

THE TOBAGO BLUE FOOD FESTIVAL'S CONTRIBUTION TO INCREASED CONSUMPTION AND INCREASED NUTRITIONAL AWARENESS OF THE INDIGENOUS STAPLE DASHEEN, AMONG ATTENDEES OF THE FESTIVAL

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Background: The Tobago Blue Food Festival is an annual event held in the remote village of Bloody Bay to highlight the indigenous staple root dasheen. This particular type of dasheen turns blue when it is cooked hence the name of the festival. One of the major aims of the festival is to promote the consumption of dasheen among locals and visitors. The festival which is now in its fourteenth (14th) year attracts thousands of visitors to sample a variety of dishes made from this indigenous root.

Objective : To determine if the Blue Food festival contributes to increased consumption and increased nutritional awareness of the dasheen among the attendees of the festival.

Design – A cross-sectional study design was used. Data collection was mainly done by a quantitative method. A questionnaire containing both open-ended and close-ended questions was the research instrument.

Results – The major groups of attendees were Tobagonian males (25.4 %) between the age range of 50-59 years and Trinidadian females (23.9 %) between the age range 40 -49 years. Approximately half the respondents (51.2%) were first-time attendees while the rest were repeat attendees. The majority of attendees (65.6%) attended the festival 'to taste the food'. The least amount (3.6%) of patrons gave their primary reason for attending to get nutrition education. The most popular dishes sampled were dasheen served with stews of pork, chicken, beef or fish by (96.3%) and dasheen and wild meat by (81%) of patrons. Almost all of the other dishes tasted were liked by the patrons. The least liked dish was 'riced dasheen'. Both repeat and first-time attendees had similar consumption patterns of staple foods. Rice was the most frequently consumed staple for both groups (once per day / week). Dasheen and other staples were consumed once per month or less. Dasheen was eaten predominantly at lunch or dinner by 78.1% and 14% respectively. Very few patrons (6%) ate dasheen at breakfast time. Most attendees (68.1%) were willing to purchase a Blue Food recipe book. More than half (60%) of the respondents did

not know the nutritive value of dasheen. Sixty-four (64) respondents indicated that they knew the nutritional benefits of dasheen but only 69.3% gave correct responses. Although only 46.9% wanted to learn about the nutritional benefits of dasheen, 90% indicated they would like to see a Nutrition Booth at the festival.

Conclusion - Tobago's Blue Food Festival is an excellent tourist attraction etched into the cultural calendar of the island. This festival was initiated in October 1988 out of a need to expose the rural districts and encourage the consumption of Tobago's indigenous blue food by locals and visitors. There is evidence that this gastronomic event has grown over the years. Many mature locals and visitors are attracted to the rural district of Bloody Bay in Tobago mainly to taste the food and enjoy the entertainment for just one day. Patrons generally eat what they are familiar with. Opportunities for retention and reproduction of newly created dishes are not provided as there are no live demonstrations or recipes provided to attendees. Evidence also shows that attending the festival has not encouraged the increased consumption of blue food among attendees. This can be attributed to a number of barriers including ignorance of the nutritional importance of the staple. Patrons expressed desire for a Nutrition Booth at the festival. This would provide valuable nutritional information to motivate patrons to increase their consumption of dasheen / blue food.