>b. The number of employees trained include: Regional Administration North: 50; Regional Administration South: 67; and Other Frontline staff: 72</p>

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Comment of the MALF</b>
(ii.) MALF should consider establishing feedback systems to monitor the effectiveness of the training and the accuracy of information provided, allowing for continuous improvement in customer service, and report to Parliament on its plans in this regard by January 14 2025.	(i.) The MALF has an established feedback mechanism for participants of training courses. Usually the feedback is positive which reflects the appropriateness of the information provided.

**Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries**  
**January 14, 2025**