

# Keep price of staples low, says supermarkets boss



President of Supermarket Association of T&T, Biondi Bachew

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The Supermarket Association of T&T (SATT) is recommending that the price of staples must remain as low as possible, necessitating active government intervention to enhance the local growing and production of these essential products.

This as SATT articulated a clear, multi-faceted set of recommendations for the national budget, as it also positioned the retail food sector as a strategic partner in tackling the nation's challenges—high cost of living and food security.

Speaking on CNC3's Morning Brew programme yesterday, SATT's president Biondi Bachew explained, "So what we would like to see is staples stay as low as possible and we would welcome any move by the government to intervene in that space locally to enhance local growing and production of those products."

He also emphasised the need for a robust and actionable plan to strengthen the agriculture and agribusiness sectors.

Bachew pointed out that the national palate has evolved, with consumers increasingly drawn to foreign products however, he argued that meaningful import substitution cannot be achieved simply by growing more local crops.

Instead, the government must invest in the full agricultural value chain—from cultivation and primary processing to market-ready consumer goods.

This means supporting farmers not just with policy rhetoric, but with tangible incentives such as grants and tax relief that is accessible and effective.

"Growing more tomatoes in and of itself will not affect import substitution in that way, but it's how that product can then move across the value chain and be turned into something that's usable by consumers," Bachew explained.

The rising cost of food is another factor that needs to be addressed, he said.

Acknowledging that inflation is a global issue, Bachew highlighted that local supermarkets are adapting to meet consumer needs.

One strategy, he said, involves diversifying supply chains by introducing new brands from non-traditional markets, thereby reducing reliance on expensive imports.

Another approach is repackaging bulk items into smaller, more affordable portions—an effort to meet consumers “where they are.”

Examples include slicing cheese into smaller cuts or redistributing bulk peanut butter into individual servings, Bachew said.

On the matter of engagement with policymakers, he said the association, like other business service organisations, maintains dialogue with various line ministries, adding that proposals were submitted addressing not only food-related concerns, but also broader business challenges such as crime and public safety.

Bachew also advocated for innovative government interventions, including a shift toward a cashless society. That would reduce the circulation of physical cash—through direct deposit systems and digital payments—so that businesses and consumers alike could become less vulnerable to theft and fraud.

The discussion also touched on the mechanics of price changes following budget announcements.

Bachew explained that any increase in import tariffs or duties does not translate into immediate price hikes at supermarkets, adding that the timing depends on existing inventory levels and the supply chain’s resilience.