

- Agricultural Tourism in Barbados -



PLANT: *Promoting Linkages in Agriculture, Nutrition, and Tourism*

Project Group: Alexander Cooper, Aaron Friedland, Marie-Sophie Iredale, and Sharon Lopez

Mentors: Dr. Francis Chandler, Dr. Danielle Donnelly, Ms. Mariam Zulfiqar, Mr. Henderson Greaves

Introduction:

Barbados is known in the tourism world as being a destination of sun, sand and sea. However, the island has a flourishing agricultural industry that could be more aggressively promoted to enable farms to participate in the prosperity that comes with tourism. Since the early 1990s, Barbados' tourism sector has been on a steep incline, after the island invested a great deal of money into luxury hotel production and amenities geared towards attracting visitors from all over the globe. Statistics reflect the notion that since 1993, the Barbadian tourism industry has made extensive efforts to reposition itself and rejuvenate the industry using three principle methods: luxury upgrading, increasing tourist capacity and developing niche markets of attraction (Potter and Phillips, 2004). Agricultural tourism is one of these niche areas, however the market has somewhat plateaued. A

concern with the tourism industry today is that it degrades the environment that it relies upon. The beauty of the beaches in Barbados is the main strategy in attracting tourists, yet one impact of tourism is the degradation of these attractions (Potter and Phillips, 2004). However, the promotion of agricultural tourism in Barbados is an active strategy to remedy these issues. In addition to environmental impact, there is an increased global concern regarding food scarcity, food consumption and health, and localized food production. The promotion of agricultural industry aims to address these concerns head on. The agricultural sector in Barbados is not only rich in history and culture, but also could be incorporated into the tourism industry through both local farm visits and through culinary tourism based on the apparent desire for tourists to experience local cuisine.

Economic Rationale:

The Barbadian market is ripe for investment within the agricultural sector. Presently, the agricultural sector is forced to compete with large, multinational corporations (MNC's) for the sale of produce. The outcome has inhibited localized agriculture from achieving economies of scale and has increased reliance on imported, processed foods. This has led to a multitude of adverse effects, which do not directly correlate but facilitate increased rates of obesity, increased reliance on foreign economies and the disintegration of the local agricultural sector. *Figure 1* does not show a direct relationship but rather provides us with a trend. This trend showcases the problems with the reliance on imports.

Food imports (% of merchandise imports) in Barbados



Figure 1 (Trading Economics)

Goals and Objectives:

In recognizing these issues, **PLANT Barbados**, aims to promote the agricultural sector in Barbados through building relationships with local farmers and supporting them in their agricultural endeavors. PLANT was created to help support local business and promote agricultural tourism via the creation of farm displays that will draw in visitors to reconnect them with food production, eat local, and experience true 'agri-culture' in Barbados. The goal of our project was to design signs that would be unique to each farm while still consistent with the theme of PLANT. These farm sites would allow guests to educate themselves about how local produce is grown on the island, as well as help spark awareness of the

importance of local agriculture. The on-farm displays would provide visitors with the history of the farm, including information about the growers and how they cultivate their crops. Additionally, the PLANT website acts as an index of the different locations of the project, as well as give explanations of the various activities that take place at those locations; ultimately providing interested tourists with a number of self-guided tour options. Through the incorporation of QR codes on the displays, visitors could use Smart Phones and Smart Devices to further enhance their visit. In facilitating this initiative PLANT hopes to empower farmers by helping them promote their profession and share their farming philosophy.



Marie-Sophie and Mr. Wason at his farm in Coach Hill, overlooking Conset Bay

Achievements:

As we set the foundation for PLANT, we began to create a network of contacts to support the beginnings of the initiative. In organizing both funding and a sustainability plan for our project, we attended a three-day conference hosted by IICA Barbados. This allowed us to get a better look at the current agricultural industry on the island, as the conference was aimed towards facilitating direct relationships between local farmers and the hotel and restaurant industry. At the conference, we met with a number of farmers who expressed interest in joining forces with the PLANT project in the future. Through our network, we were put in contact with farmer, Mr. Kevin Wason, whose farm in Coach Hill, St. John showed great potential from both an agricultural and tourism perspective. This farm became the main focus of our project for the summer. Mr. Wason's farm features more than just a wide range of tropical produce, but additionally showcases impressive panoramic views that surround the property, which is located next to the historic Codrington College and overlooks Conset Bay. Through our mentor, Mr. Henderson Greaves of the Barbados Ministry of Agriculture, we were able to meet with the Deputy Chief Economist at the ministry who was kind enough to tell us more about the slowly developing agricultural tourism sector on the island. There is a policy document in the works regarding the sector. However, this document has yet to be edited since it was first drafted in 2009. In order to grow the sector, PLANT was awarded a \$600 BBD grant from the ministry to process a sign display for Mr. Wason's farm. This sign has yet to be printed. However, this grant is still available for an incoming group to take over. In hopes of generating more market potential for our initiative, we felt the need to show tourists and Bajans alike how local produce can be used in culinary dishes. Chef Wilmore Jordan was kind enough to volunteer his time to let us film a cooking demonstration showcasing a Bajan bean salad using locally grown produce.



Long Term Goals and Sustainability:

The long-term goal of the PLANT project was to build a database of interesting agro-tourism locations. At this time, PLANT is only working with one farmer, but we hope that as the project evolves in future years, new farmers will become involved. All these farmers will be indexed and promoted on the PLANT website. Every location will have displays that are unique to each farmer, and yet consistent with the theme of PLANT. This will not only help standardize the advertising of these farms, but it will provide an educational platform, which is both attractive and convenient for tourists. In addition to publicizing the PLANT farms, the website will also include information about businesses and restaurants in the area of the locations, serving to promote all aspects of the rural economy. This will turn a simple visit to a farm into a day of discovery and fun.

This project will be sustained through student work and an integrated internship program. As a group, we have prepared a number of possible internship opportunities in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, the University of the West Indies (UWI), the McGill Career Planning Services, and both the McGill BITS and BFSS programs. The project can be continued by a group of students for the BITS and/or BFSS field programs. If not, an internship opportunity can be created whereby a student would receive recognition, school credit, and agricultural tourism knowledge. The internship would be unpaid, and tasks would include updating the PLANT website and social media, acting as a contact for farmers interested in the initiative, and supporting selected farmers turn their farm into a touristic experience.

Links:

Website: <http://plantbarbados.wordpress.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/PLANT-Barbados/655028591246116>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXSlgwQ37EsVdcPLbJOTB9A>



- PLANT Website Scanner QR Code -

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