

In this four-part series, Michael McLaughlin of the Trees That Feed Foundation (TTFF) discusses how the organization has helped transform families' lives the world over with the humble breadfruit. In previous articles he gave some [history](#) of this valuable fruit, its [nutritional advantages](#), and [how it's used](#). In this final installment, he will be highlighting the economic benefits.



We focus on breadfruit, for its versatility and gluten-free properties, but of course similar environmental and economic arguments can be made for many other food crops.

First consider the cost of nutrition. Jamaica imports over 25% of its food. Imports of corn and wheat in 2011 amounted to 450,000 metric tons (MT) at a cost of over US\$150 million.

In stark contrast, the peak year of fresh breadfruit exports was 1987, at 250MT - Less than US\$1 million in hard currency earnings. Miniscule. This net food cost is ironic in a country with generally good soil and good rainfall.

Growing and consuming more breadfruit locally will bring a huge payoff to the country in terms of food cost savings, not to mention increased local employment.

Whether fresh or processed, breadfruit is a money earner. Fresh breadfruit in retail marketplaces in Jamaica sells for the equivalent of US\$1-US\$3 per fruit, according to a University of Minnesota study.

There is a relatively wide price range due to seasonality and hence scarcity of the fruit. Either way, the cost of reaping and transportation is a fraction of the price, hence selling fresh breadfruit is a profitable business.

When processed into flour, as described in our [previous article](#), there's additional significant value added. The wholesale price is only US\$0.50 to US\$0.80 per fruit weighing an average of four pounds. The local price for processed breadfruit is US\$3-5 per pound. The math shows a value add of at least 500%, which is more than enough to cover the costs of production and distribution.

The economics look even more favorable for the export market. Breadfruit flour is gluten free, so it will serve a niche market in the US, Canada and Europe, where gluten-free products fetch a premium price.

Breadfruit post-harvest products are somewhat expensive compared to efficiently produced North American wheat, which retails at less than US\$1 per pound. On the other hand, local products require no expenditure of foreign currency.

Imported food and other goods have to be paid for in U.S. dollars or some other freely convertible currency, not Jamaican dollars or Haitian gourdes. Foreign currencies tend to be scarce in developing countries.

And locally produced food creates meaningful jobs. The price of breadfruit, whether fresh or processed, largely reflects human input. There is cost of transportation, electricity and depreciation of equipment, sure, but most of the price is for labor—labor is needed in caring for the trees, reaping the fruit, and transporting it to the marketplace or processing facility.

Much of the processing is manual, including weighing, sorting, peeling where appropriate, drying, milling and packaging. Hard numbers are difficult to come by, but each fruit sold at retail, or each pound of breadfruit flour sold, likely contributes a dollar or two to local wages and salaries. Multiplied by hundreds of thousands, or millions, and this is a substantial benefit to the local economy.



Packages of breadfruit flour

We have several success stories. On a recent visit to a basic school in Jamaica where breadfruit porridge was being served to children, the cook in the school kitchen thanked the TFFF representative.

"If you didn't give us this breadfruit porridge, I wouldn't have this job," she said.

"This brought home to us the economic benefits of our tree planting. By feeding people with breadfruit, we were creating new jobs at every stage in the value chain."

As already mentioned, McLean's nursery in Jamaica has expanded his breadfruit sapling production from 300 annually in 2010, to 15,000 in 2015. Pierre-Moise Louis, in Jeremie, Haiti, is producing approximately 600 fruit trees per month, plus 300 pounds of breadfruit flour each month.

His operation is generating over US\$2,000 in monthly revenue - a very successful small business in Haiti. Charlotin Frednaud, in Trou du Nord, Haiti, similarly is expanding his production. In less than six months since startup, he is producing over 400 pounds of breadfruit flour per month. Already he is purchasing larger capacity equipment for his factory.



The happy stories continue. Juan Carlos Rodriguez, in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, starting with just 432 trees, has built a factory producing breadfruit French fries, and other products, in four or five short years. Rita Hilton, in Jamaica, is purchasing and reselling 1,000 pound

batches of breadfruit flour produced locally by Diamond Ridge Processors.

It's a fundamental principle of sustainable aid that businesses have to be created. This is where the work of Trees That Feed Foundation is so unique. TTFF does not seek to provide help in perpetuity.

Rather, we aim to facilitate creation of successful businesses. We facilitate first by providing equipment and training at little or no cost. This provides a huge boost to entrepreneurs who have limited resources.

We further agree to be the first customer, by purchasing their food production and distributing food to those in need. We pay a generous price, but there's a catch...only for two years.

There's no permanent dependency. The two-year period gives the entrepreneur time to streamline their processes, build a customer base, and generate profits.

TTFF has also created quite a marketing buzz around breadfruit, other locally grown food products, and the importance of communities becoming self-sufficient. This buzz helps our budding entrepreneurs to enter the marketplace with food products seen as desirable.

We have a proven track record of planting trees, creating jobs, and benefiting the environment ... and we're proud of the work we do. And so yes, Virginia. Money does grow on trees.

The visit the Trees That Feed Foundation website, [click here](#).

www.freshfruitportal.com