

**AGRICULTURAL
DIGITALISATION IN AFRICA**

*The transformative potential of
digital solutions for agriculture*

INTERVIEW

*Professor Frederike Praasterink
emphasises the urgent need to
transform food systems*

TRADING OPPORTUNITIES

*How will new initiatives help
women take advantage of the
Africa Continental Free Trade Area?*

N°194 | September - November 2019

SPORE

spore.cta.int

Digitalising extension

SMART ADVISORY SERVICES FOR FARMERS



A global perspective on agribusiness and sustainable agriculture



URBAN FARMING

Vegetable gardens crop up in Trinidad and Tobago

Student entrepreneur, Jameel Phillip, is creating adaptable food production systems in the Caribbean by setting up small urban gardens that maximise production using space-saving designs.

Keron Bascombe

Jameel Phillip, 24, set up his urban agriculture business Green Thumb Gardens with his fiancé, Ciele Williams, in September 2015. The company combines sustainable agricultural practices together with landscaping principles to provide an aesthetic appeal to home-based food production, whilst helping to remove the stigma attached to traditional farming.

As a geography and agriculture student at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Phillip undertook courses with the Ministry of Agriculture in basic aquaponics and grow box production (a method that uses partially or entirely closed, soil-based or hydroponic systems maintained within a wooden box with equipment to deliver optimal plant growth conditions). Whilst completing his studies, Phillip installed a 1 m² kitchen garden on the patio of his father-in-law's townhouse. Within a brick frame, the small garden incorporated a mixture of sheep manure, compost, soil and sand for growing herbs and vegetables such as basil, celery, chive, dill, fennel, jalapenos and tomatoes. With requests coming in from neighbours, Phillip began to build up his business. "We started with about three clients in the first year and have grown to over 30 clients, including schools," Phillip states.

To access financing, Phillip engaged with Youth Business Trinidad and Tobago (YBTT) in 2016, which offers mentorship to young entrepreneurs. "I heard about the opportunity to pitch my business to YBTT in order to qualify for a loan of \$20,000 [€17,550], which was used to build a small office space, store stock,



30 clients

including schools, have established vegetable gardens

and purchase a larger tiller to maximise time and productivity in the business," says Phillip. YBTT partnered Phillip with mentor Rachel Renie of D'Market Movers – an online delivery service of fresh produce. "Rachel helped me to understand what it means to do business," Phillip reveals. "She showed me how to set up and keep financial records, as well as how to manage clients."

As well as other space-saving alternatives, such as aquaponic systems that run along walls, Green Thumb provides vertical pots, which are used to grow various leafy vegetables and herbs. "We also do lawn maintenance so we collect

In Trinidad and Tobago, entrepreneur Jameel Phillip is promoting food security through the establishment of urban vegetable gardens

the clippings to use in our own garden as natural mulch to keep down weeds, and also prevent too much evaporation from the soil so less water is needed daily," Phillip explains.

The company also works with other local agribusinesses to support home-grown innovations. "I was introduced to Mark Mica of Boissierre Greens Earthworm Farm during an elective Vermicompost course at UWI in 2017," Phillip says. "Their soil is the best. We also use their vermicompost and compost tea for our client's gardens. Another regional product we use is Algas Organics which is an organic fertiliser made from sargassum seaweed." For the future, Phillip and Williams are looking to start a programme to encourage their clients to engage in composting utilising their own food waste in their gardens, and improve agricultural education beyond classrooms and backyards. ■