

Ayodele's Vision Of A Sustainable Business - Farming Plantains In Guyana

In 2010, Ayodele Sampson, a 32 year old single-parent and mother of two, returned to her homeland of Guyana with the intention of becoming a successful farmer. She had been living abroad, working in the insurance business and had observed Antiguan farmers enjoying a successful livelihood. Ayodele had the advantage of access to a 37 acre family farm on Trollie Island (Region 3 on the Essequibo River, West Demerara), which had been idle for 16 years. Upon her return, she shared her vision with the family, friends and the community and quickly learnt that the main crop grown in the region and the one in highest demand was plantains. "I traded in my sophisticated working attire and image for long boots and farming tools, this was not an environment that I was not accustomed to". Without experience and despite the doubts of some of her family, Ayodele began farming plantains, cultivating 3 acres in her first year.



"It was challenging understanding the agronomy of the plantain crop and the marketing of the produce, as a newcomer and a woman, the middlemen often took advantage of me offering me the lowest price for the plantains"

This was not the best time to become a Plantain Farmer in Guyana as most farmers were suffering heavy losses due to diseases and pests including Black Sigatoka (a leaf disease that has caused a significant decrease in the production of plantains since 2009), Moko, Corn borer and Nematodes.



At the time, few farmers had the knowledge necessary to manage the pests, diseases and nutrition of their plantain crop and far less, the desire to invest in the purchase of pesticides and fertilizers needed to minimize those losses.

With help from fellow farmers, some family members and through trial and error, perseverance and eternal optimism, Ayodele was able to make enough to pay her workers and keep going.

In 2014 Ayodele learnt, by word of mouth from fellow farmers, about the **PROPEL sponsored Plantain Management Program**. The program was advertised as open to existing plantain farmers who were already cultivating plantains on a minimum of a half an acre or at least 300 suckers. Ayodele was quick to apply to participate and was accepted into the program in April, 2014.

As part of this new program, Ayodele

- **Attended a series of PROPEL/NAREI Workshops on the Production and Management of Plantains;**
- **Cultivated a half acre Action Oriented Research Plot (demonstration plot) and planted 300 disease-free suckers;**
- **Tracked and utilized a “Tech Pack” consisting of fertilizers and pesticides specially prescribed for the management of diseases/pests and for the nutritional needs of the crop; and**
- **Maintained a detailed Farm Diary provided by the Project to chronicle her activities on the demonstration plot.**

The project’s Agricultural Field Extension Officers regularly visited her farm to follow up and provide technical advice such as how to apply the pesticides and fertilizers .

Ayodele admits that participating in the PROPEL Plantain Management Program was a game-changer.

“As a result of the program, I can replicate what I have learnt. I am now able to manage the plantain cultivation and I have increased the average weight per bunch from 30 to 40 lbs., which increases my income. I have been able to build a house, purchase a boat and engine, travel and most importantly, ably provide for my family”. She elaborated that she has a deep sense of satisfaction and self-worth stemming from her transformation.

Ayodele currently has 8 acres cultivated in plantains with plans to increase production in the future.



Ayodele attends PROPEL workshop
(seated front left)



Ayodele practices farm sanitation “trashing”
cleaning suckers of diseased leaves.



Up to the end of September 2015, over 700 farmers in Guyana have participated in the Plantain Management Program offered by PROPEL in association with NAREI. Through this valuable technical assistance and the inputs provided, farmers are expected to practice what they have learnt, improve and increase production and share the knowledge with others. These producers will be better able to target high value markets due to the improved quality and more consistent supply of their produce.