

St. Kitts Consortium of Farmers and Food Producers Planting Program 2023-2024.

Executive Summary

On September 22nd, 2023, the St. Kitts Consortium of farmers and food producers started a six-month planting program to document and assess the ability of farmers to consistently produce as well as highlight the challenges encountered in the process. Such an exercise would form the basis from which to inform future programs and developments.

There was an appointment of a coordinator to maintain the records for the targeted crops which were green pepper, cabbage, cantaloupe, honeydew, carrot, onion.

Considering the 25x25 concept the annual imports and local production were carefully analyzed to influence the set production targets.

A total of 22 farmers participated in the program, taking to the marketing unit in excess of 25,000lbs of green peppers, 4000lbs of cabbage, 2000lbs of honeydew and 6000lbs of cantaloupe. The understanding was to deliver all the produce to the Marketing Unit for data reference. However, some challenges at the department forced some farmers to seek out alternate markets for their produce. The marketing challenges also lead to some spoilage in the field.

In addition to marketing challenges there were many production challenges. Land preparation in the early stages meant some farmers simply could not participate in the program while input availability in the later half caused some interruptions. Poor care, feral animals, drought, and other weather conditions had a its impact on the program. Consequently, no carrot or onion were harvested from the combined twelve acres planted.

Having these initial records means the notion of consistency can be more accurately assessed. They provide a better understanding of the present state of production and how to begin improving. From these records came some resolutions that can be implemented to improve future programs. Early preparations, and capacity building were some suggestions towards improving the program.

Introduction

The Consortium of Farmers and Food Producers (hereafter Consortium) was established during the last quarter of 2021. The initial discussions centered around the need for improvement in the treatment between the partitioners and the policy makers and by extension the market. This original the members reasoned can only be achieved through sustained dialogue and engagement with the farming and wider community.

Over a period of approximately two (2) years the leadership met repeatedly with food producers, officials in the Ministry of Agriculture including the minister, allied agencies, the media, a grant agency, and banking institutions. There was a singular theme emanating from most actors. That is, farmers on St. Kitts are inconsistent, therefore they cannot be taken seriously by the community at large.

This the farmers easily refuted, citing policy issues of the government and lacunae in the financing system of St. Kitts and Nevis. Moreover, the producers cited the historical truisms that they never had real access to the domestic market and the lack of market information is a debilitating factor among others.

The Consortium protested the widely held belief that farmers simply cannot produce consistently, on the basis that it did not consider intervening but surmountable factors. At a leadership meeting of the Consortium in September of 2023, a decision was taken to fight back what was considered a half-baked narrative. The decision was taken on the floor of the general membership where it received commitment and encouragement to undertake the program.

The goal of this report

The intentions of the exercise were to assess the ability of the Consortium to undertake a planting program 2023 -2024, to measure its impact on the domestic market and to inform the planning of future planting programs.

Anticipated Outputs:

- A measure or rating of the overall success of the production program.
- A listing of key challenges encountered during program implementation.
- A schedule of recommendations for future improvements.

The purpose of the program

The main purpose of the program was to begin a process of organized farming and record keeping. We believe with proper data we can get a better understanding of not just where we are currently or where we want to be but, to chart the course to ensure we reach that destination.

The remainder of the report is laid out in four substantive sections:

- **Description of the Planting Program**
 - *Provides a brief description of the planting program.*
- **Program Results and Performance Against Stated Targets**
 - *Highlights the Consortium's performance.*
- **Challenges encountered throughout the various stages of the program.**
 - *Reflects on the challenges encountered throughout the various stages of the program: seedlings generation, planting, Marketing Unit and the Market and others.*
- **Recommendations for future plans**
 - *A list of recommendations to inform organization's plans.*

Description of the Planting Program

This section catalogues the specifics of the program. It identifies the crops targeted, the farmers involved, production targets, the production process and systems involved.

The program advanced six crop types including bell peppers, cabbages, carrots, onions, cantaloupes, and honeydew melons.

A total of 16 farmers participated in the planting program from an initial commitment of 22. The number of farmers planting the various crop types is displayed in Table 1. It also shows the initial commitment made by the membership, those who were able to follow through as well as the number of farmers who joined once the program began.

Table 1-Participant breakdown

	Pepper	Cabbage	Cantaloupe	Honeydew	Carrot	Onion
<i>Initial commitment</i>	11	4	3	3	5	7
<i>Additional</i>	2	3	1	1	0	1
Started	11	4	4	4	4	6

Table 2- Listing of farmers for each crop who were able to start planting.

Green peppers	Cabbage	Cantaloupe	Honeydew	Carrot	Onion
Blyden Brudy	Troy Flanders	Eddison Isaac	Eddison Isaac	Mervin Patrick	Dishon Richardson
Calvin Percival	Esmon Henderson	Jahme Jahbarme	Jahme Jahbarme	Troy Flanders	Calvin Percival
Esmon Henderson	Jermado Smithen	Jermaine Mike	Jermaine Mike	Esmon Henderson	Mervin Patrick
Glenford Williams	Leon Anthony	Jermado Smithen	Jermado Smithen	Meshach Alford	Meshach Alford
Meshach Alford					Esmon Henderson
Troy Flanders					Kevin Jeffers
Andre Patrick					
Leonard Herbert					
Jermado Smithen					
Leon Anthony					
Eddison Isaac					

The objective was to plant a number of seedlings amongst as many farmers possible to ensure a consistent minimum monthly production for a six-months period. The planting period was September to March while harvest period would range from November to early June. This would translate to nine months total to account for the time required before harvest. These targets were obtained from the official import records from the Ministry of Agriculture for the last five years. It was refined by what the average production should be per plant or per acre and was further influenced by the 25x25 agenda concept.

Table 3 and table 4 provides detailed information necessary to understand how the targets were derived along with what was required to achieve it.

Table 3- 2017-2021 average annual imports and local production (kg), with increase required for 25x25 concept.

	(kg) Cabbage	Sweet Pepper	Carrots	Onions
Average imports	93,911	166,190	116,765	284,352
25% Import reduction	23,478	41,547	29,191	71,088
Average local production	24,740	70,140	91,000	56,060
Production increase required	23,478	41,547	29,191	71,088
Total production Required	48,218	111,687	120,191	127,148
% Increase Required	95%	59%	32%	127%

Table 4- Targeted production with what is required to achieve it (lbs).

Item	Cabbages	Sweet Peppers	Cantaloupe	Honeydew	Carrots	Onions
Target monthly production	10,000	25,000	20,000	20,000	60,000	60,000
Yield per plant (lbs)	1.5	1.5	5.0	5.0		
Yield per acre (lbs)					30,000	30,000
Seeds/seedlings required (monthly)	6,667	16,667	4,000	4,000	30,000	10lbs
Trays Required (monthly)	98	245	59	59		
Planting period (months)	5	6	5	5	2	2
Total production (lbs)	50,000	150,000	100,000	100,000	120,000	120,000

There was an appointment of a coordinator to perform the necessary extension services for the consortium. To maintain the records of the farmers involved and to provide regular reminders and updates of the planting dates etc.

The ministry committed to providing extension services to ensure the marketing unit is kept informed of the produce in the field. Upon delivery to the marketing unit the produced would be inspected and only A-Grade produced would be accepted. The farmers were assured payment for the accepted produced after a two-week processing period.

The data collection process started with a manual updated spreadsheet then later moved to an online form to bring a level of automation. This gave farmers the opportunity to practice the habit of record keeping.

It is important to note each farmer agreed to fund their own individual involvement. They would purchase their supplies, plan for their seeds/seedlings, etc., for the period specified. The harvest would be taken to the marketing unit where it would be recorded in the government system, adding a level of integrity to the records.

Program Results and Performance Against Stated Targets

The quantities of the crops produced and delivered to the marketing unit are displayed here.

Table 5 to Table 7 highlight what was accomplished by the Consortium. Showing how much of the various crops were planted and when. The total harvest sent to the marketing unit is also shown below.

Table 5- The number of trays sowed monthly.

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Cabbage	75	50	45		75	48		293
Cantaloupe	21		16	56	21			114
Honeydew	21	7	19	50	16			113
Sweet Pepper	244	134	138	160	114	155	80	1053

Table 6- The number of acres planted for carrots and onions.

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Carrot	1	2	2	1				6
Onion		3.5	1	2				6.5

Table 7- The total production sent to the marketing unit (lbs).

	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Total
Cabbage	0	0	459	186	1439	2146	0	4230
Honey Dew	0	204	527	976	295	898	92	2992
Onion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carrots	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cantaloupe	1042	626	0	1760	1360	105	1993	6886
Sweet Pepper	0	1893	5371	7150	4928	4067	3289	26698

A number of farmers reported some of their produce was not sent to the marketing unit. However, on the account of accuracy and accountability it will not be noted as part of the official recordings. It is simply to provide a more wholesome overview.

A listing of the vendors who supported the program is outlined in Table 8.

Table 8- Vendor listing

Disperse To	Total (lbs)	Disperse To	Total (lbs)
Best Buy Buckley's	3821	Ms. Phool	175
Ram's Bay Road	2366	Daily Food (Supermarket)	159
St.Kitts Marriott Resort	1122	Ms. Swarsattie Persaud	159
Ram's Bird Rock	1059	B's Enterprise Ltd	140
Ms. Tikiasha Johnson	888	Carambola Beach Club	138
Ram's Buckley's	888	Ms. Ernes Brandy	136
Mr. St.Clair Williams	573	Ms. Valma Caesar	135
IGA Value Mart	530	Royal St. Kitts Hotel	130
Best Buy Bird Rock	408	Choa Chinese Old Road	125
Dollar Strecher Supermarket	401	White Castle	95
Ram's Cash & Carry Nevis	399	Walk In Purchase	92
Mr. Desuza	378	Ms. Shay Brandy	84
J.N.F Hospital	365	School Meal Programme	82
Ms. Amanda Sancho	359	Mr. Verral Marshall's	73
Mr. Shemly Walters	345	King's Pavilion Supermarket	70
Xin Hua (Supermarket)	320	Ms. Relda Warner	70
Mr. Moses	306	Ms. Thyra Mills	65
En Ping (Supermarket)	300	Ricky Bassue	60
Mr. Justin Peets	298	Ms. Lynet Pemberton	58
Mr. Mark Adams	280	Mr. Kendell Huggins	55
Tony Rohoman	280	Mr. Naldo Smithen	46
Mrs. Peets	247	Latin Cuisine Restaurant	45
Mr. Freddie	220	Ms. Merla Isles	45
Bargains Superette	210	kathie	40
Best Buy Supermarket Nevis	204	Island Bakery	30
Damion Huggins	203	Mr. David Pryce	30
Larison Parry Agriculture Deport	200	Mr. Joshua Brandy	30
Panda Supermarket	190		

Challenges encountered throughout the various stages of the program.

This section starts with the production challenges through to marketing. Highlighting the challenges experienced in the various processes and providing the necessary data to understand the impact.

Production challenges.

The program was off to a late and slow start mainly due to land preparation issues. Most of the tractors were down, then there was a backlog once the tractors were operating again. This had a direct impact on the number of participants as well as the consistency.

There was also a common challenge with seedling generation. The seedling schedule wasn't maintained, and the quality could not be determined. To reduce cost some farmers generated seedlings in a home/unprofessional setting with varied results. The schedule in some instances was sidelined for other tasks such as harvesting.

Table 9 provides a listing of the production challenges.

Table 9- A compiled list of the challenges experienced in the production process.

CROP	CHALLENGES
GREEN PEPPER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• chemical burn• seed availability• space due to lack of land prep• wild pigs• monkeys
CABBAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• storm• land preparation.
CANTALOUPE/ HONEYDEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor germination• land preparation.• Water (drought)• Stray cattle• monkeys
CARROT/ ONION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor germination• Storm weather restrictions• Drought

Green pepper

Seed availability was a challenge in the latter half of the program following the closing of a major seed supplier, then the withdrawing of the seeds from the department of agriculture. Some farmers simply could not purchase the preferred seeds to plant.

Cabbage

Land preparation was a major challenge for the persons planting cabbages. Most didn't get the land prepared until January 2024. Once the land was prepared, they decided to plant other cash crops to make the most of what's left of the season.

One farmer had 45 trays that started folding in the trays while waiting for land preparation.

Others who were able to transplant were then affected by storm and pests (moth worms)

Cantaloupe/Honeydew

Whether it was due to poor quality seeds, poor germinating facility or a combination of both; Poor germination was a consistent cry. Ferral animals and poor care were also noted.

Carrot/ Onion

The drought like conditions meant the soil never got to the optimal temperature for proper germination of carrots and onions. The farmers reported this was the worse drought period experienced in over 20 years of farming.

Table 10 to Table 11 provide a listing of the impact, and production stage at which the challenges occurred.

Table 10- Harvest lost based on estimated projections.

	TRAYS LOST	ESTIMATED LOSS OF HARVEST (LBS)	ESTIMATED MARKET VALUE (\$)
CABBAGE	80	8160	12,240
CANTALOUPE	23	7820	15,640
HONEYDEW	14	4760	11,900
SWEET PEPPER	96	9792	34,272
CARROT		90000	180,000
ONION		195000	292,500
TOTAL	213	315532	546,552

Table 11- Lists the stage at which the production challenges were experienced.

Crop-challenges	Pre-planting	Seedling	After transplant	Fruiting
Cabbage (trays)		45	35	
Cantaloupe (trays)			16	7
Honeydew (trays)			10	4
Sweet Pepper (trays)			96	
Carrot (acres)	1	2		
Onion (acres)		4.5		

The various challenges listed had significant impact on the number and level of participation. This left an almost insurmountable task to fulfil the calculated targets based on the number of participants and the land available.

Marketing challenges

The production challenges also had an impact on marketing, causing us to update the expected harvest to account for the losses sustained. To compound this issue the ministry never fulfilled its agreement to provide the extension services required to deliver the necessary forecasting to the marketing unit.

The arrangement made with the marketing unit took an unexpected turn when we were asked to first decrease the delivery of green peppers then later to halt completely for a number of weeks. Several farmers reported an abundance of peppers being discarded due to spoilage. Consequently, farmers were forced to seek out alternate market opportunities for their produce. Whether or not the farmers will be compensated for the discarded produce is still unclear.

There's a request for the official records of the dumped commodities.

The spoilage in the field as a result is still being assessed.

Recommendations for future plans

After a lengthy assessment some resolutions for some of these challenges for the upcoming planting programs were identified in Table 12. Some can be improved in the short term with better planning while some require a more long-term approach.

Table 12- A list of possible improvements for the challenges encountered throughout the program.

Challenges	Recommendations
<i>Land preparation</i>	Start 1-2 months early to ensure readiness.
<i>Seed availability</i>	Acquire all inputs at the initial stage.
<i>Poor germination</i>	Obtain quality seeds from reliable sources. Test the seeds before planting. Use proper germinating facility.
<i>Ferral animals (pigs, monkeys)</i>	Partner with animal control programs
<i>Plant care (pest management, chemical burn)</i>	Training on the proper use of chemicals Training on good practices and plant care
<i>Market</i>	Make direct contact with the supermarkets and other stakeholders to assess the possibility of a MOU. Export market opportunity
<i>Storage</i>	Use of the chills from member cooperatives.

There were echoing sentiments for the Consortium to assess what is needed to provide some of the essential services on behalf of the farmers. Providing or arranging for the inputs and services required to enable the farmers to focus more on production.

Another suggestion is to engage the larger entities such as the supermarkets who supported the program to gain greater insight (likes/dislikes) on their experience with our produce and program.

How can we bridge AgProcessing with the marketing unit to deal with the issue of spoilage? This is an ongoing discussion.

Conclusion

The Consortium with the support of its members organized the first ever planting program on St. Kitts. In a quest to provide evidence that farmers can not only produce but produce consistently given adequate support systems, the farmers band together to produce. The data brought to the fore that effective implementation and preservation of key services is vital for the topic of consistency.

The path to Agri processing must be explored.

One certainty is that there needs to be better communication between the farmers and the market.