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A FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY POLICY FOR BELIZE

Government of Belize
February 2001

A FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY POLICY FOR BELIZE



Mission: To ensure the sustainable supply, accessibility and use of safe, high quality, nutritious, diversified and culturally-acceptable foods for all Belizeans, in order to improve their well-being and quality of life.

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Foreword

Food and Nutrition Security is "the guarantee that all individuals, families and the general population have access in terms of quality and quantity to the food that they need for adequate intake and biological utilization to ensure a healthy and socially productive life". This is the vision that we have for our Belizean population, that all will enjoy food and nutrition security. We are proud to present this policy, which is the tool that can lead to the realization of that vision.

We are convinced that food and nutrition security is possible for the country of Belize. Our country already produces enough food to supply all its citizens and in sufficient variety to ensure nutritious diets. Unfortunately some portions of the population are at risk of food insecurity due to a lack of purchasing power, resulting in limited access to the food that they need. Some rural groups, the elderly, the disabled, single income households, and female - headed households in urban centers are also at risk. The vulnerability of our population in the event of disaster also poses risks of food insecurity.

This Food and Nutrition Policy outlines the strategies, which will counter these threats to food security. A total of six programs are included which will facilitate the education of the public; the increase in food production, food safety, the generation of income, school feeding, nutrition of the elderly and nutrition of other indigent groups. Most importantly, the policy outlines a strategy for coordination of actions. We are aware of the complexity of this mission. The issue of food and nutrition security is complex and care must be taken to ensure proper management and coordination in order to achieve success.

Our Government is committed to the reduction of poverty as a strategy toward sustainable human development. This policy has the potential to contribute to poverty reduction and complements our other policies and programs which strive to address social deficiencies. It also emphasizes a respect for the environment and the preservation of our natural resources, another important factor in the enhancement of the quality of life for our Belizean people.

We take this opportunity to thank the communities that played a vital role in the assessment which led to the development of this policy. We also want to thank our partners in development, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Institute of Nutrition for Central America and Panama (INCAP), the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA), for their support.

To the implementers and those who will give life to the strategies outlined in the policy, we pledge our support for this policy. We trust that the guidelines provided herein will be a useful tool as you set out to achieve the task with which you are charged. We wish you every success in its implementation.



Hon. Daniel Silva
Minister of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Cooperatives



Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia
Minister of Human
Development, Women and Civil Society



Hon. Jose Coye
Minister of Health
and Public Service

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Although Belize has made substantial social and economic progress, as corroborated by recent assessments by national and international authorities, several studies point to unacceptable levels of poverty, food consumption, nutritional and health problems.

Of the Belizean population 33-54% is estimated to be at risk for food insecurity, due to a lack of purchasing power which prevents their access to food. These groups include young people, the elderly, the disabled, female-headed households and other indigent groups of the rural areas. Furthermore, trade liberalization and the high level of food imports restrict our local productive sector, reduce gainful employment and drain valuable foreign exchange. Current statistics show that under-nutrition measured as weight-for-age is present in 6.2% of children under five years old. A National Height Census conducted among school children six to nine years old in 1996 found fifteen per cent of growth retardation. Anaemia among pregnant women is high. Although these problems are daunting, the country of Belize has accepted the challenge to ensure Food and Nutrition Security for its people.

Food and Nutrition Security is defined as the state in which all persons enjoy access in terms of quantity and quality to the food that they need for adequate consumption and biological utilization, thus guaranteeing a healthy and socially productive life. The development programs being implemented in the country and which support the achievement of this goal include the following:

- The alleviation of poverty through education, health care improvement, crime prevention and overall equitable human development, with special attention to the marginalized and impoverished.
- The Social Investment Fund (SIF) that responds to the basic human needs of the poorest of the poor in Belize, using a community and participatory approach.
- The establishment of the Small Farmers and Business Bank and Micro-Enterprise Credit Scheme aimed at improving access to credit at reasonable rates and creating economic opportunity for the poorest of the poor.
- Institutionalization of the Sustainable Human Development Program to develop human capacity, leadership and participation for local, community initiatives.
- Establishment of the Community-Initiated Agriculture and Rural Development Project and Toledo Development Cooperation to address socio-economic development priorities in the southern region.

As a signatory to the international conventions resulting from the International Conference on Nutrition in 1992 and to the World Food Summit of 1996, Belize stands to benefit technically and financially from international assistance. This will allow the country to meet its national food and nutrition security goals and to secure the envisaged optimal and sustainable quality of life for present and future generations of Belizeans.

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POLICY STATEMENT

The policy for **National Food and Nutrition Security** can be stated briefly as follows:

Mission: To ensure the sustainable supply, accessibility and use of safe, high quality, nutritious, diversified and culturally-acceptable foods for all Belizeans, in order to improve their well-being and quality of life.

Mission Objectives:

1. Develop sustainable, equitable and environmentally sound policies, plans and programs for food and nutrition security.
2. Design achievable plans for food and nutrition security improvement with the effective participation of all people in the decisions, actions and evaluation at all levels.
3. Ensure sufficient supply and continued access to a variety of safe foods and drinking water so that people, especially the poor and vulnerable groups, can have nutritionally adequate diets, even during periods of bad harvests, natural and human-caused disasters.
4. Ensure adequate intake of macro and micronutrients combined with adequate health care, especially for women, children, the elderly and marginalized throughout the country.
5. Improve food safety and nutrition through the regulation and surveillance of the food chain including the production, industrialization, marketing and handling of food products.
6. Improve the motivation, knowledge, skills, and entrepreneurship of all stakeholders, for food and nutrition security.

The achievement of these six mission objectives will lead to unprecedented levels of food security, nutrition security and food safety for all Belizean populations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. **Multi-sectoral Approach** to each program involving government, private sector and non-governmental organizations and civil society.
2. **Promotion of Partnerships**, collaboration and joint financing arrangements among the public sector, the private sector, communities and international agencies.
3. **The Development of Human and Institutional Capacity** supported and promoted in all initiatives related to this policy.



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4. **Grass-roots Driven** to facilitate consultation in establishing local needs, priorities and projects.
5. **Equity** of access to all services promoted under this policy to be ensured for all vulnerable groups including grass roots, indigents and the elderly.
6. **Targeting** priority areas and groups, which are at risk and therefore require urgent attention, such as villages in the Toledo, Stann Creek, Belize and Cayo Districts, elderly and indigent groups.
7. **Gender-sensitive** to further promote and ensure equity in development.
8. **Iterative Planning** process in all operations (i.e. diagnose, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate), which will require periodic planning and review meetings to analyze priorities and needs, assess results and achievements, and coordinate plans for all regions and districts of Belize.
9. **Respect for the Environment**, to prevent any negative effects, so than even while we strive to increase production, our natural resources will be preserved for future generations of Belizeans.

STRATEGY

To achieve the mission and objectives and facilitate adherence to the guiding principles, the following organizational arrangements, criteria for setting priorities among projects, and indicators to measure the medium and long - term performance of this policy, are proposed:

Management and Coordination

1. A Food and Nutrition Commission, chaired by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives, will be established. The Food and Nutrition Commission will be comprised of representatives from the Ministries of Health and Public Service, Human Development, Women and Civil Society, of Rural Development, Education and Sports and one representative each from the NGO community and the private sector. There will be two persons representing the districts of Belize.
2. The Commission will meet periodically to review the implementation of the policy and programs and will be responsible for the mobilization of financial, technical and logistical resources, and will report to Cabinet periodically.
3. The Food and Nutrition Commission will be supported by a Secretariat and Coordinator, which will a) develop and recommend policy improvements, strategic (5 year) and operational (annual) plans, allocation of human, technical, financial resources, and b) monitor and evaluate program operations and achievements.
4. The Commission will be assisted in all its operations by several existing programs and committees working throughout the country.



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5. The secretariat and commission shall ensure that the Food and Nutrition Security Policy are planned in an integrated manner and implemented in partnership with other relevant institutions and programs in the public and private sectors, and with Civil Society.

Criteria for Setting Priorities:

1. Priority and urgency for local communities and target groups including the elderly and indigent
2. Harmony with national priorities/policies and political acceptability
3. Vulnerability to human-caused and natural disasters of vulnerable groups including children under five years old, pregnant women, the elderly and select indigent communities.
4. Expected impact of the project
5. Compatibility with existing capacity and resources
6. Potential cooperation and support from the private sector and from international agencies

Impact Indicators:

1. Proportion of population with access to essential food basket
2. Production and availability of essential food commodities
3. Nutritional status of vulnerable groups
4. Morbidity and mortality of the Belizean population resulting from food and water-borne diseases
5. Value of food import/export balance
6. Number of hygienically certified, food handling establishments
7. Services from a national food and nutrition rapid alert system.
8. Nutrition surveillance system in place.

PROGRAMS

Six basic programs, each with clear terms of reference, are presented as an operational framework to organize projects and activities. Some projects are already ongoing, and they can be amplified and strengthened according to these terms of reference. New projects to address existing gaps, weaknesses and complement ongoing projects, need to be identified, developed and prioritized using the criteria presented above. The first four programs respond directly to the felt needs and suggestions of the most affected communities, households and local change agents, whereas the last two are justified on nation-wide considerations and priorities. Both sets of programs are complementary and essential.

1. Information, Education and Communication on Food Production, Preparation, and Nutrition

This program seeks to educate all segments of the population to better understand their roles in food production, the principles of food preparation and the fundamentals of good nutrition and healthy lifestyles practices.



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OBJECTIVES:

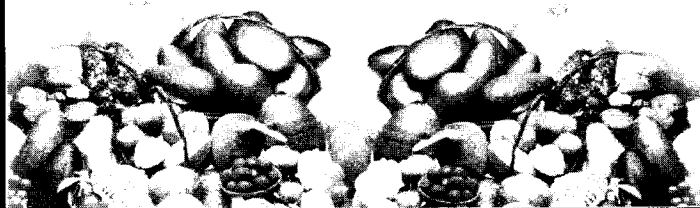
- To train communities in nutrition education, backyard gardening, hydroponics, and use of dietary guidelines.
- To teach agriculture, nutrition and food utilization in the formal, informal and alternate school systems at primary, secondary and post secondary levels.
- To raise awareness of women of childbearing age about the importance of nutrient supplementation related to pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- To promote the marketing of local complementary infant foods.
- To create radio and media messages to inform the general public and vulnerable groups.
- To promote healthy lifestyles among all groups through proper food selection and exercise.

OUTPUTS:

- Increased awareness among communities and households regarding nutrient values, dietary guidelines and the importance of using local foods
- Children and families trained in production, nutrition and utilization of local crops, livestock, homegardens, agroforestry and the management of micro-enterprises
- Increased percentage of pregnant women completing iron supplementation schemes
- Increased number of practical classes for food preparation, handling and storage introduced into the curricula
- The Rural Education and Agricultural Project (REAP) revived
- Dietary Guidelines developed in accordance with the Belizean culture
- Broader dissemination of nutrition information and skills by means of the media, fairs and other events and special programs for immigrant workers, families, elderly and indigent groups
- Increased implementation of programs for adolescent and parents aimed at reducing alcohol and drug consumption, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS:

- Volunteers from the community trained by the Breast is Best League; Community Health Workers/Community Nurses Aides; Public Health Nurses; Belize Family Life Association; Belize Organization for Women and Development; Society for the Promotion of Education and Research; National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse; National Drug Abuse Control Council; Belize Diabetes Association; Belize Council for the Visually Impaired; National Committee for Families and Children; Belize School Canteen Association; National AIDS Commission; Human Rights Commission of Belize; Help Age Belize
- Indigenous leaders, churches and ethnic organizations
- Ministry of Education and Sports, Min. of Human Development, Women and Civil Society, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives, ANRI (Lynam), Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources of the University of Belize, Social Investment Fund, Ministry of Health, Belize Information Service, and radio stations
- National Development Foundation of Belize, Belize Business Bureau, Development Finance Cooperation, Small Farmers' and Business Bank, Credit Unions, Building Societies
- Int. Organizations: UNDP, UNICEF, INCAP/PAHO, CFNI, European Union, Dept. for International Development (UK); IICA, CARDI, FAO, CDB



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2. Diversified Food Production, Food Processing, Marketing, Storage and Credit Mobilization

This program promotes increased and diversified food production in order to stimulate self-sufficiency, increase access to nutritious foods at the local level and to establish a food banking system. An important aspect of this program is the putting in place of structures which ensure food and nutrition security on a continual basis, and also in times of disaster. The use of appropriate technologies and agricultural practices that preserve bio-diversity and our natural resources are encouraged.

OBJECTIVES:

- To support policies, programs and initiatives that promote an equitable and comprehensive agrarian reform.
- To support sustainable agricultural practices that have their roots in ecology, organic farming and preservation of bio-diversity and our natural resources.
- To establish and stimulate self-sufficiency in the production of our traditional basic grains and vegetables.
- To diversify the food crop, livestock and fish foods to enhance the nutritional status, access and security at the community and household levels, including home gardening systems.
- To ensure adequate accessibility of affordable credit at low risk to limited-resource producers.
- To establish market access and distribution channels to accommodate increased levels of local food production and to reduce food imports.
- To introduce, develop and transfer appropriate technologies for water management, food processing and storage, and rational use of local products, to be profitable and competitive.
- To establish a national food banking system.
- To provide support to women in order to increase and enhance their involvement in the productive sector.

OUTPUTS:

- New and improved initiatives in place which support the increased use of land for agricultural production
- Improved projects and programs being implemented with due attention to the protection and preservation of our natural resources
- Increased production of basic grains and vegetables
- Increased diversification of food products
- Enhanced accessibility and use of nutritious foods at the household level
- Increased percentage of families producing vegetables for their own consumption
- Increased understanding of credit systems and functioning mechanisms for accessing and managing credit
- Improved definition and establishment of market and distribution channels for the various commodities produced, processed and other value-added forms
- A food banking system established
- Improved processing and storage mechanisms adapted to community level, to reduce the variability between periods of glut and shortage and to reduce product loss to pests
- Increased mechanisms in place which encourage and support the active involvement of women in the area of production

Participating Institutions:

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives; Ministry of Education and Sports; BMB, CARD Project BEST, Help for Progress, BFAC, BAPO, BBS, Beltrade, BCCI, BBB, NDFB, DFC, BEST, SIF
Int. Organizations: CARDI, IICA, CATIE, FAO, INCAP, CARICOM (CCMS), UNDP, CDB, IFAD, IDB

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3. Maternal and Child Care, School Feeding and Nutrition for the Elderly and the Indigent

This program encompasses special initiatives targeted at vulnerable population groups. These include the promotion of breastfeeding and proper complementary feeding practices for young children, iron and Vitamin A supplementation programs, school feeding programs, and nutrition programs for the elderly and other indigent groups.

OBJECTIVES:

- To develop capacity for and promote breastfeeding and appropriate infant feeding practices.
- To promote the use of local complementary foods.
- To encourage homegardening, emphasizing vegetable and fruit production.
- To strengthen and initiate intervention projects to reduce micro-nutrient deficiencies such as iron, vitamin A, folic acid, fluoride and iodine.
- To improve the delivery and accessibility of health services for pregnant women and infants.
- To strengthen existing school feeding programs and introduce new programs in high-risk communities.
- To improve the provision of health and nutritional services to the elderly and indigent communities.

OUTPUTS:

- Publication of several recipes of complementary infant foods, such as concante and gungude, to be prepared by mothers at the local level from green bananas, cassava, plantain and other foods
- Increased number of Belizean food industries producing complementary infant foods
- Increased marketing of fortified foods such as salt and flour with thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, iron and folic acid
- Increase in the number of non-profit organizations dedicated to the promotion of breastfeeding and appropriate infant feeding practices
- Increase in the number of pregnant women and infants under five years old receiving iron and Vitamin A supplementation.
- All Hospitals declared baby-friendly, i.e. providing services to promote and protect breastfeeding
- School feeding programs being implemented in high-risk communities and targeted at children who are at risk, including indigent children
- Identification of programs for addressing the nutritional needs of the elderly and other indigent groups

Participating institutions:

- NGOs, cooperatives and credit unions, Belize Business Bureau, Belize Enterprise for Sustainable Technology (BEST), SFBB, National Development Foundation of Belize (NDFB), Micro Enterprise Credit Scheme, Belize Mills, Marie Sharp, large supermarkets, Helpage, Mercy Clinic
- 4-H Club, Belize Youth Developing Center, Belize Family Life Association, Belize Organization for Women and Development

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- Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Hospitals, National Committee for Families and Children, National Women's Commission, Belize Bureau of Standards (Min. of Trade), Customs Office (Ministry of Finance), Maternal and Child Health Program (MCH)
- Int. Organizations: CARDI, UNICEF, INCAP/PAHO, CFNI.

4. Creation of Employment and Income Generating Opportunities at the Local Level

This program focuses on the provision of credit opportunities for vulnerable groups, strengthening of their entrepreneurial skills and creation of small enterprise and income generating opportunities for such groups.

OBJECTIVES:

- To raise income levels of vulnerable groups, including the elderly and indigent, in the rural and urban areas of Belize.
- To provide self-employment for people in the high risk communities.
- To strengthen and improve the entrepreneurial skills of vulnerable groups such as women, indigents and the elderly.

OUTPUTS:

- Survey of demand and capacity for small enterprises, small farming, eco-cultural tourism, services, arts and crafts.
- The enhancement of the Small Farmers' Bank and business bank to provide credit at the community level in a timely, effective and efficient manner, with the minimum of red-tape and bureaucracy.
- The strengthening of local credit intermediaries such as credit unions, NGOs, and community organizations in capacity building, institutional and organizational strengthening, financial management and sensitization to community-level issues.
- The provision of credit with support services (business management, credit management, technical assistance, etc.) to individuals and community groups/organizations in the following areas: micro and small-scale enterprises, small farming and agro-processing, community-based eco-cultural tourism, small manufacturing, arts and crafts, and formulation of projects.
- Increased capacity for small enterprise development and implementation

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS:

- NDFB, Credit Unions, Community Organizations, Women's Groups, Farmers Cooperatives, NGOs (BEST, HELP)
- Ministry of Human Development, Women and Civil Society; Statutory Bodies (SIF, Social Security Fund, DFC)
- Int. Organizations: IICA, CATIE, CDB, IDB, IFAD, UNDP, FAO, INCAP/PAHO.

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5. Food Safety

This program supports the development of national standards for food products, adherence to national and international standards and the development of monitoring mechanisms. It also includes the education of the public in matters relating to food quality and safety.

OBJECTIVES:

- To regulate and control quality of food products according to the established norms of the Codex Alimentarius, WHO and INCAP standards.
- To improve mechanisms for quality control and monitoring the safety of food products
- To disseminate information on food quality and safety to the Belizean public.
- To develop national standards for food labeling and safety

Outputs:

- Timely distribution of health norms according to CODEX Alimentarius, WHO and INCAP for all major and perishable food products of Belize
- Improved control and inspection system of health and nutritional quality of foods in establishments, airports and seaports using Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP).
- Implementation of laboratory network for microbiology, chemical and physical analyses of food products.
- Implementation of surveillance system for food-borne and nutrition related problems, and operational/institutional and public information system for immediate notification and alert.

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS:

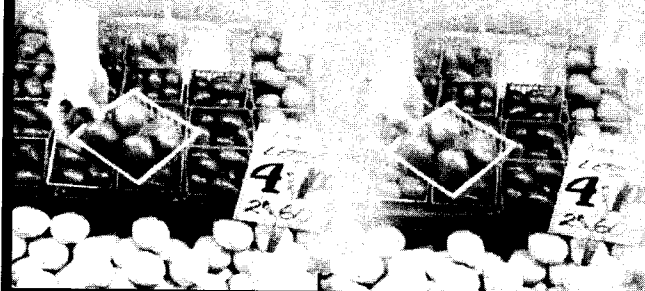
- Belize Agricultural and Health Authority (BAHA), Ministry of Trade and Investment, Ministry of Nat. Resources, Environment and Industry (Bureau of Standards); Min. of Health and Public Service, Min. of Agric., Fisheries and Cooperatives; Min. of Tourism and Youth; Belize Tourist Board
- Belize Tourist Industry Association, Consumer organization, BBB, BCCI, Private sector firms and labs
- Int. Organizations: PAHO, FAO, INPPAZ, INCAP, CFNI, OIRSA, IDB, IICA

6. Analysis and Reform of National Policies for Food and Nutrition Security

This program is geared toward the development of national capacity to analyze issues as they relate to food and nutrition security and the application of these analyses in policy reform and improved implementation strategies.

OBJECTIVES:

- To identify the major policy constraints to achieving the mission objectives for national food and nutrition



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security including vulnerable groups, legislation and regulations on land tenure, credit, monetary and fiscal incentives, marketing and trade, and investment in training and infrastructure.

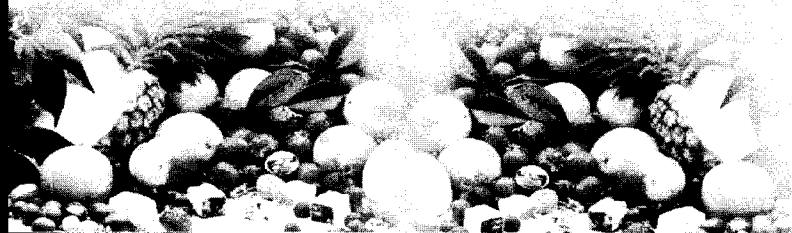
- To assess the ante and post effects, implications and assumptions related to key existing and future policies related to food and nutrition.
- To make practical recommendations for policy reform
- To involve communities, producers, private sector and development non-profit organizations in policy analysis and reform.
- To monitor and assess immigration patterns and their effects on poverty, employment and basic social services, and to make recommendations to address food and nutrition security- related migration problems.

OUTPUTS:

- Established mechanisms, indicators and methods for policy analysis.
- Improved policy recommendations and proposed implementation strategies
- Developed national capacity for food and nutrition policy analysis that can be transferred to other policy issues.

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS:

- Ministries of Economic Development; Finance; Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives; Trade and Investment (Beltraide), Tourism and Youth; Natural Resources, Environment and Industry
- BCCI, BIM, BAPO, NDFB, BAS, PFB, Rotary Club, Lions Club
- Int. organizations: IICA, RUTA III, CARICOM Secretariat, FAO, PAHO, CCAD, SICA



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Acronyms used:

BAHA	Belize Agricultural Health Authority
BAPO	Belize Association of Producers Organizations
BAS	Belize Audubon Society
BBB	Belize Better Business Bureau
BCCI	Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Beltraide	Belize Trade and Investment Promotion Service
BEST	Belize Enterprise for Sustainable Technology
BFAC	Belize Federation of Producers Organizations
BIM	Belize Institute of Management
BIS	Belize Information Service
BMB	Belize Marketing Board
CARDI	Caribbean Agricultural, Research & Development Institute
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CATIE	Tropical Agricultural Research & Education Center
CCAD	Central American Council for Environment and Development
CCMS	Caribbean Community Marketing Service
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
CFNI	Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute
DFC	Development Finance Corporation of Belize
HACCP	Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points
HELP	Help for Progress
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IFAD	International Fund for Agric Development
IICA	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture
INCAP	Institute of Nutrition for Central America and Panama
INPPAZ	Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses

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INPPAZ	Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses
MAFC	Ministry of Agriculture ,Fisheries and Cooperatives
MCH	Maternal and Child Health Program
NDFB	National Development Foundation of Belize
NFNC	National Food and Nutrition Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OIRSA	International/Regional Organization for Animal Health
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PFB	Program for Belize
REAP	Rural Education for Agricultural Production
RFNC	Regional Food & Nutrition Council (Prop.)
RUTA III	Regional Unit for Technical, Assistance (Phase III)
SICA	Secretariat for Central American Integration
SIF	Social Investment Fund
SFBB	Small Farmers and Business Bank
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund



INCAP

CFNI



PAHO



WHO



FAO