

THE FAIRCHILD INTERNATIONAL MANGO FESTIVAL: A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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Abstract. The Fairchild International Mango Festival (IMF) has been held at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden for the past 13 years. The objectives of the IMF are twofold: 1) to promote the mango as a resource, and 2) to increase the level of education within general and expert audiences. Educational programs are presented to the local and international community to enhance the appreciation for the diversity of the mango, its wide range of flavours and uses, and a multitude of horticultural/ technical points of its production. The focus of the event is the living collection of more than 200 cultivars that represents considerable genetic diversity in mango. The IMF takes place in July during the peak of the mango season in South Florida. Through the Public Relations and Marketing Departments of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, we are able to capture the attention of the local, national and international press and deliver the latest in scientific and horticultural advances. Each year since its inception, the number of participants has increased. In 2003 there were 7000 participants. This program may serve as a model for community outreach programs with other fruits.

Over the past few years, the mango has gone from a seasonal curiosity to a year-round commodity, with increasing popularity among non-traditional consumers. In fact, the mango now ranks fourth behind bananas, grapes, and melons, of fruit imported into the United States. Most of the imported mangos are grown in the Western Hemisphere from Florida to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, and the West Indies. The only constant in this

complex world of mango production is change. Windows of opportunity for production and trade open and close based on factors such as armed rebellions, trade agreements, marketing strategies and public opinion. The IMF provides the mango enthusiast, researcher, grower or marketer the opportunity to see, taste and learn all that is new in the mango world. New cultivars offer promise in shaping consumption patterns within the mainstream markets of North America and Europe.

In this work we propose a model for community outreach based on our experience with a world-class botanical institution and living collection. The living collections contain some 200 mango cultivars. All of the major producing regions of the world are represented. Our collections have provided propagative materials to individual growers, private companies and various governments worldwide. The IMF began in 1992 with the idea of bringing this fruit to the forefront of the local and international community. The concept was to celebrate the mango and its diversity, versatility and international appeal. This event has been held each July for the last 12 years, during the height of the mango season in South Florida, and has evolved into a highly recognized annual event (Fig. 1).

The IMF Model

We emphasize five main points in our model:

Education. Education is at the heart of the event. Our message is delivered to a local and international audience of enthusiasts, growers, packers, shippers, importers, exporters and consumers.

Quality. Quality is our main strength. The living collections at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden are the basis for all displays, products and plants that we feature during the IMF. Care is taken for strict quality control of our message, our product, and all creative marketing and written materials.

Creativity and Culture. Our event draws heavily on the diverse ethnic and culture opportunities provided by the mango to further generic knowledge of the fruit.

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Fig. 1. Mango display.

Public Awareness. We reach the greatest number of people by maximizing a wide range of media outlets. We utilize the Internet, radio, television, newspapers and magazines. The emphasis and effectiveness of each outlet is evaluated annually and adjusted accordingly.

Teamwork. Collaborations with universities, botanic gardens, government agencies and individuals is emphasized and is essential for success.

Description of IMF Events

Mango Display. Mangos are grouped by region of origin. These regions include Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, Florida, Indochina/Indonesia/Pacific, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Americas. We also showcase exciting new cultivars that hold promise for revolutionizing the mango export industry.

Mango Tasting. Our public tasting evaluations use only the highest quality mangos, harvested fresh from the Fairchild collections and ripened to perfection.

Mango Conferences and Workshops. Presented by the world's authorities on mango. Each year our program of conferences and workshops is customized to address topics of interest and concern for mango producers worldwide. We strive to address the needs of both commercial producers or importers and home gardeners.

Mango Product. Processed mango products including chutneys, pickles, preserves, breads, dehydrated slices and leathers, and juices are made by our staff and volunteers and are available for purchasing and sampling. We also provide demonstrations on the making of many mango products. Local chefs provide samplings of mango cuisine.

Mango experts. Local fund International experts are on hand to answer questions about mangos and to deliver short presentations on various subjects pertaining to the mango, its uses, and its culture.

Mango Trees. Over 1500 mango trees, and more than 20 cultivars are offered for sale. The Curator's Choice Program features cultivars found nowhere else in the world.

Mango Kids. The IMF is a family event. Children that visit the festival have the opportunity to learn and explore, using mangos as their medium. Mango puppets and theatrical presentations, mango art, mango cooking for kids, mango folklore from around the world, didactic games and mango inspired contests are only a few of the activities used to expose children to the multifaceted mango.

Mango Auction. This event may be the best-kept secret of the IMF. Auction lots consist primarily of fruit from our Mangos and Their People display, but also feature special Caribbean and Asian assortments hand-chosen by experts. The public is led through the fascinating maze of mango lore and history leading ultimately to the different cultivars.

Mango Conference. This year we will introduce a two-day conference for growers and policy makers involved with mangos. Mango experts will present various programs aimed towards the improvement of marketing and trade in mangos. The first day will consist of a series of presentations dealing with current mango policies and future prospects. The second day will include a tour through the FTDG collections.

Conclusion

The IMF was originally developed to promote the mango as a South Florida phenomenon. However, it has quickly incorporated a worldwide focus. By continuing to improve our events we can have a positive influence on the consumer, and generic marketing of the fruit. Our ultimate goal remains to promote the mango and its culture in order to increase the demand for mangos. The IMF is a work in progress. Twelve years of labor have produced a platform by which to educate the community about this very special fruit. Last year alone we had over 7000 visitors and 300 volunteers representing more than 12 countries. Media coverage was excellent locally, regionally and internationally. We propose that this model may be used with other fruits.