

4-H National School Garden Programme to be launched

Thursday October 2, 2008

The symbolic opening of the first school garden located at Jamaica College will signal the official launch of the National School Garden Programme, on Friday, October 10.

The programme will be launched by Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture, Honourable J.C. Hutchinson and Education Minister, Honourable Andrew Holness.

This initiative, which is one of the efforts from the Ministry of Agriculture, is being implemented and managed by its youth training arm, the Jamaica 4-H Clubs in schools islandwide. It has as its goal to implement or resuscitate approximately 1,000 school gardens over a three-year period. In year one alone, it is expected that some 300 gardens will be established.

One of the special features of this programme is the endorsement of the Ministry of Education, which according to 4-H Clubs Executive Director, Lenworth Fulton is a major fillip for the programme.

“We are happy to have the minister, and by extension his ministry on board. Most of our (4-H) membership base is found in schools, hence having the education ministry as a stakeholder in this programme is seen as key,” he said.

The 4-H Clubs will work with the Ministry of Education through the schools to ensure that the gardens integrate adaptable technologies with a view of stimulating interest among students. The project will also forge critical links with school canteens so that they provide fresh food and vegetables for their respective populations as well as for sustainability.

Fulton added that the individuals who are part of the training process for the 4-H programmes were the “Leaders” who are for the most part teachers in the schools.

While the concept of school gardens is not new, it has taken on a new dimension with its launch seen as timely.

“It arose out of a policy directive from the ministry of agriculture,” Fulton continued. He added that based on this directive, the programme is charged with five major objectives:

1. To get young persons to recognize and accept the role they must play in food production.
2. To encourage environmental awareness in sustainable agriculture.
3. To coin careers in agriculture.
4. To treat agriculture as a viable business option.

5. To integrate service learning in the formal education process.

School Garden Coordinator, Clinton Brown explained that to date, over 300 schools were registered in the project, and that School Garden Officers have already been dispatched to service schools in the parishes.

According to Brown, preliminary work on the programme began in April; however, it became operational in June.

“Of the 322 schools assessed islandwide, 36 have already received inputs in the form of poultry - 10,000 broilers and 600 layers,” Brown said.

The Jamaica 4-H Clubs is the leading youth organization in Jamaica involved in youth programmes. Its mandate involves the training of young persons between the ages of five and 25 years in the areas of leadership development, agriculture, home economics, environmental awareness, healthy lifestyle and entrepreneurship.

Its mission is enhanced by the mantra – “*Work by Doing*”, while its motto is “*To Make the Best Better.*”

The organization has a membership of over 60,000 islandwide.