

Mango Processing Workshops in St. Kitts and Nevis

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In 2008, I was discussing details of a project during breakfast with my host in Malawi. Looking out the window, I casually asked him about the impressive tree across the courtyard. This began our conversation about mangoes and how, all over the country, they would fall from these majestic trees and literally rot on the ground. Mangoes were so plentiful that there were no local markets for them; and sadly, no commercial facilities were available to manufacture mango-based products for export.

Returning to Canada, I began looking at drying mango slices in small-scale dryers that could be built and used at the community level. A second visit to Malawi in 2010 saw us building a prototype dryer to demonstrate the feasibility of the concept.

Fast-forwarding to 2015, I received a phone call out of the blue one morning from Mr. Augustine Merchant of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in St. Kitts and Nevis. He wanted to talk about my experiences with mango processing. Just as in Malawi, mangoes were going to waste with little or no effort to convert them into saleable value-added products.

After hastily putting together a proposal, we received funding for two training sessions. The first was to be a mango drying workshop scheduled for mid-October. Thirty-one entrepreneurs, teachers, and representatives from food manufacturing companies attended three days of instruction on the basics of food drying, plus specifics applied to mangoes. In addition, they received hands-on experience at the St. Kitts Food Processing Facility. Dried mango slices, mango leathers, dried mango delight (a mixture of mango and other fruits), and several other products made by the participants were demonstrated to representatives from the Department of Agriculture. Attendees also took part in supplementary sessions arranged to expand their product repertoire.

In February, 2016, a follow-up workshop was organized to focus on the preparation of mango-based beverages. At a two-day workshop in St. Kitts, over thirty participants received training in the basics of beverage processing. They then made a mango “smoothie”, and a mango-passionfruit blended beverage. Both of these were bottled and enjoyed by the participants as well as representatives from the Department of Agriculture in St. Kitts.

A second two-day juice processing session took place in Nevis, with about forty participants. They made “Mango Tango” and “Mango Passion” beverages which were presented to the Permanent Secretary and others from the Department of Agriculture.

Positive responses received from participants at these workshops prompted copies of the presentations to be distributed to IICA representatives in at least six other Caribbean countries for their use. Over twenty instructional videos have been prepared for posting on-line to serve as a resource for others interested in using mangoes as ingredients in their products.

According to Mr. Merchant, enthusiasm generated by these workshops has resulted in several new products which have the potential to be sold to regional consumers and visitors to the islands.

Based upon this success, we will be continuing our efforts to provide food processing guidance to the local entrepreneurs within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

From a personal perspective, it is extremely gratifying to be able to participate in activities which help spread awareness of food processing techniques and potentially lead to new opportunities.



Mangoes may literally rot on the ground in some countries