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Session n°19:

Transforming Agrifood Systems: Opportunities for entrepreneurs in the Caribbean and Latin America

Caribbean Agrifood Business Series

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Grace Agro Processors – Building Agri-preneurs

Overview

Escallion and Pepper demand being driven by demand for Jerk, Hot Sauces and other types of wet seasonings

Peppers in demand are Red Habanero and Scotch Bonnet

Due to global uncertainties and most of the customer base being in the USA, UK and Canada, passing through any input cost increases can be difficult

Farmers must become more efficient with a focus on reducing costs and increasing yields per acre

Grace Agro Processors – Building Agri-preneurs 2026 Targets

- Red – 1.75M Kilograms
- Scotch – 385K Kilograms
- Escallion – 1.2M Kilograms

Grace Agro Processors Pepper Agri-Preneur Program

In order to improve yields and counter other impacts such as Climate Change, GAP established the Agri-preneur program. In order to be a part of the Agri-preneur program, farmers must be willing to:

- Treat their farm as a business, have a registered business, have documented processes, financials etc
- Be willing to be open minded and foster collaboration
- Utilize science and technology
- Willing to implement proven best practices

Proven Result - Escallion

This was implemented by GAP's Escallion farmer network in 2021

The primary changes were:

- Farmers now tracking and documenting all their processes
- Change of Growing Season

This resulted in production of over 3M Kgs of Escallion in 2022 generating over US$2M in revenue for the Escallion farmer network

Pepper Production

- In 2023, GAP began implementing a more intensive approach to Pepper farming utilizing best practices from the region and other parts of the world. This includes:
- Active Soil Management including mandatory soil testing
- Use of Soil Enhancers
- Seed Selection
- Continuous review of Nutritional Plans
- Use of Fertilizers and Insecticides Using Factory Waste which are Organic

Soil Management

- Like most plants, pepper needs the basic components of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium
- Hot Peppers also need:
  - Calcium
  - Magnesium
  - Iron
  - Zinc
  - Copper
  - Manganese
  - Sulphur
- Soil testing is vital to understand the levels of these nutrients in the soil and the ideal land preparation and fertilizer programs to get best yield / cost ratios

Seed Stocks

- Poor seed quality has been one of the largest challenges in recent years
- GAP is securing good quality first generation seeds for its farmer network
- GAP is also working with select nurseries to ensure seeds are used and handled correctly to produce quality seedlings that will perform
- Even with the best seeds, there will always be non-performers. Farmers should practice culling of nonperforming plants and replace them immediately

Use Of Soil Enhancers

- GAP has been experimenting with soil enhancers and has seen very positive results
- Preferred providers are MicroEm Solutions and Morganics
- Soil Enhancers aid soil performance in multiple areas:
  - Microbial activity
  - Soil structure
  - Accelerate composting
  - Reduces pathogens
  - Enhances plant growth
  - Increases plant resistance to viruses and pests
- Once used correctly, evidence suggest 20 – 30% savings in fertilizer and pesticide costs

Nutritional Plans

- Farmers should ensure they have a documented nutritional plan which is followed by persons on the farm tending to the plants
- Nutritional plans are accessed from technical partners and universities including UWI and CMU
- GAP Field Officers assist in fine tuning plans
- Farmers are expected to regularly review their nutritional plan and adjust based on how the plants are performing

Organic Fertilizer and Pest Prevention

- GAP is in process of creating organic fertilizers from organic factory waste which are significantly lower cost than synthetic comparative products and better for the environment and less hazardous to persons handling
- Pest prevention products are found to be effective on worms and mites
- As products are organic, they can continue to be used during harvesting cycles
- As the active ingredient in the pest prevention product is capsaicin, it does need to be handled with care and used according to instructions
- Products will be available to the GAP farmer network at special pricing

Other Uses of Technology

Grace Agro Processors is actively working with several universities and researchers to implement several other uses of technology. These include:

- Use of weather modelling to determine optimal growing windows
- Use of drones and satellite imagery for early detection of pests and other growing impediments
- Use of predictive AI to measure in field parameters and aid in determining which seed stock is optimal to use at what time
- Use of robotics for harvesting

Questions???

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Thank you

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