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Organic growers urged to link with Sandals ...and other hotels, supermarkets

10/10/2014

A suggestion is being made to the Organic Growers and Consumers Association to pursue linkages with hotel chain Sandals Resorts and other hotels and supermarkets on the island.

It was made by Chef Dane Saddler who was delivering the 2014 Elsie Payne lecture on Wednesday night as he drew reference to the successes seen in Jamaica which he believes could be replicated in Barbados.

According to Executive Chef of Caribbean Villa Chefs, the Sandals' agricultural programme began, when the hotel in Jamaica forged a partnership with the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) and farmers in St. James, St. Ann, St. Elizabeth and Hanover to supply crops to the hotel chain on a consistent basis.

At that time, he noted, the purchasing manager for the resort found it extremely difficult to find a source for local, fresh, high quality vegetables to facilitate the chef's menus as the guests were heavily requesting authentic Jamaican food.

He explained that this programme afforded chefs and management teams an opportunity to pay visits to farms and attend agri-workshops. They also visited the hotels to see how their products were being used and why Sandals specifications were important.

Subsequently, Sandals worked with RADA to deal with challenges in production, packaging, distribution and sales with RADA facilitating the necessary training required to build farmer capacity in these areas.

Additionally, he noted that a farmer extension officer funded by Sandals assisted farmers with production, in addition to RADA and other technical agencies. Hotels were informed two weeks before delivery date as to what crops and volumes are available.

As a result, Sandals resorts increased the local foods on their menus and the Sandals partnership led to the, farmers' sales income increased over 55 times from US\$60 000 to \$3.3 million in the first three years.

Saddler told the audience that inspired by the Jamaican success, Sandals is replicating the farming project in St. Lucia, where over 50 farmers have been enlisted in the programme, of which 75 per cent are women.

"I urge the Organic Growers and Consumers Association, the local farming body and the relevant government agencies to look into a similar relationship being formed not only with newly arrived Sandals as they are about to open their doors here but also with other local hotels and supermarkets on the island.

"Investing in these local agencies benefit the purchases in a number of ways, they will have lower food cost as their import bill will be reduced," it was also explained.

Saddler stated that buyers will know that their products will be of high nutritional value since they will be fresh. "Produce begin to lose their nutritional value eight to ten days after being harvested and imported produce take a minimum of two to three weeks before it reaches our shelves here," Chef Saddler said. (JH)

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