

# WAITING TO EXHALE

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There are yet untapped treasures in this island that have excellent potential for engaging the displaced as well as the disenfranchised. Utilizing the natural biodiversity coupled with the country's rich heritage of cultural practices, Jamaica can fashion products for which the world is always eager, even during this time of economic woes. At worst, the country should prepare to take the world by storm once the curtain of austerity lifts.

## **Secrets Revealed**

This formed the backdrop for the Scientific Research Council's recent foray "**Secrets Revealed**". The expose was geared towards waking members of the private sector - small and large to the gems that are yet untouched. While limitations related to size, sustainability of supply and consistency in quality are all considerations that preface the full exploitation of opportunities that abound, we should not be shackled in the perpetual maelstrom of the traditional or the expected. The SRC priding its role in catalyzing the evolution of sorrel into mainstream appears anxious to share "open secrets" with the spectrum of players along the value chains of underexploited agricultural commodities.

## **Secret #1 - Food Safety**

Food security and safety have come full circle, despite all the technological advances of the past four decades, emerging as critical socio-political issues which have been impacting economies large and small. Guaranteeing food safety for example has become the visa in our trading passport irrespective of our destination - be it CARICOM, North America or the European Union. Some say this simply creates legally binding technical barriers to trade, often placing unrealistic criteria for small developing economies to meet. Irrespective of this, when faced with the harsh reality relating to conditions in our abattoirs and some of our food processing facilities, it is a miracle that we have managed to keep food-borne illnesses under the radar. The establishment of a national Food Safety body is a welcome long awaited initiative that will serve to provide some reassurance to our population regarding foods being consumed - locally as well as those traded. The effective management of food safety calls for a multi-sectoral approach and networks designed to communicate along the value chain to ensure farm to fork controls. Thankfully, the draft Umbrella Food Safety Legislation is setting the stage to do just that.

## **Secret #2 - Optimizing Agro-processing**

The food processing sector is largely under-utilized with, for the most part, a regurgitation of the "same ole same ole". Optimizing factory space by running two or three shifts is a practical way of increasing the country's productive capacity in short order without a massive outlay of capital. While at it - the time would be right for some well needed retooling to take place...and with creative maneuvering the attendant costs could possibly be shared. Protecting what is usually a

miniscule market turf or reluctance to have others share the use of equipment during downtime due to narcissistic tendencies while plausible in days gone by, is now quite shortsighted and downright foolish considering the modern paradigm, where the whole wide world is our marketplace. Try as we might, it is difficult to conceive any one manufactured product for which one local company could satisfy the market.

### **Secret #3 - Developing Local Herbal Tea Industry**

Novel approaches, capitalizing on unique attributes, resources and image are needed for Jamaica to increase and maintain its piece of the tremendous market share. The Organization of American States (OAS) funded an innovative Agro-tourism project co-ordinated by the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation in Agriculture (IICA). This Caribbean project stimulated a refreshingly new outlook on our local agri-based resources and provided a menu of non-traditional activities linking the tourism product with our indigenous agricultural product. Of course this has tremendous advantages for expanding the scope of both sectors as well as many players in between. Imagine the “coming out” of Granny’s “Bush Tea” - used for various maladies as well as in bush baths for our total spa experience! The work of the SRC in identifying therapeutic chemicals in our local herbs and “bushes” will serve to bolster the sustainability of such initiatives.

So while the current hardships are real, persons in every walk of life can use this respite to capitalize on the varied opportunities and the awesome brand Jamaica that we currently enjoy, and in so doing keep our black, green and gold flying high.