

Young mind favours farming

Saturday August 9, 2008



Sheldon Williams inspects his delivery of day-old chickens. - Contributed

If you converse with him, you would be inclined to believe he is a man well beyond his years, but, if truth be told, he is only 27 years old and burning with bright ideas on how to expand his farm.

Sheldon Williams, a 2004 graduate of the University of the West Indies, got involved in the agricultural sector only as a means of acquiring additional money to support himself while attending sixth form. Following graduation from university, he enjoyed a brief stint in the corporate world and has now traded in his grandiose suits and a degree in geography for water-boots, wheel-barrows, pigs and chickens.

"Based on my experience with the chickens during sixth form, I realized that it [agriculture] was profitable from then," he explained, as he gave his rationale for the transition.

The shift from geography to agriculture has been a very fruitful one for the youth, as at present he owns some 10,000 chickens, 1,170 pigs, a small holding of pineapple and plans to include Lychee are under way.

Getting funds

Funding an agriculture-based business was not much of a challenge for the youth, as he explained that money to begin chicken production was sought through Scotia Bank, which was an easier outlet when compared to other entities.

Williams pointed out that although his knowledge of the sector is limited; the gap is filled by attending training seminars organized by the Rural Agricultural Development Authority.

On average, the 27-year-old employs approximately eight individuals to assist him on the farm in processing a quantity of 11,000-15,000 tonnes of chicken meat every six weeks.

That meat is supplied to jerk centres and meat shops in Westmoreland and Montego Bay.

But it's not all smiles and cash for the young farmer, as he explained that even though his farm is secured, on one occasion he lost some 550 mature birds to thieves, which cost in excess of \$200,000.

Other problems he encounters are an increase in cost of inputs such as chicken and pig feed as well as ravages from hurricanes.

Already, relationships have been forged with Caribbean Broilers, one of the island's largest suppliers of day-old chickens, poultry and the requisite equipment and inputs for farmers in the field.

According to Williams, the company is in-tune with the needs of young farmers and if, or when, he has a problem, whether financial or otherwise, it is always ready and willing to lend a helping hand.

Pig production

The farmer has long recognized that pig farming in Jamaica is a lucrative business and, with the Ministry of Agriculture and Newport Genetics' drive to assist pig farmers to lower their production cost, Williams has boosted production to 800 fatteners per year.

However, he is eyeballing going a step further by obtaining the first pig production contract with Caribbean Broilers, which he hopes will revolutionise Jamaica's pork industry.