

Media Backgrounder

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Trees That Feed Foundation Fights Hunger with Breadfruit Trees

More Than 50,000 Food-producing Trees Planted in Five Years in Jamaica and Haiti

The massive 2010 earthquake in Haiti devastated this already impoverished and resource-starved nation. Lack of shelter, disease and crime still plague the population, but hunger might be the most serious lingering problem. The nation's already inadequate farming infrastructure was nearly destroyed by the disaster, leaving the nation's food supply severely depleted.

The Trees That Feed Foundation (TTFF) is a not-for-profit public charity devoted to helping people in tropical countries combat hunger. In the Caribbean, for example, food costs are unaffordable for many because wheat, corn and rice, a large component of the local diet, are imported. The high costs of these foods increases daily living stress on the world's poorest populations. Locally based organizations and governments are constrained by limits of their resources, while arable land lies idle in many areas. Traditionally grown field crops need more land mass while trees need much less space to grow.

Mary McLaughlin, a TTFF founder and current chief executive, believes tree crops are a large part of the answer to world food concerns. "Tree crops have similar nutritional qualities to grains, yet require less input of labor, agro chemicals, fertilizers and space. They also restore ecological balance to land damaged by slash-and-burn farming methods, commercial logging, or neglect," she said. Trees also capture and sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, convert it to oxygen, and store the carbon for decades, if not centuries.

TTFF has achieved meaningful humanitarian success with its ongoing initiatives to plant breadfruit trees in Haiti and Jamaica. The native South Pacific tree produces a large, round fruit with green skin, and is larger than a grapefruit. The fruit is cooked and the skin peeled for eating. When cooked, breadfruit tastes similar to unleavened bread, and can serve as a substitute for flour, rice or potatoes. TTFF also provides other food trees, including ackee, mango, avocado, lychee, pomegranate and more.

TTFF works with governments and not-for-profit organizations in the Caribbean, Central America and Africa to plant selected species of food-bearing trees. Trees can be grown

either by small farmers, on field margins or in urban spaces.

In Haiti and Jamaica, TTFF distributes seedlings and more. The Foundation works with governments and local organizations to promote, expand and sustain its efforts, including education, support and distribution.

In Jamaica, TTFF is working with local Rotary chapters to encourage planting of breadfruit trees on the grounds of the country's 3000 schools. This project, according to the Ministry of Education, "will improve the diets of Jamaicans in sustainable ways and reduce dependency on imported foods and agrochemicals."

In Haiti, TTFF has made significant progress in producing breadfruit flour, which is made into porridge and served daily to school children and hospital patients. TTFF also sent 1,000 scrub-like pomegranate trees to help bind barren soil to eventually allow for planting larger trees.

Fresh breadfruit has limited shelf life but dried fruit will last for years. Working with partners in the Jamaican and Haitian governments, TTFF is developing production capabilities to help farmers and food co-ops process picked breadfruit. In association with Northwestern University, TTFF developed its "Factory in a Box" kit that includes a fruit peeler, grinder, scale, drying racks and packaging materials for the flour. After the fruit is picked and peeled, it can be dried and ground into flour for distribution or sale.

TTFF remains focused on Jamaica and Haiti and is recruiting partners to produce breadfruit flour locally. The organization has planted 50,000 trees in five years already and is helping the world's most needy populations develop and maintain a sustainable food supply.

More information about TTFF is at www.treesthatfeed.org.

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