

Southwest District Mission Program, Inc.



**CUBA
SO
CLOSE....
BUT, A
WORLD
AWAY!**

YOUTH CAMP & FOOD SITUATION

Youth camp for approximately 1,000 youth will be held at Camp Canaan in July. As with youth world wide they like to eat. Our annual youth trip will be attending the camp in July. Funds are needed to help with the purchase of food for this event. Please consider making a donation and send to: Southwest District Mission Program, Inc., Attn: Dan Christopherson, 125 Treviso Court, North Venice, FL 34275

Read article below concerning the ongoing food issues in Cuba. Keep the people of Cuba in your prayers.

HAVANA, May 11th (AP) The Cuban government announced Friday that it is launching widespread rationing of chicken, eggs, rice, beans, soap and other basic products in the face of a grave economic crisis.

Commerce Minister Betsy Díaz Velázquez told the state-run Cuban News Agency that various forms of rationing would be employed in order to deal with shortages of staple foods. She blamed the hardening of the U.S. trade embargo by the Trump administration. Economists give equal or greater blame to a plunge in aid from Venezuela, where the collapse of the state-run oil company has led to a nearly two-thirds cut in shipments of subsidized fuel that Cuba used for power and to earn hard currency on the open market.

"We're calling for calm," Díaz said, adding that Cubans should feel reassured that at least cooking oil would be in ample supply. "It's not a product that will be absent from the market in any way."

Cuba imports roughly two thirds of its food at an annual cost of more than \$2 billion and

growing number of products have started to go missing for days or weeks at a time, and long lines have sprung up within minutes of the appearance of scarce products like chicken or flour. Many shoppers find themselves

still standing in line when the products run out, a problem the government has been blaming on "hoarders."

"The country's going through a tough moment. This is the right response. Without this, there'll be hoarders. I just got out of work and I was able to buy hot dogs," said Lazara García, a 56-year-old tobacco-factory worker.

At the Havana shopping center where García bought her hot dogs, cashiers received orders Friday morning to limit powdered milk to four packets per person, sausages to four packs per person and peas to five packets per person.

Manuel Ordoñez, 43, who identified himself as a small business owner, said the new measures would do nothing to resolve Cuban's fundamental problems.

"What the country needs to do is produce. Sufficient merchandise is what will lead to shorter lines," he said.

Limited rationing of certain products has already begun in many parts of the country, with stores limiting the number of items like bottles of cooking oil that a single shopper can purchase. The policy announced by Díaz appears to go further and apply the same standards across the country of 11 million people.

The Cuban economy crashed with the fall of the Soviet Union and plunged the island into a more than decade-long period of misery and hunger that ended with the arrival of subsidized Venezuelan oil in the early 2000s.

The latest shortages and rationing appear to mark the end of a phase of relative prosperity but conditions are nowhere close to the deprivation of what is known as Cuba's "special period." Cuba's highest leaders say that while tough times lie ahead, there will be no return to the worst days of the post-Soviet depression because the island has diversified its economy and built trade ties with countries around the world.

Food stores in Cuba are government-run and sell products ranging from highly subsidized to wildly overpriced by global standards. Every Cuban receives a ration book that allows them to buy small quantities of basic goods like rice, beans, eggs and sugar each month for payment equivalent to a few U.S. cents.

Cubans with enough money can buy more of those basic goods at "liberated" prices that are still generally below the world average. At the highest of Cuba's three tiers, brand-name goods from high-quality rice to

fancy jams can be purchased for often two to three times the price in their country of origin.

Díaz said chicken will now be sold in limited quantities in every type of store - with cheaper chicken limited to 11 pounds per purchase and the more expensive variety capped at two packages per purchase.

Low-priced soap, rice, bean, peas and eggs will now only be sold in limited quantities per person and controlled through the national system of ration books, she said.

Sales of those products at higher prices do not appear to be affected for the moment. The measures can be expected to have a serious impact on private business owners who often buy cheaper-priced goods at state stores in the absence of access to a wholesale market. Cuba maintains a total monopoly on wholesale commerce, imports and exports, with virtually no access for the country's small but growing private sector.

Díaz provided a grim series of statistics on food production by the state-run sector, which has found itself struggling to find the cash it needs to pay for basic inputs.

She said that in March Cuba produced 900,000 fewer eggs than the 5.7 million needed daily to satisfy national demand. That deficit shrank to 600,000 by mid-April, she said. The production of pork, the most-consumed meat in Cuba and a normally affordable staple of most people's diets, is hundreds of tons below target.

Díaz said importing food from U.S. producers had become more complicated under Trump, forcing Cuba to search for products that were more expensive and difficult to import.

"Selling limited quantities will lead to equal distribution, so that the greatest number of people can buy the product, and we can avoid hoarding," she said.

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