



VEGETABLE GARDEN: Lady Cooke reaps tomatoes from her vegetable garden at Kings House.

Lady Cooke's vegetable garden

GOVERNMENT'S push towards increased agriculture production through small-scale farming is not lost on Lady Cooke, wife of Governor General Sir Howard Cooke.

She toils in her own back-yard vegetable garden on 0.04 hectares (1½ square chains) of the 56.7 hectare (140-acres) Kings's House property.

By keeping her own garden, Lady Cooke echoes her husband's call for Jamaicans to return to the soil "and eat what we grow."

Lush food crops, tended by herself and an assistant, Phillip Campbell, a farmer for the last 20 years, were sprawled in a garden-like setting when *Jampress* visited recently.

Foodstuff fit for everyday consumption — tomatoes, beetroots, turnips, carrots, onions, escallion, string beans, black-eyed peas, sweet corn, calaloo, cabbage, pak-choi, lettuce, okras, cho-chos, cucumbers, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, cassava, Irish potatoes, plantains, sweet and scotch bonnet peppers, garden eggs, pineapples, passion fruit — were all in various stages of development.

Lady Cooke, who enthusiastically

spoke of her toils in the garden, said that shortly after taking up residence at King's House last year, she was "very distressed about buying a bundle of calaloo for \$6.00." Hence, she thought of growing her own crops.

It was even more timely, she added, as at the time, Minister of Agriculture Seymour Mullings was advocating the growth of back-yard gardening to ease economic pressure and increase production.

The cost of maintaining the garden is very minimal, as Lady Cooke uses mostly available resources. "Land, labour, and other needed materials were already here," she said. The Ministry of Agriculture was also very considerate in assisting with a supply of seeds, she said.

Never out of food

Very little water is used in the First Lady's garden. In fact, Lady Cooke says she uses water "only when the season is very dry." Instead, mulch (grass) taken from the lawn is used at the root of the crops. This moisturizes the earth, slows the pace of evaporation and prevents the growth of weeds.

"We try to stay away from the artificial fertilizers," she said.

Crops grown in the garden are utilized on a daily basis in the kitchen, she said, pointing out that the provisions were planted in such a manner that "we are never out of a particular foodstuff...When a re-

ady crop is harvested, another batch of the same foodstuff is already growing at another section of the garden."

Lady Cooke clearly believes that variety is the spice of life, and as a result, has also embarked upon some fish farming. A 21.35 metre (70-foot) wide fish pond situated amidst overhanging trees on the property, was being cleaned by groundsmen when *Jampress* visited.

Hundreds of African perch, or black perch as they are popularly called, breed in the pond, which was previously unutilized.

No stranger to farming, Lady Cooke said she has been involved in crop growing since school days. She once received a prize for her school garden in Portland. While residing in Montego Bay, she said, she maintained a backyard garden.

Lady Cooke does not intend to stop there, however, and plans to cultivate an orchard with fruits such as mango, pear, orange, banana, sweet sop, ackee, breadfruit, and "many others."

Speaking from her own experiences, Lady Cooke encourages all householders to enter small-scale farming. "No matter how small the plot of land is, you can plant something. The economy must be pushed forward through production, and this is the best way to produce."

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