

St. Stanislaus College Farm: more than 30 years of quiet but steady progress

Guyana Times International Sunday Magazine, 25 February, 2011

(for original article, go to: <http://www.guyanatimesinternational.com/?p=4572>)

With increasing concern about global food shortages, over the years the St. Stanislaus College Farm Complex (SSCF) has been humbly proving its ability to be a major player in ensuring Guyana's food security.



The SSCF is the only agriculture school farm in the country and is a premiere training institution for agriculture students, technicians and farmers in Guyana.

It is located at 69 North Sophia and also houses the St. Stanislaus Training Centre (SSTC), the Dairy Products Unit (DPU) and the Greenhouse Vegetable Production Unit. The 13 acre complex is

owned by the St. Stanislaus College Association (SSCA) (formerly the St. Stanislaus Old Boys Association).

In an interview, the Farm Manager, Mahadeo Panday Mansaran, said that operations are implemented using sound scientific techniques, making the optimum use of resources and improved technology, which ensures the added value to products, thereby increasing financial returns, use of renewable and recyclable resources (solar energy, manure, etc.), use of environmentally-friendly material, strict adherence to safety and health regulations, and overall implementation of best practices.

According to Mansaran, SSCF was established in the early 1970s to provide practical training for Agriculture Science students of the St. Stanislaus College. The farm was the brainchild of the then headmaster, Father Kenneth Khan, and it was conceptualized in response to the call of the government of Guyana to have agriculture introduced into the curriculum of secondary schools.

The farm was set up with the help of members of the SSCA and with many hours of self-help work by former and then current students and parents who toiled diligently to establish what was a living laboratory to be used by the students of the college. It was officially opened by then Minister of Agriculture, Gavin Kennard, on 25 September, 1975. The economic base of the farm was built around a poultry unit which provided revenue from the sale of eggs and broilers, thereby helping to make the farm a financially sustainable entity.

Troubling times ¹

By the end of the 1970s, the future of the farm was in doubt. Father Khan had been transferred, and there was no foreign currency available for the purchase of hatching eggs and feed ingredients. As a result, the farm was unable to access baby chicks, and revenue had eroded to the extent that the entity became unsustainable.

The Chairman of the Farm Committee, Dr. Deep Ford, engaged the assistance of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the services of Dr. Hector Munoz who was at the time a Livestock Specialist attached to IICA. A business plan was soon prepared to convert the farm into a dairy farm using appropriate technology. Dr. Munoz supervised the establishment of pastures with a rotational grazing management system. He also used a solar unit to power the electric fences, and installed a portable milking machine.

With the financial assistance of Guyana Stores Ltd., a few cows were added to the two already at the farm, and that signalled the beginning of the dairy model with an improved package of technologies, commonly referred to as the 'St Stanislaus Model' or the 'Munoz Model'.

The model has been used to train and/or expose farmers as well as students from secondary schools, universities, and agricultural training institutions. The model has also been demonstrated to farmers, technicians, and students from the Caribbean.

SSCF Dairy Programme and Poultry Enterprise

Mansaran said that the dairy farm produces an average of 45 gallons of milk per day. And the farm utilizes a unique grazing system in Guyana, known as a rotational grazing system that revolves around the use of 24 grazing pastures and two overnight pastures. These pastures were planted in 1983 with technical assistance from IICA. As a result of good management, most of the pastures have never been replanted.

Within the milking parlour, 24 cows per hour are milked by a Portable Double Milking Machine. Trained staff members make certain that the milk produced is of the best quality.

Greenhouse Vegetable Production

Three months after the flood of January 2005, Greenhouse Vegetable Production was initiated, in collaboration with IICA, in an effort to demonstrate alternative vegetable production systems. Both Hydroponics and In-soil vegetable production are demonstrated and taught. Hydroponics is the cultivation of plants without soil and is a

¹ In Jan. 2005 when the heavy rains fell and most of the East Coast was flooded, the Farm also was so flooded that the only high ground was the administration building where classes are held. Since the cattle and other farm animals could not use their regular barns, they had to be housed and maintained in this building. As was to be expected, after the flood waters receded and the animals were able to use their own buildings, the administration building was literally a mess. The [Toronto Association](#) contributed \$5,000 (Can) to clean up the building and to repair any other damage done to the Farm by the flood.

technique of crop production which is most suitable for home-owners with limited resources – land space, water, time, materials, and equipment.

Training Centre

The St. Stanislaus Training Centre was established in 1993 with the financial assistance from Futures Fund and the Agricultural Institute of Canada. The German and Netherlands Micro Projects fund was also utilized for the acquisition of training equipment and materials. Persons trained over the years include farmers, students from primary and secondary schools as well as students from the Guyana School of Agriculture, the Regional Programme for Animal Health Assistants, and the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry of the University of Guyana.

Since its inception, the complex has been responsible for providing formal and informal training opportunities to over 10,000 farmers, students, and others. The foundation courses have been Dairy Management and Poultry Production. Specific Dairy Management topics have included clean milk production, milking procedures and sanitation, servicing of milk machines, animal health including mastitis control, animal nutrition, feeds and feeding, herd management, pasture management, and record keeping; while specific Poultry Production topics included brooding of baby chicks, feeding regimes, general management of broilers, and poultry house design.

“The complex has hosted more demonstrations on haymaking, silage making, rotational grazing, organic fertilizer production, machine milking of animals, milk cooling, the manufacture of milk products, and greenhouse vegetable production than any other location in Guyana. It is the only location in Guyana where one can witness humus production, compost production, biogas production, and hydroponics all on the same complex. Fifth Form students countrywide come to visit us but, because they cannot witness this production because of time, we made CDs where we show them the process,” Mansaran stated.

Agri-tourism

In recent years, about 300 to 500 students per year have utilized this facility for training. The modules embrace areas such as:

- livestock breeds such as cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, swine, and rabbits,
- pasture production and management systems such as pasture grasses and legumes, pasture establishment and systems, and grazing management systems,
- cost of producing meat birds,
- marketing poultry products,
- common livestock calculations,
- farrowing and care and management of piglets, and
- meat carcasses and cuts.

Several student training and farmer training sessions will be done each year, and there will be three to four specially organized CARICOM student experience tours and farmer training opportunities each year.

The complex has been offering a unique opportunity to Guyanese and visitors to tour a diversified, multi-enterprise farm and observe several day-to-day activities such as cows being milked, cattle grazing, and compost and silage making. A guided tour of the farm has been well received by all visitors. The SSCF has been engaged in rudimentary agri-tourism type activities from as early as the 1980s. "When I started in 1985, we had a few chicks and pigs and some other animals but, now, the SSCF has grown and continues to grow, assisting in the reduction of poverty and hunger," Mansaran said proudly.

(Taken from Guyana Times Sunday Magazine)