

SNAPSHOT

Linking Farmers to Markets Organically in Jamaica with Expert Volunteers Jim Riddle and Joyce Ford



F2F Volunteer Jeremiah Kidd with FAVACA program supported by VEGA in Jamaica

Locals in Kingston, Jamaica are flocking to the Ujima Natural Farmer's Market to purchase local, natural and organic produce and goods. Established in 2014, the Ujima Natural Farmer's Market is Kingston's first organic and natural-only market. As supply and demand have increased, the market has expanded its hours from biweekly to weekly.

The founding of this market and support for its suppliers and vendors were made possible by the Farmer-to-Farmer Jamaican Sustainable Farm Enterprise Program (F2F JSFEP). JSFEP is a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded program implemented by the Florida Association for Volunteer Action in the Caribbean and the Americas (FAVACA), in partnership with local host Source Farm Foundation (SFF) and supported by the Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance (VEGA). Through volunteer technical assistance, this program seeks to build local, ecologically based, disaster resistant organic food systems in Jamaica through technology transfer and management expertise. Skilled volunteers teach Jamaican farmers organic farming techniques specific to their climate and topography, and also help connect them to markets for their goods, one of which is the Ujima Natural Farmer's Market. It provides Jamaicans with an opportunity to sell and purchase local and natural products from meats and vegetables to natural detergents and jams. Customers can even enjoy local music and poetry as they shop the Ujima Natural Farmer's Market.

Success of the JSFEP and the Ujima Natural Farmer's Market is made possible through volunteer technical assistance, the heart of the Farmer-to-Farmer Program. F2F sends skilled American volunteers to provide short-term technical assistance to local partners in developing countries. To date, 54 skilled volunteers have served this particular program.

Organic farmers and experts Jim Riddle and Joyce Ford have traveled three times from their home in Minnesota to

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Jamaican farmer with FAVACA program

Jamaica to help smallholder farmers. But their service has gone well beyond those three assignments, as they have stayed consistently engaged with the community. They have helped Jamaican farmers improve their production practices and make significant progress towards organic certification.

“Each year the organic movement in Jamaica moves closer to its goal of implementing a fully functioning organic certification system,” said Jim Riddle. “In the past, we have worked with government officials and certification body representatives and conducted workshops for growers. We even held a fundraiser in our hometown to help buy hand tools for Jamaican farmers.”

Through F2F, Riddle and Ford also have directly supported the project’s local partner, Source Farm Foundation, by sharing their expertise and strengthening the training curriculum. They provided organic certification sensitization training to farmers, educators, students and government staff. They also were instrumental in creating the Jamaica Organic Growers Group, supporting them as they developed their infrastructure, record-keeping systems, and governance structure for collective decision-making.

Following their third volunteer assignment with this program, Ford stated, “In our last meeting with the JOGG (Organic Onion Growers) farmers, we were standing in the onion field and formed a circle. We each provided a word that spoke to us at that point in time. Here is what we said: ‘Consensus, love, prophetic, progress, dedication, cooperative, joy, hope, redemption, success, togetherness, peace and oneness/unity.’ If that doesn’t show we are making progress, I don’t know what does!”

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