

Exploring sustainable food sources the wave of future

From field to table, produce suppliers examining creative ways to meet demands

When you visit your fruit and vegetable market or shop at your local grocery retailer, it's very likely you never give much thought to where the items you purchase come from or the journey they've taken to get from seedlings to your kitchen. The trip may have been short, as there are some produce items that grow well in our Canadian climate (although, sadly, not too many). But more often, the journey is incredibly long, as it is critical that produce be cultivated in a climate that optimizes growth.

"Today, we have so much cultural diversity in our food preparation, much more than even 10 years ago," says Hera Landry, sales manager at Goodwave Technology, a technology and infrastructure developer on exotic and root produce items, such as ginger, for major grocery retailers in both Canada and the U.S. "Foods from all over the world are enjoyed by Canadians, especially in a multicultural city like Toronto, and those foods are now often being prepared in the home. Food suppliers all over the world are looking for new cultivated sources which will meet demand without compromising a healthy environment and at the same time developing the economy."

One such source is the continent of Africa. "It's the perfect environment to grow many produce items," Landry explains. "We are seeing grapes and some citrus fruits coming out of South Africa. But beyond that, while the potential is there, most parts of Africa don't have the technology or resources for wide-scale farming."

To make it happen, she says, requires an infusion of finances and technology. There are three areas that need focused investment: technology, infrastructure and training.

New growing opportunities in Mozambique

To meet the burgeoning demands, Goodwave has initiated a produce-growing project in Mozambique by teaming up with partners Norfund and Neofresh. The project launched last year and began growing ginger this past spring.

"We've already harvested and we have export-quality African ginger — the first African ginger available in Canada — now selling exclusively in Loblaw stores in select parts of Canada," says Landry. Established in 2004, Goodwave has over 10 years' experience in growing and processing ginger. "The



Goodwave Technology's project in Mozambique has already harvested export-quality ginger and has brought about 500 jobs to locals in the community. CONTRIBUTED

reason we began with growing ginger is that ginger is one of those produce items that no one really knew much about a few years ago. But the ginger market is booming due to the wide variety of uses, it's delicious and unique taste and the potential health benefits," Landry says.

Success in partnership

Norfund is Norway's development financial institution, wholly owned and funded by the Norwegian government. While Norway's economy was once struggling, it is now oil-rich, giving them the opportunity to assist underdeveloped countries. Through Norfund, it invests in sectors and countries where it can have the greatest positive impact on underdeveloped communities, with a mandate to "contribute to economic and social development by providing equity capital and other risk capital to sustainable businesses."

Neofresh is a South Africa-based company specializing in the production of unique tropical and sub-tropical crops in Southern Africa. Its roots are firmly in Africa, and it is keenly aware of its social responsibility towards unleashing the untapped potential of this continent and its people.

"The technology know-how comes from Goodwave, the finances from Norfund and

the opportunity was supplied by Neofresh," says Landry of the relationship between the three partners.

A supporting partner is Loblaw, encouraging Goodwave and the FAVE brand to be innovative by being the first to sell export-quality ginger from Africa in its stores.

Untapped potential in Mozambique and beyond

"Our short-term goal is to create a sustainable source for produce in general — ethnic produce in particular — in Mozambique," Landry says. "But we're looking beyond that. Africa has untapped potential, but at the same time, it's a nation that requires our assistance to help with development."

Mozambique is a country located in South-east Africa. Since its independence in 1975, it is one of the most disadvantaged countries in the world. The country is rich in farmland, and agriculture is a mainstay of Mozambique's economy, making up more than 25 per cent of its GDP and employing 80 per cent of the labour force. However, resources throughout the nation are largely untapped: only a fraction of land suitable for farming is currently cultivated. As a result, nearly 50 per cent of the population is living in poverty.

Choosing Mozambique was a tactical deci-

sion because the climate is ideal for growing. However, that wasn't the only reason for the choice; this initiative is more than just a business opportunity. "Mozambique is the right climate for growing ginger and also garlic, which is something we will be bringing in soon. That said, we could have gone to another country, somewhere with experience and the infrastructure to make this work. But we recognized we also had the opportunity to help an underdeveloped community get started with a sustainable resource. A project has been implemented to provide safe drinking water to the surrounding community, which is vital to their future. So we took the risk, one that was overlooked by other investors, and took a first step," explains Landry.

As a result, the initiative has brought about 500 jobs to locals in the community. "We've sent experts with a wealth of experience to teach them how to grow ginger, as well as handling, storage and transport so it can reach the Canadian market," says Landry. "And we won't be stopping with ginger. This has just opened the door for what else we can grow."

She adds: "We believe it's our responsibility to create opportunities for the people of those communities as well. They need us to invest in them, in their communities, and this is starting to happen. We are just on the cusp, and I like to think that at Goodwave and our work in Africa, we're a bit ahead of the curve."