

Food warnings soon?

AGREEMENT ON FRONT- OF-PACKAGE LABELLING APPEARS TO BE ON HORIZON

By Marlon Madden

After months of uncertainty and failure to get enough support, the highly touted front-of-package labelling (FOPL) system to be adopted by Barbados and other Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member states appears to be just months away from becoming reality.

Coordinator of the “high in” octagonal shape FOPL standards, the CARICOM Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ), is in the process of a final review of the resubmitted documents.

Fulgence St Prix, CROSQ’s Technical Officer Responsible for Standards and Technical Regulations, told **Barbados TODAY** the review of those documents should be done “sometime this month” and once completed, it would be sent to member states who will then be expected to send back their response.

“I will give three months for the member states to respond because I know they would need to engage in extensive consultations with their stakeholders because we always ask them to do that. And then they would submit their position on it,” he said.

“So that document now has been received by the CROSQ Secretariat. I am currently



**Fulgence St Prix,
CROSQ's Technical
Officer Responsible
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in the process of reviewing it to ensure that the language is correct. Nothing is changing technically. So that is where we are now.

“Once that is completed, I will submit the standard to all member states for acceptance, along with a voting form, along with the disposition of the comments sheet so they would see how the comments that were

received during the voting period in 2021 have been addressed, and so they can make a decision accordingly. So that is where we are at with the standard at present,” he explained.

Asked if the FOPL standard would likely be implemented at the start of 2024, St Prix said there was no guarantee but it was possible depending on how member states vote this time

around.

“If I get the level of positive response that is required – that is the 75 per cent – then certainly it will be submitted to the next available COTED [Council Trade and Economic Development] or the next available joint COTED/COSHOD [Council for Human and Social Development], whichever one the CARICOM Secretariat recommends I submit it to. So there is a possibility but not something I could speak to definitively, but we are hoping that is the outcome,” he explained.

The intended “high in” octagonal shape FOPL for pre-packaged goods would indicate the level of sodium, sugars and fats in the item.

Following a high-level CARICOM meeting in 2017, a recommendation was made for the development of the FOPL as one approach to address the non-communicable disease (NCD) problem in the region. CROSQ was tasked with developing a FOPL standard, on which work began in 2018.

Following the submission of the draft of the standard in 2021, and after months of discussions and research, CARICOM member states voted on the suggested model, with six countries voting for, three against, and six abstaining. That fell short of the 75 per cent support needed for it to be approved.

The CARICOM Private Sector Organisation (CPSO) then embarked on a study for a new proposal to be put forward. The report from that study along with concerns and a FOPL study done in Jamaica were submitted to the technical committee for consideration.

Countries were expected to review the documents and give their position, which they did by the end of March this year. The majority indicated that they supported the existing format and label that was in the standard.
marlonmadden@barbadostoday.bb

PAREDOS boss: Obstacles to families expanding must be removed to increase population

By Jenique Belgrave

Government must use a holistic approach if it wants to encourage Barbadians to have more children.

Director of the Parent Education for Development in Barbados (PAREDOS) Cecily Clarke-Richmond said if the island, which has one of the lowest population growth rates in the Caribbean, wants to turn the situation around, deterrents to families expanding must be addressed.

Last week, economist Jeremy Stephen suggested that with population growth declining, the Government should offer incentives to families to have more children.

“If the Government was giving me a \$10 000 tax break for a child, I would have had ten children a long time ago. . . . This is how governments promote birth rates, and increasing birth rates all over the world is a government-led thing, and in our society, where we expect governments to lead, you would expect it should be a government-led initiative,” he said.

Agreeing that the heavy price tag attached to raising children is a major deterrent for some persons, Clarke-Richmond told **Barbados TODAY**: “We need to fix a lot of the problems that we have here with regards to parenting, with regards to children, before we look to give persons money to have children if that becomes a resort.”

She said thought must go beyond the

basic cost of necessities like food, shelter and clothing if the birth rate is to increase.

With many parents having demanding jobs, Clarke-Richmond pointed out that businesses in some countries have already gone the route of offering on-site daycare facilities.

“Daycare is expensive and the grandmothers are not around anymore, so you have to find somebody else to take care of your child or to take it to the nursery and if you cannot afford the nursery, then there you have it,” she said.

Clarke-Richmond also suggested that some people did not want to deal with the overburdened public health care system.

“Obviously, you know that if you go to the hospital or the polyclinic to get any sort of service, you have to wait and you have to go through so much stress. So you need to fix a lot of the problems that would make people scared of thinking of having to go through that on a continuous basis.

“If your child happens to be a special needs child, that is another kettle of fish that you have to deal with, and in a lot of ways, you have to deal with this on your own,” she explained.

The PAREDOS director said research should be carried out “to examine why couples are not having children, and why women are not having as many children as they had in the past”.

She said that information would be critical in any attempts to increase the population.

jeniquebelgrave@barbadostoday

**Director of the
Parent Education
for Development in
Barbados
(PAREDOS) Cecily
Clarke-Richmond.**

