

## Jamaica Food & Drink Festival: The Authentic Jamaican Experience

When CB Foods launched the 10th season of the CB Pan Chicken Championship, dubbed PAN-X at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel recently, the company also unveiled its newest, tantalizing event.

Three years in the making, the Jamaica Food & Drink Festival packages the island's varied culinary offerings and Kingston, as the ultimate destination for a true Jamaican experience. Described as the next phase of PAN, this four-day, seven-event delectable adventure is expected to build on the success of the championship now recognised as Jamaica's largest food festival. "The CB Pan Chicken Championship was developed out of an office discussion. Persons felt that even though pan chicken was a staple in Jamaica, enjoyed by many here, with jerk having international recognition, there was no recognition for the vendors locally. We also believed there was a need for a well-produced, wholesome event the entire family could enjoy. And so the competition was born," Alicia Bogues CB Chicken & Bad Dawg Sausages brand manager explained. Since then, the competition has grown annually to become a four-event series over five months including three regional eliminations and a grand final. The competition goes around the island seeking to find Jamaica's best pan chicken chef and culminates with the big showdown. For the past three years, this grand final event has been held on the Waterfront in Downtown Kingston. Starting at noon, attendees are feted to the grand cook-off, a slew of activities, entertainment for the family, various food offerings, and a live show featuring some of the top recording artistes in Jamaica. The company estimates that more than 60,000 persons attended the 2014 series. But while CB Foods is revelling in the event's success as it celebrates the 10th staging, the organisers say they are most proud of what the competition has done for the Jamaican men and women who enter. Sharing at the Launch, Bogues told the stories of Sitrena Gilling, Rodney Bent, and Natalie Sill, three past entrants whose lives have changed because of the competition. Hanover-native Sitrena Gilling is the reigning Pan Chicken Champ who entered the competition six times to further her goal to become a celebrity chef. Rodney Bent, who at one time lived under a tree now owns his own home. When he started selling pan chicken he had two chickens. Now he can sell more than 100 quarters in one night and still has more customers. He credits this to the popularity he gained from the competition. Natalie Sill missed out on a final in 2009 because of an unfortunate situation. After two tries, she was selected as the runner-up last year.

"At CB we are big on entrepreneurship and at its core, 'Pan' pushes small business. The competition has evolved into so much more than a cooking competition, and presents an undeniably unique opportunity for pan chicken men and women to network and expand their businesses. As such we include business development and marketing, plus general food handling and safety workshops as a part of the series. Along with prize money, the top winners also get business development grants and coaching from a small business and loans financial provider. We are proud to partner with Jamaica National Building Society again, as we share the same values and hopes of building Jamaica through small business and entrepreneurship. Without a doubt, the small business sector contributes one third of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Jamaica's economy and is responsible for nearly 40 per cent of the labour force. So our work with these men and women is more than just entertainment," Bogues said. On this milestone anniversary, Matthew Lyn, director and COO of the CB Group explained that the company wanted to do more for Jamaica. He suggested that similar to the distinct taste of Jamaica's pan chicken which has become an iconic part of our culture and an enticing draw for tourists, Jamaica should market its authenticity, hence the Jamaica Food and Drink Festival concept was born. "What better way to do that than provide persons an authentic culinary experience in the mecca, Kingston city. The Jamaica Food and Drink Festival will market this experience in the same way we package reggae or our climate. We hope that these six separate and unique events will be the catalyst to the development of destination Kingston," Lyn said. Beginning on Thursday, October 29 the Jamaica Food & Drink Festival opens with 'Pork Palooza' the premiere pork event highlighting the versatility of pork. On Friday CB will host three signature events: 'Sticks & Stones' - focused on food on skewers and complimenting spirits; Crisp - illustrating various techniques of fried chicken paired with Jamaica's finest imported and local beers; and 'Red, White & You'. The latter will allow patrons to sample an array of wines, paired with complementary bites. On Friday into Saturday, persons 'Meet Street' at Jamaica's first Food Truck event, enjoying popular music and food. Also on Saturday is a take on a Boozy Jazz Brunch, with out-of-this-world food complete with the right eclectic music, decor and of course, booze!