

Essequibo farmers shadehouse project get high marks from visiting Rutgers farm financing specialist

By **Stabroek staff** | BUSINESS | FRIDAY, MAY 25, 2012

Farmers from the Essequibo coast and Pomeroon River have secured 'high marks' from international donors and visiting specialists for the progress which they have made in 'taking forward' a Shade House Vegetable Production Project launched in several parts of the country with the support of several multilateral agencies including Partners for the Americas, Caribbean Self-Reliance International (CASRI) and the Inter American Development Bank through its Multilateral Investment Fund.



Dr. Robin Brumfield

Designed to help popularise the hydroponics technology that removes the application of soil in the planting of vegetables, the Shadehouse Project has been embraced by farmers in several of the country's administrative regions and this week's two day – May 23-23 – visit to the Essequibo and Pomeroon areas was intended to undertake an evaluation of the progress being made by the farmers in pursuit of what, for most of them, is virgin territory.

Of no less significance than the note of optimism sounded by the visiting team regarding the progress which the farmers have made in their new venture is the enthusiasm shown by the farmers themselves. Visits to Bethany, Anna Regina, Perseverance, Aurora, Lima and Charity on the Essequibo Coast and three farms along the Pomeroon river found farmers who had not only embraced the shadehouse method but are contemplating consolidation of their existing efforts.

Lettuce, celery, pak choi, cucumbers, parsley and tomatoes are the most popular vegetables with the experiment and apart from the satisfaction which the farmers have expressed with the high yield, they also acknowledge the organic element in the significantly reduced use of fertilizer pesticides.

Those farms visited by the Guyanese and overseas experts continue to engage in conventional agriculture but now appear to have become converts of the shadehouse concept. Marketing in the cases of all but one of the vegetables, is hardly an issue. Outlets, including supermarkets have evinced a willingness to support the initiative and with the exception of lettuce, the farmers say, their shadehouse produce is selling well.

Not that the initiative is not without its challenges. Planned expansion cannot be separated from costs. The recommended size of a single shadehouse is 18×24 ft. Erecting a shadehouse using second grade lumber costs \$320,000.00.

Understandably, some of the shadehouses are more modest than others. The farmers, however, appear to be sufficiently pleased with what they have accomplished up until now to want to make the further investment.

Rutgers University Farm Financial Management Specialist Dr. Robin Brumfield, a member of the team visiting Essequibo this week told Stabroek Business that narrowing the existing gap between farming, extension services and research would significantly improve the lot of farmers. Brumfield, who told Stabroek Business that she was gathering data during her visit said that she would welcome an opportunity to return to Guyana to give further support to the project.

Part of the requirement of the shadehouse project is that farmers secure a steady supply of small plants and Brumfield said that she was pleased that an initiative had been put in place to ensure that supplies would be available.

Project Coordinator Kelvin Craig who led the team said that he was satisfied that the Essequibo farmers had been good Ambassadors for the project. Asked whether there was likely that there would be continuity to the project which ends next month Craig said that while “it would be good if we get a successor project” he was satisfied that the farmers had become sufficiently familiar with the technology to continue on their own.