

PERSPECTIVE



A tropical opportunity to pick your own and lend a hand



OWEN ROBERTS
U OF GUELPH

If you love talking about farming – and who doesn't? -- meet Val Kempadoo.

Kempadoo rose through the ranks as an organic farmer and later as a Caribbean-wide nursery owner. Now he's a successful real estate developer, founder of a new and luxurious US\$600-million development in St. Kitts called Kittitian Hill, a 400-acre property at the northwest part of the island, away from the traditional tourist areas.

But he's still a farmer at heart. And he's looking for advice from other farmers on how to make the organic farm at Kittitian Hill, called Belle Mont Farm, succeed.

In fact, he's prepared to offer discounts to guests, depending on

how much guidance they can provide. The amount of that discount is important – a typical guesthouse at Belle Mont Farm runs about \$2,500 a night!

Through a series of fortunate circumstances, I had the opportunity to experience Kittitian Hill in early February, and not surprisingly, it's an amazing place.

Kittitian Hill is located in the foothills of 3,800-ft. Mt. Liamuiga. Behind the property, a seemingly endless, dense rainforest engulfs the entire mountain. The development's up front -- the farm, as well as 84 single-room guesthouses and seven multi-family units, a spa, restaurants and other facilities in various state of completion.

These all blend below into a nine-hole golf course called Irie Fields, and abandoned sugar cane fields that will become another nine holes for the course mid-year, and further developed farmland. From your private guesthouse you can see uninterrupted views of the Caribbean Sea and the nearby islands of St. Eustatius, St. Barts, St. Martin and Saba.

But despite the opulence of its guesthouses, main buildings with cut stone exteriors, designer interiors and coral walkways,



Kittitian Hill spa director Nickle Myers has plans for this homegrown flax, as well as the tomatoes and other greens that grow on Belle Mont Farm. Photos by Owen Roberts

gritty, tiny Belle Mont Farm is held out as the key attraction there. It's the apple of Kempadoo's eye.

He believes food and food production, regardless of the scale, opens doors for conversations and lessons about sustainability and social responsibility. This includes replacing imports with locally grown food and making jobs for Kittitians.

It's at the farm level that



Plans call for this two-acre terraced organic farm to expand three-fold . . . which will require a lot of agricultural expertise.

Kempadoo wants food production and nature to be in harmony, and hopes Belle Mont Farm inspires others to be like-minded.

To him, that journey centers around guests having their own farm-to-table agricultural experience. They mosey through the two-acre terraced fruit and vegetable farm (plans call for it to triple in size over the next five years) and get guidance from staff to pick what's in season from the dozens of fruit and vegetable varieties there.

Belle Mont Farm's fertile ground gives the facility's chef

many possibilities. The rich volcanic topsoil is easily a metre deep in some places, perfect for fostering plant life of all kinds.

The real challenge here is how to grow food organically, naturally or whatever you want to call it, without the modern pesticides that make wide-scale farming possible elsewhere. Insects and plant diseases flourish in this moist, humid weather, and linger in the soil.

Think you can help? Check it out here: www.kittitianhill.com/experience/our-farm/