

Broader Horizons for Cooperatives in Cuba

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The experimental, non-agricultural cooperative sector in Cuba continues to expand in the areas of trade, food and technical or personal services provision, as part of the ongoing process to update Cuba's economic and social model.

The first national workshop on the topic was held in Havana recently to evaluate progress to date, with the participation of high ranking government officials, the presidents of non-agricultural cooperatives (CAN), trade union representatives and university professors and researchers.

The meeting highlighted that the development of a cooperative system sector will release the government from direct involvement in activities that by nature require a high level of independence, autonomy and responsible management.

The creation of this new form of production is in keeping with the implementation of two guidelines approved by the 6th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, to amplify non-state forms of property and management, based on socialist principles.

Still in their trial phase, these nonagricultural cooperatives operate in sectors such

as trade, gastronomy, passenger transportation, freight services, construction, industry, food, energy and accounting services.

A total of 397 CNA are presently in operation with 93 others due to come onstream, most -- as directed by the Council of Ministers in 2014 -- aimed at changing the structure of food services.

Grisel Tristá, a member of the commission in charge of implementing the economic guidelines approved by the party told this newspaper that of the non-agricultural cooperatives presently functioning, 62 percent (248) are engaged in commerce, gastronomy, technical and professional services, 17.4 percent (69) in construction and 8.5 percent (33) in industrial related activities.

Participants in the recent event agreed that deficiencies exist in the training of future CNA partners and in supplies to cooperatives from the wholesale distribution network.

Mercedes Fontanella, the Domestic Trade Ministry's (MINCIN) national director for gastronomic affairs said that training initiatives have not thus far resolved a shortage of workers, presidents and officials.'

According to the MINCIN first Deputy Minister, Odalys Escandell, 'there is still a lot to be done, in the context of breaches of contracts signed by suppliers, delays in supply and a general lack of information about regulations covering the creation of non-agricultural cooperatives.'

The official acknowledged that although the wholesale distribution network offers facilities such as a 20 percent discount on some products to cooperatives, 'such offers are not sufficient to satisfy demand'.

On a more positive note, the event praised the growth in production and service provision levels by cooperatives, principally in the food sector, which directly benefit both the population and CAN members.

A critical analysis by the forum is regarded as a major contribution to the continued progression of the nonagricultural

cooperative experiment that prioritizes activities that contribute to local development solutions.

All forms of cooperative in Cuba are in keeping with the nation's socialist system and are created voluntarily to produce goods or services for economic and social ends, under the precept that all permanent workers are stakeholders in the

ventures and that all enjoy equal rights.

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