



| Country Profile Saint Lucia

Nutrition

While Saint Lucia has reduced child stunting and obesity in children <5 years old, the country has made limited or no progress on indicators of non-communicable diseases (NCD) in adults. For example, 29.9% of the adult population are obese and over 18% have diabetes, while 14.3% of women of reproductive age are anemic.¹ Dietary risks for NCD in Saint Lucia include high intakes sugar sweetened beverages and processed (including ultra processed) foods, and low intake of fruit and vegetables.^{2,3}

Dietary patterns have shifted away from locally sourced tubers, roots, fruits, and vegetables towards diets characterised by high consumption of ultra processed foods.^{2,4} These changes are primarily driven by factors such as increased accessibility and desirability of unhealthy foods and social determinants including income and education. Another important driver includes policy changes in key preferential trade agreements through trade liberalisation, leading to reduced market prices for local farmers who have limited leverage in pricing and must compete with more subsidised agricultural systems abroad.³

In 2016, 20.3% of the population in Saint Lucia was considered to be living below the poverty threshold.^{2,5} It's evident that the food accessible at the national level is not equally available to everyone; a considerable portion of the population still lacks the financial means to acquire food that meets their recommended dietary intakes.^{3,6}

Several factors beyond income hinder access to healthy foods, including seasonality in crop production, limited agro-processing, transportation issues and a poorly functioning market, resulting in high consumer prices and low producer prices.^{3,6}

Knowledge and Awareness

The Government is taking action to address the consumption of ultra processed foods and sugary drinks by working with The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on initiatives that include the implementation of regulations on the food industry, including fiscal measures, restrictions on the access of children to unhealthy foods, and limitations on sponsorship and advertising.⁷ Simultaneously, there has been support for schools to implement healthy food policies, and a general promotion of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Collaborative efforts between Government Ministries is essential to regulate the accessibility and affordability of unhealthy ultra processed foods and beverages in line with World Health Organization guidelines.⁷

Community Food Production

Saint Lucia is highly dependent on imported foods, with 75% of the food products sold sourced from overseas.⁸ The Government is seeking to address this through policies and targeted support for the agriculture sector, such as the "Enhancement of the Efficiency of Production- Distribution Supply Chain of Fruit and Vegetable Sector in Saint Lucia", which aims to increase the domestic production of eight key crops to reduce the food import bill.⁹

There has also been investment in the establishment of advanced agro-processing facilities aimed at bolstering the predominantly cottage-based industry throughout the nation. Saint Lucia is a participant in the FAO Sustainable Approaches to Agro-Processing and Value Chain Development of Root and Tuber Crops in the Caribbean program. Through this initiative, the country stands to gain from the expansion and diversification of its agriculture sector, resulting in the production of value added products and services while reducing the reliance on imports.^{10,11}

The contributions of Community Food Production (CFP) to national food supply include crops such as dasheen, sweet potatoes, cassavas, mangoes and bananas.¹² These crops are grown on small holdings (less than 5 acres). As land area increases, food production tends to shift to commodity crops such as bananas, coconuts and limes, most of which are destined for export.¹²

Expanding the cultivation of root crops like sweet potatoes and cassava offers promising opportunities for enhancing agro-processing capabilities. This, in turn, can aid in reducing the need for imported flour and flour-based products, while simultaneously prolonging the shelf life of these commodities and boosting income levels.¹²

Influences on Food Practice

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the food and nutrition challenges, several collaborative efforts involving government agencies, NGOs, international funding agencies, and local communities are being carried out. Contributing to this is the Global Community Food for Human Nutrition and Planetary Health in Small Islands (Global CFaH) Project. Global CFaH responds to the nutrition, health, social, and economic well-being issues of small island states by applying approaches that develop healthy, resilient, and environmentally sustainable community-based food production.

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