

Cuba Experiments with Wholesale Market for Farmers



Havana June 2 (NNN-RHC) --- Cuba opened its first wholesale market for farmers in decades on Sunday, an experiment limited to agricultural supplies in one area and the latest market-oriented reform for the communist-run island.

While Cuba has allowed nearly 500,000 small business owners and their employees to operate privately and hundreds of thousands of farmers to grow their own crops, it has been slow to give them access to wholesale markets.

Even though the farming sector has been the most liberalized, Cuba continues to import more than 60 percent of its food, in part because farmers still depend on state-run allocation and distribution of subsidized supplies. Official output has not significantly increased since the reforms began six years ago.

But as of Sunday, farmers on the Isla de Juventud, home to 60,000 people off the southwest coast of the main Caribbean island, can purchase unsubsidised supplies on demand.

An Artemisa farmer, who asked to be identified only as Carlos, said "This list looks good, but let's see what's really available in three months and what happens when the experiment goes nationwide," he said.

"Besides, they didn't include the most important agricultural input, diesel fuel."

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