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Eggs for Christmas

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Hugh Martin

CHRISTMAS TIME in Jamaica produces such a frenzy that those of us who would prefer to approach each day with quiet appreciation are forced to stay clear of the roads and the shopping plazas. And all of this frenetic activity is mostly for the acquisition of food, drink and the bling. This is not to disparage the pursuit of fun and frolic for we all seek our pleasures in myriad ways. Indeed, such activity does enormous good for the economy and the providers of goods and services are greatly rewarded at this time of year, if at no other.

Take the egg producer for instance. Jamaicans on an average eat one egg per week. At 52 eggs per year it is the lowest per capita consumption of this item in the Caribbean and ranks therefore among the lowest in the world. The health food people will tell you that there's nothing wrong with that - and they are right. But they will also tell you that most persons can eat three to four each week and it will be still okay. The others who are perhaps on a low cholesterol diet can have two egg whites instead of a whole egg and still benefit from this very nutritious food. In the United States the statistics show that each person consumes 300 eggs each year. The figure for Japan is 350.

However, at [Christmas](#) time here, the consumption of eggs seems to take off into orbit - as much as three times more are consumed in [December](#) than in any of the other months including the month in which Easter falls. On average, the table egg industry produces a little over ten and a half million dozens of eggs each year. This is okay when each person eats one per week but when the demand for Christmas cake and egg nog chips in then the system comes under enormous strain. Most years the suppliers have had to import thousands of dozens to meet the demand which is further impacted by the start of the tourist season.

I was therefore very interested in a bit of news I heard last week from the Jamaica Egg Farmers Association (JEFA). It was that there would be no importation of eggs this year as there are sufficient supplies to meet the expected increased demand which will continue well into 2006.

GOOD NEWS

Well, it's good news indeed that one agricultural industry is able to satisfy all its demand and from what I understand was able to do some exports as well to a CARICOM neighbour. That was what encouraged me to accept an invitation from the USAID-funded Jamaica Business Recovery Programme (JBRP) to the handing over of an egg marketing facility in Kitson Town, St. Catherine, to JEFA. I am glad I



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went. The poultry industry is one of the sub-sectors that received assistance from the JBRP under the Hurricane Ivan recovery programme and many of the beneficiaries have recovered so well they have surpassed their previous performance levels. They are now in the process of bringing their operations up to international standards. The new facility will assist them in properly grading and packaging the eggs for the market. This will go a far way in satisfying one of the consumer's biggest concerns; that of finding a dozen eggs of the same size and quality in one box.

ASSESS PRICING

But while I congratulate the JEFA on the strides they have made in increasing production and improving quality I would also like to suggest that they take a good look at their pricing. Perhaps the low consumption of eggs in Jamaica is due not so much to a misguided fear of cholesterol but rather, and to a great extent, to the high cost of the product. At \$135 per dozen at the supermarket, many of the shoppers are going to take half a dozen when they really wanted one. Production and consumption could easily be doubled with a little promotion and a lower price.

Do have a holy and peaceful Christmas.

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