

Cheryl Harte from Producer to Agri-preneur, one step at a time.



Cheryl Harte on her farm in Guyana

Cheryl Harte was born and raised in the village of **Two Friends** along the East Coast Demerara, approximately eighteen (18) miles from the capital city of Georgetown. She received basic instruction in Agricultural Science while attending the Ann's Grove Primary School. Her exposure to large scale crop production, however, came in 1987 at age eleven when she started accompanying her guardians to do voluntary work at the adjacent Hope Estate.

"I went with the folks who raised me to Hope Estate on weekends. They were mostly involved in weeding to keep the farm clean. I joined those who were not weeding to pick peppers. The first time I went to the Estate, it was though I was day dreaming. That was the first time I saw large scale farming. They had acres upon acres of pepper and coconuts. As a child, picking pepper was fun. I did not realize then that one day I would be an owner of a farm."

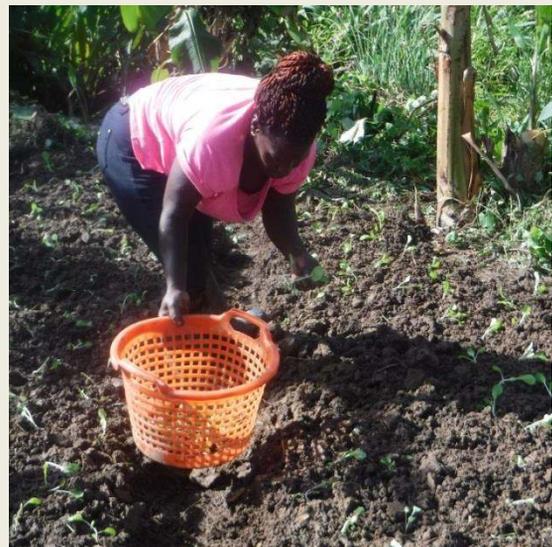
Cheryl embraced farming as she started her family in 1992. Her husband Jairam secured leases for farm lands that were under the jurisdiction of the Hope Estate in the villages of Dochfour and Hope. Together they began cultivating leafy vegetables, pepper, watermelon and passion fruit. However, as her family grew,

(Cheryl now has 6 children) along with her culinary skills, she developed a micro-business preparing snacks for students and the community at large.

In the last quarter of 2015, Jairam began collaborating with the PROPEL team on the Plantain Black Sigatoka Management Program. Through the PROPEL project, farmers in their community gained access to extension services that encouraged a change of approach to farming which was adopted by her husband. This in turn, encouraged Cheryl to give farming another try.

"He had no system in farming, no order in planting. All the crops he would plant mix up and anyhow. He never listened to anyone. Since you all (PROPEL) worked with him I see a difference. He harvested some good bunches of plantain from that half acre plot. We had bunches from 30 to 60 pounds. We wholesale (the produce) but the prices the middlemen paid was too low, not good"

Seeing potential, Cheryl leased and cleared a half acre plot of her own with a plan to cultivate at least half of it with plantains. Under the guidance of PROPEL, she also began cultivation of leafy and other vegetables. Cheryl has been putting into practice the advice and recommendations given to her with regard to the cultivation of her crops and has been seeing the desired results. It was due to her enthusiasm and attention to detail that **Cheryl was selected by PROPEL to participate in their Sustainable Agriculture Program. This program emphasizes care of the environment and rejuvenation of soil fertility through the use of organic farming inputs.** She is one of the vegetable producers on whose farm a trial is being undertaken to assess the efficacy of H2K organic products. **In addition she was encouraged to become an agri-preneur and undertake the retail marketing of her own produce.**



Cheryl cultivating leafy vegetable (Pak Choy)

Best practice leads to better quality and greater demand.

“Some of the things I learn from you all (through PROPEL) I never know before. Like scoop up the two - three inches of rotten leaves and soil from under the trees and work that into the soil and plant and the culture mixture with the sugar that we spray. I don't use no shop fertilizers on them calaloo and customers at the market rushing for that as soon as I reach.”

After surveying the markets for about a month, Cheryl took the bold step and launched out as a wholesaler/retailer of her produce in September 2016.

“I was ashamed to go to the market and sell my produce, but after you keep telling me that I must not complain about the middleman and low prices if I do not want to retail myself - that give me the courage. I am doing better now. I am getting greater returns producing and retailing produce. The snack business used to bring in around \$18,000.00 per week (6 days per week). Selling produce at the markets, my profit now is \$60,000.00 plus (4 days per week).”



Cheryl's new farm visited by PROPEL

Cheryl explained, *“The work is not easy. At the farm the boys and their father put in the hard work of land preparation. But I do most of the planting on my plot. At harvest, sometimes I hire someone to help in lifting the produce out from farm to home. I would go to the markets alone, but lately one of the girls would accompany me. We are better off now. Our living condition has improved. I am now able to send the girl, who is at secondary school, to private lessons in the afternoons so she can improve in math.”*

When asked about her plans for the future, this enterprising mother of six said, *“I want to expand, but selling space is a problem now at the markets. My plan though, is to grow bigger in this business. It is going to happen, bit by bit, step by step.”*



Cheryl's Poi plot thrives with H2K products

Presently, Cheryl sells at the Stabroek Market at the centre of the capital city of Georgetown on Mondays and Fridays. She markets her produce at Bourda Market on Wednesdays and La Penitence Market on Sundays. She has a host of customers who rely on her weekly for her high quality leafy vegetables. She now also buys wholesale from producers of quality vegetables to meet widening customer demand. Her profits from selling produce have grown over 200%.

Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Canada

The Promotion of Regional Opportunities for Produce Through Enterprises and Linkages (PROPEL) project is implemented by World University Services of Canada (WUSC), with the financial support of donors and from the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada (GAC).


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