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### **Caribbean: Jamaica's Food Insecurities**

Jamaica is a small island in the Caribbean Sea but is well known for its reggae music, beautiful mountainous regions, gorgeous beaches, mixed cultures of African, European, Asian and Indian descents, and unique foods. It is the third largest island of the Greater Antilles and is a commonwealth realm that had Queen Elizabeth II as its monarch and head of state. Jamaica is divided into 14 parishes, which are grouped into three historic counties. The original inhabitants of Jamaica are believed to be the Arawak Indians, also known as Tainos who originated from South America 2,500 years ago. They named the island Xaymaca, which meant "land of wood and water." Many people do not know that Jamaica has impoverished areas just as other countries do. They only see the beauty of it. The country is home to tourism and has its share of wealthy and poor citizens. Wealthy citizens send their children to private institutions and go to universities overseas. Their citizens who are not as fortunate to have this luxury must find ways to educate their children. Through public schools and some home schools, children sometimes acquire inadequate educations. Along with the inadequate education, many Jamaicans live with inadequate housing, poor health care, a limited food supply and unclean water. Along with these hardships are the internal political issues, crime, unemployment, declining infrastructure and natural disasters that affect this country. Agriculture has played a major role in Jamaica's history from the beginning of the seventeenth century to today. Being a third world country, Jamaica has a multitude of issues that may affect their being considered a productive country, but most of the agricultural problems lie in the hands of the farmers and their abilities or inabilities to produce the goods for the people. Learning about the people, education and their agricultural practices which involve the lack of food security will be the focus of this research.

"Civilization as it is known today, could not have involved nor can it survive, without an adequate food supply." Laureate Norman Borlaug

An average-sized Jamaican family is five children and two adults. Most of the families are headed by the women. It has been stated that Jamaican parents are very strict by nature. When asked the question to a my grandmother, who lived in Jamaica almost all of her life, "Who ran the household in her family?" She descriptively stated that her mother was the disciplinarian because her father was always working, but both of her parents loved each other and their children. Though stern sometimes, her parents never missed a chance to have fun, play some family games and be involved in their children's lives (Interview-Moore). The typical parents in this area enforce togetherness, and look out for their families. However, raising children, as in any country, has its difficulties, but adding a limited supply to the list changes things. According to facts in the article, *The Female Face of Farming*, it is evident that the women help to increase productivity and reduce hunger and malnutrition in most of the families while helping to raise the children. The women farm just as men do. They have limited access to credit and lack control of family funds. They are also faced with limited educational opportunities and gender discrimination at markets unlike the men. Regardless of these facts, most families still manage to stay together. Fresh vegetables, fruits, beef and pork are given at meal time and the family unit is in place. The size of the family is not important because they welcome many from the community, in an open door policy type behavior. This is established in most Jamaican households regardless of the food supply. However, there is still a lack of food for the next day.

"If you have no confidence in self, you are twice defeated in the race of life," (Marcus Garvey).

Education is very important in this country. It is offered in almost every family in Jamaica and it is enforced. They have many levels of education: early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education. Every level is needed and success is acquired as it is attained. According to the Caribbean Examination Council, primary education consists of a basic school education which includes the ages 5-11. Grade one is for readiness inventory. Grade three is about assessment tests in Math and Language Arts. Grade four is literacy testing, and grade six is all about achievement tests. This system of learning is very useful and should be enforced in the United States because it shows what will be focused on in every grade. The way that their system is set up seems to be centered around the preparation for college and/or standardized tests that will be taken in the future. There are only five primary schools that citizens may be placed in based on their academic goals and achievements. They can not select the school they want to attend. They must follow guidelines that are mandated in their country. Once they are in secondary education, there are two different levels, lower (7-9) and upper (10-11). Upper level school students have the ability to create their own curriculum which includes mathematics, English language, history, geography and twenty-six other subjects. The last level of education is tertiary education which basically means students will be working on a college level and will soon graduate with a three year diploma. According to my grandmother, "Education is the key to doors opening and moving forward in the world." She speaks highly about the education that she and her family received and how her mother and father stayed on them constantly about graduating and being successful. In as much as education is the way to success in this country, the citizens are still lacking in ways to effectively provide for their families. The subject matter is important. Are effective ways of farming and producing foods being taught in schools and are the students given hands on experience? Focusing on these issues could be a start to creating a well-educated citizen in Jamaica, who could not only be successful but who could provide for their families if they chose to remain in the country.

Health care for families continues to be a problem in this country. Depending on the location, health facilities are available, but in other cases they are miles away. Every Parish has at least one small hospital. Comprehensive emergency care is available only in the larger cities such as Kingston and Montego Bay. Outside of the larger cities or in the remote parts, emergency services are limited. All in all, there are about three dozen hospitals and clinics available to people on the island. Their services are offered free of charge to all citizens and residents; however, they are often considered unreliable. The local population is usually unable to pay or does not have insurance for private healthcare and therefore must pay out of pocket. There are a number of health conditions which cannot be treated on the island and patients must be traveled to a nearby country where they can find care. This is another issue in this country which affects the families, community care and food supply. Adequate health care is important. If citizens are healthy, they can effectively provide for their families. The food supply is threatened when the farmers cannot adequately provide for their families because of illnesses or lack of medicine.

The economic conditions in Jamaica lead to hard lives for many farmers. These conditions affect the farmers' abilities to plant and harvest their crops which are sold to local factories and markets. Eighty percent of Jamaica is hilly and mountainous and the climate is tropical. This fact does not help the food supply deficiency. Large plantations and pastures dominate coastal plains while small farmers are confined to rugged fields, as stated previously. With the climatic atmosphere, being very hot most times and rainy, and the mountainous terrain, it is sometimes difficult for farmers to plant and harvest the crop which plays a large role in hunger and poverty (Frank Rijsberman). Small farmers have about five acres or less and produce root crops, plantains, mangoes, avocado, pears, bread fruit, cassava, ackees and vegetables. Large farms produce sugar, bananas, coffee, citrus and cocoa for the market. The foods produced by these farmers help their families survive. The pastures that some farmers have for their cattle, chickens, goats, pigs and sheep are large fields but in most cases, they are small areas. However, large or small, these farmers can provide for their families with adequate education and healthcare. If the farmer has milking cattle, factories in Jamaica may encourage them to sale their cattle or milk for a profit. Sometimes, there is not enough dairy to be sold to the local market, so food supply or money is not

available. In this case, large orders of imports of powdered milk, butter, and cheese are shipped from New Zealand and other countries to Jamaica. Food imports cost more than the value of exports. If farmers do not farm and produce the goods and services for their families and their country, Jamaican's population declines and food supply is therefore threatened, again.

Employment is difficult throughout the West Indies, because the number of agricultural workers or farmers is declining. There is a serious problem in rural areas because of the lack of employment available. With the increase in population, it is hard to find work. Education and healthcare affect employment as well. Many Jamaicans are uninterested in the jobs that do exist because of low paying positions and little advancement options. As a result, people have been leaving their parishes to find work in nearby towns. Conditions are often worse than the conditions in their own area but lack of knowledge sometimes leads to poor judgment. There are many fishermen who travel from beach to beach all around the island trying to make a living. Jamaican bay fish is popular so they search the waters to find it. Once they catch the fish, if it is in large quantities, residents have a chance to buy and sell products at the local market and/or corner stores. Sam's Caribbean Market is a local grocery store in this country that will buy goods and offer jobs to the citizens of Jamaica; thus helping to raise the employment rate and decrease inadequate food supply. However, this is not enough. There are other resources that can be offered in this plight.

According to FAO Corporate Document Repository, there are a number of agricultural services that the Government supplies for the citizens and residents of this area. During the 1980's and 1990's, Jamaica underwent many policy changes under the World Bank and IMF programs which denoted the areas of trading for the liberalization in Jamaica. According to this study, some of the policy changes are listed below:

- elimination of all quantitative import restrictions and the use of reference prices
- adjustment of nominal protection (no tariff to exceed 100% after reductions)
- reduction of tariff rates over a 5-year period
- elimination of all transfers to the Jamaica Commodity Trading Company
- in the sugar industry, sale of government owned plantations and mills to private investors

Liberalization assisted the Commodity Boards to adopt a more business-oriented approach. These services include research, the development of technology, human resource and marketing, plant quarantine/produce inspection and veterinary services. The government also provides income tax exemption for up to ten years for farmers with approved farmer status (FAO). With adequate education, the implementation of the changes stated above will help Jamaica and its citizens bring the country back to a state of adequacy.

As Jamaica's food insecurities are examined, one can see that there are many deficiencies in this country that aid in the lack of food supply for this country. Education is one of them and though it is strictly enforced, is the subject matter that is being taught one that is conducive to their families and country's survival? Because of climatic weather and other factors that may affect this country's crops and productivity, what can the citizens and residents do to get a handle on the food insecurities? The economic conditions of Jamaica also play a role in the food insecurities because if a family does not have the money for food, how can it survive? These are the questions that are being asked. Hunger and poverty do exist in this country. It is very difficult to find a remedy to their problems of food insecurity but there must be one. The problems of one area of the world may not be that of all areas; however, they still affect the other. Lack of education, healthcare and food insecurities are a concern to many Americans, Canadians, Africans and Europeans because as they migrate from Jamaica and they settle in

these countries, some of them leave their families behind. People caring about the welfare of other people should be a priority. It is not just their problem anymore because helping that country will help other countries as well. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations must act quickly and efficiently to help this country with their growing problems of food insecurities. This organization is there to help both developed and developing countries but the communities, citizens and other countries must do their part as well. The citizens and residents must take a stand on their own education. The local agencies in this country must assist as well. Learning more about their crops, when to plant them, how to harvest them and general information about them can be a pro-active solution to some of the growing problems in Jamaica. "Each one, teach one" is a good motto for this country's leaders, local government and even the neighboring countries. It is not only their problem; but it is our problem as well. When one country survives a crisis, we all survive. Restoring Jamaica's food security must be a major concern for their citizens, residents, tourists and neighboring countries so that it can remain the beautiful exotic island that all people can enjoy.

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