



## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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Lead Story

## PROPEL CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ACROSS THE CARIBBEAN

In celebration of International Women's Day and 2017's theme 'Be Bold For Change', WUSC Caribbean is thrilled to celebrate the immense strides that women have made in Caribbean agriculture!

The world over, women are crucial in the production of the global food source and fresh produce supply for their communities. Women make up 30% of producers in the Caribbean as small holders and are intrinsically involved through multi-faceted roles in the production, marketing and processing of fresh food. WUSC Caribbean not only recognizes this importance, but also fully commits to facilitate the advancement of Caribbean women in fresh produce market systems.

PROPEL is proud to partner with over 1100 female producers in initiatives such as the Guyana Onion Trial, Jamaica's National Potato Program, and Dominica's Elite Potato Seed Importation Trial. Women are a key target population due to their fundamental and pivotal positions as entrepreneurs, heads of households, mothers, community organizers, and agricultural professionals. Determination, resilience, and dedication are terms best used to describe these amazing women who are bold for change on a daily basis. Today we celebrate them.



Mrs. Campbell, a successful onion producer in Seville, St. Ann, Jamaica

## OPAL SLATER

### FROM CITY DWELLER TO IRISH POTATO PRODUCER



Opal Slater, St. Elizabeth Irish Potato Producer

Until three years ago, Opal Slater was a definitive city dweller. Today, she is one month away from reaping her first crop of Irish potato, and has fallen in love with farming.

Opal was born in Kingston, Jamaica, and spent her entire life in the city. A born entrepreneur and problem solver, at a young age Opal found a true calling in food processing. Trying new things and continually looking for opportunities along the way, Opal dove into food processing in the mid 2000's, opening a jerk-smoked fish processing business. Business was great - until the Global Recession of 2008 hit. After losing her factory and her business, Opal felt a change was needed, and sought divine intervention:

*"God told me to go to Magotty, to the country. So that's what I did"*

Having never lived out of the city, life in rural St. Elizabeth was a true game changer. Ever resilient and always up for a challenge, Opal took to the country like she never expected, "I'm a country girl at heart!" Opal quickly became involved with the community and started attending farmers meetings at the St. Elizabeth Cooperative Credit Union, an agriculture-friendly financial institution partnering with local producers.

Opal's first foray into agricultural production was growing callaloo, a labor-intensive crop that proved too difficult to maintain. But where

there is failure there is learning, and Opal credits her experience with callaloo as setting the stage for her current Irish Potato crop. Building linkages with the fertilizer provider Newport-Fersan and the seed distributor HL Agro during her callaloo days eased the road that was to come.

Opal's next big project began in August 2016, when she attended a women's focus group at the St. Elizabeth Cooperative Credit Union that was facilitated by PROPEL. The purpose of the focus group was for female producers of St. Elizabeth to share their experiences in agriculture, and to connect the group to the PROPEL project. Participating in the women's focus group that day inspired something more for Opal, as she was introduced to the idea of Irish potato production, a crop she had not yet considered.

Discussing Irish potato cultivation with the PROPEL team led to further independent research, market research, speaking with her new networks in the agriculture sector, and ultimately, a light-bulb moment for Opal.

Inspired and armed with the information she needed, Opal set forth, seriously looking for land where she could cultivate Irish potato for the first time.

*"I was asking around about land that was available, and I heard about the Cowan family, who had land but they were not renting it out. So I went and knocked on their door!"*

Having secured the land, Opal returned to the St. Elizabeth Cooperative Credit Union to obtain an agricultural loan to get her into the production of almost 2 acres of Irish Potato, in prime land between Magotty and Lacovia. She also connected with Kemoy Edwards, an the Agricultural Extension Facilitator for the PROPEL project, whom she states was instrumental in helping her secure a contract with MidCo, a buyer of produce who guaranteed Opal they would take everything she produced for a set price. Having looked at market prices and armed with knowledge obtained through word-of-mouth, Opal did not originally like the price given. Together with Kemoy, the two of them managed to negotiate with MidCo, whom she eventually signed on with for a price higher than originally offered.

After obtaining a soil test from Newport-Fersan, Opal purchased most of her seeds from H&L Agro, and also received some seeds from the National Potato Program. Inspired by a presentation on H2K climate-smart technologies, Opal also invested in bio-pesticides to protect her crop and renew her soil. Opal planted her first rows of Irish potato the day after Christmas, 2016.

Unfortunately, drought hit almost immediately, and disaster may have been imminent. But Opal had faith. Without a drop of rain for a month, that faith was tested.

*“The only thing in farming that you are sure of is your belief in God... Farming has strengthened my faith in God. I see it as a miracle. You plant the seed, but you have to care for it, you tend it, and you enhance the miracle.”*

Opal’s resilience paid off. Rain came, and by the end of January her crop was not only sprouting, it was thriving. Opal states, “Kemoy has been integral” to her current success, while the supportive partnerships she has built with her input providers, her buyer, and her credit union have all led her to where she is today, one month from reaping her first crop of Irish potatoes. When asked about her future business plans, Opal has it all thought out:

*“I want to be a big farmer and make lots of money. Farming is one step in the whole scheme of things, I want to add value to whatever I am producing - but the drawback is that I don’t have the collateral to move it forward. So the business plan is to start simply, build resources and credit worthiness with the new institutions, so that further down the line I have more opportunity to grow.”*

Opal has her eyes on a plot of 10 acres near her home in Magotty, and is hoping to put in 5 acres of Irish potatoes and 5 acres of sweet potato this summer: “I’m always looking at the next step for more growth. Moving from micro farm to small farm to large farm.”

Regularly employing between three and five workers on any given day, with Irish potatoes, Opal has found a crop that both works for her and brings the joy and self-sufficiency she deems as crucial in life.

*“I believe it is a way women can make themselves more independent in terms of the possibility of financial gains. And it can be sustained! What we need to do as a sector in Jamaica is to move agriculture beyond subsistence farming to larger scale farming. Instead of everyone doing small scale, we need to boost productivity and the acreage that is farmed. Many farmers, especially women have under an acre, but you want to move half of them to higher acreage and that is how you can bring prosperity.”*



Opal shows PROPEL staff how her first Irish Potato crop is coming along

How can other women do what Opal has done, and in such a short amount of time? Knowledge and relationships are key!

*“Read everything you can, attend every meeting you can, and use your connections with RADA and with input providers to expand. If we can get more women involved in farming, they can take care of their families and improve their own independence.”*

## CHERYL HARTE PRODUCER, PROCESSOR, AND RETAILER

Cheryl Harte was born and raised in the village of Two Friends on the East Coast Demerara, in Guyana. Her exposure to large-scale crop production came at age 11: “The first time I went to Hope Estate, it was though I was daydreaming. That was the first time I saw large-scale farming... I did not realize then that one day I would be an owner of a farm.”

As a beneficiary of the Sustainable Agriculture Program and guided by PROPEL, Cheryl cleared a half-acre plot and planted plantains. Her farm was then selected as a trial plot to assess the efficacy of H2K Organic products on calaloo. And Cheryl has definitely seen the desired results: “Some of

the things I learned from you all I never knew before... Now I don't use no shop fertilizers on them

calaloo and customers at the market are rushing for that as soon as I reach.”

After a month of observing the markets, Cheryl took a bold step and launched out as a wholesaler and retailer of her own produce in September 2016. “I was ashamed to go to the market and sell my produce, but after you kept telling me that I must not complain about the middleman and low prices if I do not want to retail for myself. That gave me the courage!”

Selling to a host of weekly customers at the Starbroek, Bourda, and La Penitence Markets, Cheryl is now buying wholesale from producers to meet a widening demand for high quality produce. A savvy entrepreneur, Cheryl has every intention of taking her farm and business to the next level, ensuring not only her own success but also her independence.



Cheryl proudly displays her high quality fresh produce



Olive stands inside her newly built cook shop, already a thriving business after only 6 weeks.

## OLIVE JOHNSON FROM FIELD TO FORK

Olive has always grown food, but today she is also cooking it! After 30 years as a farmer working side-by-side with her husband, 6 weeks ago, Olive opened a cook shop in her hometown of Mile Gully, Jamaica, and business is already booming. Olive, together with her husband, were one of the first persons to benefit from the PROPEL project. Today, her successes expand into new ventures.

With the addition of “restauranteur” on her resume, Olive not only grows the food that her community eats, but now that food is going from field to fry pan to fork in a seamless cycle through her restaurant business.

*“No matter what the cost, work towards your independence. If hard work isn't going to kill me, it isn't going to kill anybody! I have worked really hard. You should see me in the field, those men out there, they're scared of me!”*

Customers who frequent Olive's shop know that the meals they are enjoying are full of ingredients, from chicken to potatoes to cabbage and carrots, that were grown and reared well, transported fresh, and cooked with love.

Olive loves the independence of her multi-faceted food business, having created a mini-market system for herself. Most importantly, Olive has never been scared of hard work and encourages other women to do the same.

## LILIAN MARCELLIN NEW TECHNIQUES LEAD TO CROP SUCCESS

Lilian Marcellin is a veteran farmer of 45 years. Teamed with her husband, Lilian works about half of her 10-acre farm in Calibishie, in Dominica. Lilian typically farms sweet potatoes, ginger, plantain, onions, dasheens, vegetables and potatoes and she sells her produce on the local market as well as to supermarkets. She is an active member of the North-Eastern Women Farmers Group.



Lilian reviews her farm's bookkeeping accounts

In February 2016, Lilian was selected by WUSC Caribbean for a study tour to Jamaica to learn about potato production first-hand, from successful potato farmers and the PROPEL Jamaica team. Lilian also benefitted from potato farmer field school training through PROPEL and extension support from the Ministry of Agriculture in Dominica.

*“When I went to Jamaica, I realized that I made a mistake with how I was planting and drying the potatoes – I was planting them left, right, all over the place, mixing up the big seeds with the little seeds. I would have done better if I had gone to Jamaica before to see how it is really done.”*

As a result of these learning opportunities and access to Elite potato seeds, Lilian has expanded her potato crop and is utilizing the best practices learned not just in potato production, but also to farm sweet potato and onion.

Lilian was ecstatic with her crop that followed, from which she was able to sell 30 bags of high quality Irish potatoes— 20 to the local supermarket Greens and the remaining 10 in the local market. “I love the Spunta and use it in my curry chicken every week!”



Lilian surveys her potato drying facility

## PROPEL TEAM COMPLETES GENDER TRAINING

In an effort to increase our team awareness of gender issues and to enhance our collective ability to make increasingly positive impacts in gender equality and mainstreaming through the PROPEL project, a beginner course on gender was completed by all PROPEL staff and consultants to kick start awareness of key concepts and issues so that we can all begin thinking about ways in which gender can be further incorporated into our programming at PROPEL.

The *I Know Gender: An Introduction to Gender Equality for UN Employees* course was made available via the UN Women Training Centre online portal. It is aimed at UN employees, though it is highly suitable for civil service staff, government staff, non-profit workers and any person who is planning and executing development programming. The following modules were identified as excellent starting points:

**Module 1-3 - “Gender Concepts to get Started”, “International Frameworks for Gender Equality”, and “Promoting Gender Equality throughout the UN System”** -- General gender concepts, terminology, history and issues.

**Module 4 - “Women’s Economic Empowerment”**--- How and why gender balance in the labor force as well as an introduction to women’s economic empowerment and participation in the market society is important.

**Module 5 - “Women’s Leadership and Decision Making”**--- Why gender balanced governance is important and beneficial for all.

## MEET SOME OF THE HARDWORKING POWER WOMEN OF PROPEL

### MARISSA LOWDEN: RISING THROUGH THE RANKS

Marissa only joined PROPEL in March 2016, but in less than a year she has gone from being Guyana's Gender Equality and Youth Program Officer, to adding the title of Agribusiness and Marketing Coordinator to most recently becoming the Country Coordinator. With a Master of Science Degree in Global Studies from the University of the West Indies and a Degree in International Relations from the University of Guyana, Marissa has limitless energy to lead with creativity, passion, and a drive to take Guyana's PROPEL team to the next level. Marissa brings her experiences with the Guyana Chamber of Commerce, the United Nations, and Texila American University into her work linking PROPEL with a variety of both beneficiaries and stakeholders. Remarkably successful at such a young age, Marissa is a fine example of what a modern and empowered woman is!



### ANGELA ARTHUR ISSAC: POWER ACCOUNTANT

Angela joined PROPEL almost 3 years ago as the Project Accountant based in Barbados. Her first degree is in Accounting from the University of the West Indies, complimented by an Associate Degree in Business Studies from the Barbados Community College. Always learning and improving her skills, this power accountant recently completed her final exam with the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants and is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Barbados.

As Project Accountant, Angela loved the feeling of knowing that she had met her deadlines while ensuring that the information was always accurate and reliable. With this efficient attention to detail and her incredible account management abilities, it is no wonder that as of Mar 1, 2017, Angela earned herself a promotion to the post of Regional Finance Manager for WUSC Caribbean. We congratulate Angela for her great accomplishments and we are proud to have her leading our finance team!



### LENORIA FEARON: "KEEP MOVING FORWARD"

When Lenoria applied for her second job as an Agronomist at the local office of a renowned Sugar Estate in Jamaica, she was told that a suitable job for a female was nursing overseas. Never settling, she re-applied via their central office and was hired for the job. Two years later, she succeeded her predecessor as Agriculture Manager, in charge of 31 managers & supervisors, over 500 field workers, and with direct responsibility for the Tractor and Transport Department.

Presently, Lenoria holds the position of Agribusiness & Marketing Coordinator at WUSC Jamaica, where she prepares concept notes for economically sustainable ventures, presents business opportunities for stakeholders' buy-in, and guides marketing agreements between producers and buyers.

Lenoria attributes her success to her faith "through Jesus Christ all things are possible", perseverance, and hard work. Her philosophy is "Keep moving forward, greater opportunities lie ahead".



## GENDER EQUALITY: LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2017-2018 ANNUAL WORK PLAN

Building on the momentum of the 2016-2017 programming year, gender equality is a major focus for PROPEL priorities and goals. Each country team has a unique gender equality action plan based on their specific context with activities to be spearheaded by Gender Equality and Youth Officers (located in Guyana, Jamaica, and Barbados) as well as a Regional Gender Equality and Youth Volunteer.

All five PROPEL countries have committed significant programming time and resources to ensure gender equality strategic goals and targets of gender equality are effectively met. This commitment is not only limited to the overall target indicator of females representing 33% of direct beneficiaries, but also guides activities to ensure women are equitably integrated into daily learning activities, trainings, services rendered, asset and input distribution, and event participation.



Major areas of gender equality analysis and programming in the 2017-2018 AWP include:

- i. Integrating female beneficiaries into a wider range of PROPEL programming based on the identified needs of targeted producers, agri-processors, and agripreneurs.
- ii. Analyzing and increasing equitable opportunities for female beneficiaries to access the HVM through business development training, credit forums and governance capacity building initiatives. This also includes facilitating crop and sustainable agriculture pilots specifically directed at female beneficiaries.
- iii. Collaborating with stakeholders to increase the capacity of the market system players in identifying the needs of women and better integrating women into the high value market economies. This includes partnering with gender based organizations and increasing the institutional capacity of stakeholders.
- iv. Identifying barriers between the HVM and female beneficiaries to improve knowledge sharing and relationship building through communication means and multi-stakeholder forums.
- v. Promoting female agri-sector champions as spokespeople for women in agriculture thereby advocating for equitable access to resources and opportunities for female driven agri-businesses to succeed in the HVM.



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