

Media Backgrounder

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Breadfruit Gives Sustainable Food Supply to Tropical Populations

Breadfruit originated in the South Pacific more than 3,000 years ago and some varieties were introduced in the Caribbean in the late 1700s. The fruit grows on a leafy, tropical tree that can reach 65 feet in height. Breadfruit has a starchy texture and fragrance similar to fresh baked bread.

Breadfruit is round, oval or oblong and weighs as much as 13 pounds. The skin texture ranges from smooth to rough to spiny. The trees begin bearing fruit in three to five years and are productive for decades. Breadfruit trees can be grown on small farms and home gardens and often are planted with other subsistence crops.

Breadfruit is a versatile food crop eaten at various stages of maturity. It is an excellent dietary staple -- high in carbohydrates with low levels of protein and fat – and a substitute for potatoes, pasta or rice. One fruit from a breadfruit tree easily satisfies the carbohydrate portion of a meal for a family of five. A mature tree can produce up to a half ton of fruit per year.

Most breadfruit is consumed fresh since the fruit is not easily stored and has limited 12-month use as a starch substitute in the tropics. Food technologists are exploring ways to freeze and can breadfruit slices.

When planted in a cluster of 125 trees, breadfruit trees out produce all tropical starch crops, with as much as 66,000 pounds of fruit annually. Breadfruit trees require a hot and wet tropical climate. There are few pests that can harm the trees and they require very little maintenance.

About 80 percent of the world's hungry reside in the tropics, and government officials in the Caribbean are realizing breadfruit's potential to feed their hungry populations. It is an ideal food resource for resource-limited nations.

Breadfruit requires less land than wheat and other cereal grains. By drying and milling breadfruit into flour, which lasts for years and lacks gluten, producers are preserving the quick-spoiling fruit. This saves whole crops and makes breadfruit a lasting, sustainable food source.

The Chicago-based Trees That Feed Foundation, www.treesthatfeed.org, donates hardened field-ready tissue culture based plants to tropical countries, especially Haiti and Jamaica. The organization is working to substantially reduce hunger in the Caribbean and reduce dependence on expensive imported corn, rice and wheat.

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