

From subsistence to commercial farm management and marketing, Maylene Mahabir is leading the way for plantain farmers in Guyana

Maylene Mahabir was born and raised in the indigenous community of St. Cuthbert's Mission which is located sixty - five (65) miles up the Mahaica River. There she received her farming orientation and foundation, as "subsistence farming" was practiced by every family in that community. That foundation made it easy for her to fit into a farming family when she got married and moved to the farming community of Little Biaboo, located twenty (20) miles away on the banks of the Mahaica River.

"I grew up being involved in farming at St. Cuthbert's from a tender age and I loved it, so nothing about cultivation and caring crops was new to me except the machines and tending to the cattle."



Maylene Mahabir agri-preneur
On her plantain farm

The zeal, energy and knowledge she displayed while working alongside her husband impressed him and led to the decision for her to take the lead and manage the farm while her husband explored other business opportunities. In 1999 this dynamic woman farmer ventured into plantain production with half an acre cultivation.

"We have six acres of land for other crops, so I started by cultivating a half acre with plantain. The only time I was not cultivating plantain was during the big flood of 2005 which damaged all our crops and 2009 – 2011 when the dry leaf disease hit."

After a lull in production owing to the effect of the Black Sigatoka disease, our agri-preneur restarted her plantain production enterprise in 2012. She said,

"I love growing plantains and was happy when I was able to restart cultivation of the crop."

In April 2014 PROPEL signed the first sub project agreement in Guyana with the Upper Mahaica Farmers Association to provide training and farming inputs to help rural farmers improve their skills and production of plantains. Maylene, who had become a member of that group since 2005, was among the earliest set of farmers to have benefited from PROPEL supported interventions in Guyana. Maylene and the other members received extensive training, supplies of fertilizers, insecticides, nematicides and fungicides to use on half-acre action oriented research plots to assess the effectiveness of these inputs and the integrated management approach for the control of the Black Sigatoka disease advocated through PROPEL.

Maylene has since taken a more focused approach to her plantain production enterprise, paying attention to root pest control and she has implemented a spraying regime.

“Even though they were cultivating plantain in the Little & Big Biaboo farming communities for so long, the farmers were neither fertilizing the way they were taught nor putting emphasis on the control of root pests.”



Maylene embraces technology to assist with land preparation

Maylene has been cultivating plantain intercropped with hot or sweet peppers since she restarted the cultivation of plantains in 2012. The peppers are kept in the fields for six months before they are removed. She was very upbeat about the yield increases after putting into practice what she was taught at the plantain production management course provided by PROPEL. She has since applied the recommended 8ft. x 8 ft. and 8 ft. x 6 ft. plant spacing and on occasion, placed two suckers in a hole with good success.

Maylene now keeps records of her enterprise and has seen huge improvements using the 12:12:17:2 blended fertilizer she received as part of her PROPEL training. **She has seen her production go from 25 to 30 pounds per bunch, to an average of 38 to 42 pounds per bunch (on average a 45% increase in bunch weight).**



Maylene selling her produce every Saturday at the Mahaica market

This progressive agri-preneur is not just a full time plantain and vegetable farmer, she is also a trader and consolidator. Maylene sells her produce each week at the open market in Mahaica and when she has a shortfall in plantain production at her farm, she purchases from other farmers in the area, to maintain a regular supply to her loyal customers.

Prior to PROPEL’s intervention, Maylene’s highest acreage of plantain was 1.5 acres. Today she has increased her production capacity three-fold, cultivating 4.5 of her 6 acres with plantain. She is very upbeat about the plantain yield she produces after putting into practice what she has been taught through the PROPEL project.