

Pork patties, anyone?

If the Jamaica Pig Farmers' Association (JPFA) has its way, pork patties will soon be a hot, new item on the Jamaican retail market.

"We want to have it in supermarkets in the New Year," president of the seven-year-old association, Angela Bardowell, told journalists following its annual general meeting at the Golf View Hotel on Thursday. Bardowell said the JPFA's optimism had been boosted by "rave reviews" for test samples of the product at the annual Jack Daniels (whiskey) promotion in May. There had also been very positive responses to other test sampling, she said. The plan comes against concerns that cultural/religious considerations could prove a hindrance. Rastafarians as well as Seventh-day Adventists and other 'Sabbath keepers' of the Christian faith object to the consumption of pork. "A lot of the reasons given by persons for not producing (and selling) pork patties is that consumers don't want (traditional patties) to mix with the pork," Bardowell acknowledged. However, she argued that the reluctance was illogical because while there were also strong religious/cultural objections to the consumption of crustaceans such as shrimp and lobsters, "they (patty producers and retailers) also sell shrimp patties and lobster patties". The thriving patty sector, once reliant on beef as its base ingredient, has widened its scope through the years to include a range of meat and vegetable varieties. The move towards pork patties is part of the JPFA's drive to further accelerate the growth of the local pork industry which, five years ago, was estimated to be worth \$5.5 billion. "This (a viable pork patty sector) would definitely mean a bigger market for our pork," said Bardowell, who was returned unopposed along with her executive at the AGM. Patties apart, the JPFA is also seeking to develop other exotic pork products to entice Jamaicans. Former president Delroy Manya said "specially prepared" sausages and bologna which involve more utilisation of unfashionable pig parts such as the belly were being tested in the market. He said thought was being given to traditional Jamaican methods of treating pig's tripe and other parts such as the head. There were also thoughts of utilising the skin for pork rinds (fried pork skin), particularly for the tourism market. Pork rinds are a popular snack in North America and Europe. "We would like to get to the stage where we are using the whole pig," said Manya. He said donated pork products, including smoked sausages, bologna, jerked pork and stuffed roasted pork - the latter done German-style in Seaford Town (locally referred to as German Town) eastern Westmoreland - had been a hit at the Denbigh Agricultural Show early last month. Pork production has steadily grown in Jamaica in recent years. Figures provided by Manya show pork produced at recognised abattoirs was at 7.6 million kilogrammes last year, up from 5.5 million kilogrammes in 2000. The expectation was that by the end of this year, pork production would have reached 8 million kilogrammes, he said. It was crucial, the former agriculture minister said, that farmers get their fair share in order to stay in production and ensure the food security of the nation. Marketing was an element that was also in need of overhaul, added Pantou. He pointed to the well-publicised liking for "stewed pork" of mega track star Usain Bolt as an opportunity that should not be missed.