



## IICA-COLEAD Caribbean Agrifood Business Series

**Session n°18:**  
**E-commerce and digital marketing for agrifood products**  
Tuesday 1 July 2025

### HIGHLIGHTS

#### About IICA-COLEAD Caribbean Agrifood Business Series

In June 2021, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and COLEAD launched the **Caribbean Agrifood Business Series** to showcase the innovations and successes of Caribbean farmer-led businesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This series is part of the IICA-COLEAD collaboration aimed at developing a more sustainable and resilient agriculture sector in the Caribbean region. **The series highlights the contributions of entrepreneurs, farmers, agripreneurs, and SMEs to business models that are economically, environmentally, and socially viable.** Participants share their best practices, innovations, and technologies to help others embrace the opportunities offered by local, regional, and export markets. These regular sessions foster the exchange of best practices, networking opportunities, and business scaling strategies.

The latest Caribbean Agrifood Business session n°18 explored **e-commerce and digital marketing for agrifood products**. The event featured 4 accomplished entrepreneurs, from Bahamas, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. The discussion also showcased **support mechanisms from development partners**. The session drew **469 registered participants across continents**, eager to learn more and access additional resources.

Programme, biodata, presentations and recordings of the session are available on [Agrinnovators](#).

#### About e-commerce and digital marketing

Digital transformation presents both opportunities and challenges for Caribbean agrifood businesses. By embracing e-commerce and digital marketing, these enterprises can boost competitiveness, reach new markets, and build more resilient and inclusive food systems. Successfully addressing the challenges requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach. Priorities include targeted capacity-building for SMEs, cooperatives, and entrepreneurs; investment in digital and physical infrastructure; improved regional logistics and payment solutions; simplified cross-border e-commerce policies; and strategic partnerships among governments, development agencies, the private sector, and technology providers. By working together, the Caribbean can fully harness digital technologies to empower agrifood entrepreneurs, strengthen food system sustainability, and drive inclusive economic growth.

#### Key points discussed

- E-commerce and digital marketing are transforming the Caribbean agrifood sector by helping businesses reach wider markets, streamline operations, and build stronger brands. Entrepreneurs are

using accessible tools like social media, WhatsApp, blogs, Canva, and SMS to promote products, manage sales, and stay connected with customers.

- Digital sales channels now include direct-to-consumer websites, B2B supply to restaurants and hotels, pop-up markets, and export via platforms targeting diaspora markets. These tools also support inventory management, real-time pricing, and mobile payments, helping smallholders earn more and operate more efficiently.
- Marketing efforts focus heavily on authenticity and relationship-building. Entrepreneurs use storytelling, health tips, and cultural content to engage audiences and build trust. Consistency, not perfection, is key.
- Some businesses operate within collaborative networks that span countries and continents. These groups use digital tools to coordinate logistics, training, and sales, often guided by values like equity, sustainability, and local ownership.
- Digital adoption succeeds when it solves real problems, improving income, efficiency, or access to finance. It's not about pushing tech but about adding clear value to rural producers.
- Institutions like Caribbean Export and the Caribbean Development Bank are supporting this shift through training, grants, e-commerce accelerators, and export development programs. Their goal is to help SMEs build sustainable, scalable digital systems, not just go online, but thrive there.
- Despite challenges like limited resources and logistical hurdles, Caribbean agrifood businesses are proving that with the right tools and approach, they can compete and grow in the global digital economy.

## Meet the businesses and entrepreneurs

### *Shelly Heaven, Founder, [Farm Linkr](#), Jamaica*

Shelly Heaven, founder of Farm Linkr, shared how her company leverages e-commerce and digital marketing to market and sell fresh produce locally and internationally. Originally launched in 2017 as a B2B multi-vendor marketplace, Farms Linkr later evolved to include direct sales, with products now available in supermarkets, to restaurants and hotels, and online. The company uses a range of digital tools including social media, email marketing, blog content, SEO, live chat, and AI platforms like ChatGPT to promote products, educate customers, and maintain open communication. These tools support activities such as launching new products, providing health tips and recipes, and publicizing events and milestones. Despite challenges like limited resources, the need for engaging local audiences, and creating consistent content, Farm Linkr has seen increased brand visibility, stronger customer engagement, and expanded business connections both regionally and abroad. Shelly emphasized the importance of building a strong online presence, being consistent with branding and communication, and making it easy for customers to interact with your business. Her advice to agro-entrepreneurs is to start small, be honest, and grow steadily, leveraging free tools, scheduling content, and standardizing product listings to support trust and drive online sales.

### *Gillian Goddard, Co-founder, [Alliance for Rural Communities](#), Trinidad and Tobago*

Gillian Goddard, co-founder of the Alliance for Rural Communities (ARC), presented a powerful vision of how digital tools and e-commerce are enabling a decentralized, community-driven network of agro-processors and entrepreneurs across the Caribbean, Africa, and the African diaspora. Operating under the guiding principle of a "well-being economy," ARC supports outcomes that span social, cultural, health, equity, and environmental goals. Through three main collectives, including the Cross Atlantic Chocolate Collective and the Sail Culture Collective, ARC works across entire supply chains, from farm to retail, in over 20 countries. Digital tools are essential for coordination and growth: ARC relies on platforms like WhatsApp, Google Forms, and email to organize sales, conduct training, collect data, share updates, and communicate across a wide, multilingual network. During COVID, these tools allowed ARC to keep their operations alive and thriving, selling fresh and processed products via biweekly digital catalogs and building a decentralized logistics network that spans continents. While their main sales channels are B2B and community-based pop-ups, ARC also engages in limited online retail, primarily through partners in the U.S. and Europe. Despite being

undercapitalized, ARC has successfully leveraged digital connectivity to build relationships, move products, train producers, and co-create retail spaces. For ARC, marketing is not separate from relationship-building, it is part of a broader, values-based effort to shift global food systems and empower producers through collective ownership, training, and deeply networked collaboration.

#### ***Agyei Archer, Business Lead, AgriConnect, Trinidad and Tobago***

Agyei Archer, founder of Public Good Studio and lead developer behind AgriConnect, shared how his team is using digital tools to make agriculture more efficient, transparent, and financially viable for smallholder farmers in the Caribbean. Responding to a FinTech challenge by the UN Capital Development Fund, they built AgriConnect, a platform that combines procurement, e-commerce, and market insight tools to support farmers in Trinidad, Dominica, and St. Vincent. The platform allows verified farmers to receive real-time pricing updates, manage inventory, and receive orders and payments, all through low-data tools like SMS. Agyei emphasized that the goal was not just to build software, but to understand and improve the entire supply chain, from pest control to pricing transparency. By removing middlemen and offering cashless payments, the platform helps farmers earn more and access financial services like insurance and loans. He noted that digital transformation in agriculture isn't about pushing technology but about showing clear value to rural communities, farmers will adopt tech when it solves real problems.

#### ***Chavara Roker, Founder, [Chiccharney Farm](#), Bahamas***

Chavara Roker, founder of Chiccharney Farm, shared how digital marketing and e-commerce transformed her female-led agribusiness into a trusted and recognizable brand. Born from a need to bypass unfair systems and reach customers directly, Chiccharney Farm began in 2013 with just a phone, a Facebook account, and a strong community connection. Through platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Canva, the team built an authentic online presence, using storytelling, visuals, and customer engagement to grow their brand. From selling traditional bush teas to hosting farm-to-table events and installing backyard gardens, every step was supported by accessible digital tools. E-commerce played a central role during the pandemic, with online sales surpassing six figures thanks to early preparation and user-friendly platforms like Wix. Chavara emphasized that consistency is more important than perfection, showing up regularly online builds trust and keeps customers engaged. Looking ahead, Chiccharney Farm plans to expand digital mentorship for women in agriculture and strengthen regional logistics, proving that Caribbean agribusinesses, with creativity and the right tools, can compete and thrive globally.

### **Meet our partner organisations supporting entrepreneurs**

#### ***Jonathan Seecharan, Innovation & Digital Business Officer, [Caribbean Export Development Agency](#)***

Jonathan Seecharan presented the Caribbean Export Development Agency's work in supporting Caribbean SMEs in e-commerce and digital transformation. He highlighted key global trends, including AI-powered tools, digital marketplaces, social commerce, fintech-enabled payments, and blockchain-driven logistics. These technologies offer significant opportunities for agri-entrepreneurs, improving productivity, traceability, and resilience to climate change while enhancing market access. Caribbean Export addresses knowledge gaps through its Caribbean Digital Transformation Institute (CDTI), which offers a free Digital Maturity Checkup Tool and customized e-learning courses in areas like e-commerce and digital marketing. SMEs can assess their current capabilities, learn at their own pace, and measure progress over time. Upcoming programs include a Digital Masterclass Series (in-person workshops with tailored digital roadmaps), the Virtual E-commerce Accelerator Program (VEAP), which is a practical, hands-on training for launching full e-commerce operations, and a Digital Transformation Grant to help SMEs implement what they learn. Jonathan emphasized that digital transformation is more than just being online, it's about building sustainable, scalable systems, and Caribbean Export is working to ensure that entrepreneurs across the region are equipped to thrive in the digital economy.

**Allyson Francis, International Trade and Development Specialist, [Caribbean Development Bank](#)**

Allyson Francis highlighted the Caribbean Development Bank's commitment to supporting SMEs, especially in agriculture, through innovation, capacity building, and improving competitiveness. The CDB focuses on enhancing the enabling environment, financial inclusion, and climate resilience while working closely with partners like the European Union. A key initiative is their partnership with the Caribshopper e-commerce platform, which helps SMEs from countries like Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and soon others, access North American diaspora markets by providing tailored technical assistance, including product development, packaging, scalability, and marketing. This project reduces barriers to market entry by offering diagnostics and ongoing support to ensure SMEs can sustain and grow their online presence. Additionally, the bank supports various programs around food safety, certification, and export readiness, alongside grants to develop local e-commerce platforms. Overall, CDB's approach emphasizes not only getting businesses online but ensuring they thrive digitally and competitively in the global market.

## Questions and Answers Session

**Below is a summary of the questions raised by participants, along with insights shared by panelists.**

**How does certification influence the market competitiveness and export readiness of agrifood SMEs in the Caribbean, and what mechanisms can improve their access to it?**

Answered by all panelists: Certification has significantly impacted the competitiveness of SMEs, especially those in the agricultural and food manufacturing sectors intending to export. Certification is often a mandatory requirement for entering international markets, and lack of it can be a major barrier. Market and sector intelligence are crucial to understanding specific certification requirements for different countries. While formal certification can be costly and complex, alternative models like Participatory Guarantee Systems offer lower-cost options to promote local and some international sales. SMEs must also be aware of market-specific exceptions and labeling standards to avoid costly rejections. Support from national agencies like JAMPRO and ministries helps SMEs navigate these challenges. Even SMEs not yet exporting are pursuing certification as a future-proofing strategy.

**What climate-resilience strategies can digital agrifood platforms adopt to ensure continuity of services and supply during natural disasters or extreme weather events?**

Answered by Shelly Heaven and Gillian Goddard: Natural disasters and extreme weather primarily affect product supply more than the functionality of digital platforms. Platforms like FarmLinkr and others maintain resilience by using distributed sourcing models and off-site servers. These platforms are designed for resilience, with systems in place to source products from multiple regions, allowing flexibility when one area is impacted by climate-related disruptions. Once digital content is created, it remains accessible, and platforms often rely on off-site servers, meaning local power outages or connectivity issues don't affect international access. In off-grid locations, investments in high-quality internet solutions, such as Starlink, help maintain uptime. Working with a network of farmers also ensures that if one source is compromised, others can often fill the gap, minimizing service disruption and supporting consistent delivery.

**Considering the challenges Jamaican farmers face with consistently meeting quantity and quality requirements, how can one tackle these issues to establish itself as a reliable service provider and digital trader?**

Answered by Shelly Heaven: FarmLinkr promotes demand-driven production by aligning planting schedules with actual buyer needs. They work closely with farmers to align crop production with actual market demand, scheduling planting based on specific buyer needs (e.g., weekly volumes). This proactive approach ensures more reliable supply. While their website allows spot buying, the core strategy focuses on planned, contract-based production.



### What measures can be taken to combat scams?

Answered by Gillian Goddard: *To combat scams, the Alliance for Rural Communities relies on deep, long-standing relationships, primarily working with farmer groups that have strong internal trust. Over 10 years, they have not experienced scams, largely due to these trusted networks and community-based collaboration. Instead of formal contracts, they rely on mutual understanding, especially in the Caribbean and Global South. However, when operating in the Global North, they use contracts due to differing cultural expectations around reciprocity and accountability. So, rather than formal anti-scam measures, trust, education, and relationship-building are their main safeguards.*

### To what extent do digital agrifood services in the Caribbean engage with import brokers, given their significant role in supplying fresh produce to sectors such as hospitality, where large volumes are often sourced through intermediaries?

Answered by Agyei Archer: *AgriConnect works exclusively with farmers, not import brokers. While import brokers do play a significant role in the fresh produce value chain, particularly in Caribbean countries like Trinidad, Dominica, and Saint Vincent, AgriConnect's focus is on addressing the value gap between what farmers are paid and the final market price. Brokers often capture a large portion of this value. Their goal is to equip farmers with tools and resources that reduce their dependency on intermediaries. That being said, they acknowledge that brokers will likely always be part of the system, and some farmers may still prefer working with them. However, they aim to empower those who want more direct control over their sales and income.*

### The Checkup Tool, along with the Master Class Series, VEAP, and Grant Funding, are great capacity-building initiatives of the Caribbean Export Development Agency. For the VEAP program specifically, is it a requirement to already have a digital trading operation in place in order to participate?

Answered by Jonathan Seecheran: *You don't need a fully developed digital trading operation to participate in the Virtual E-Commerce Accelerator Programme (VEAP). However, for the first two cohorts, the program is focused on SMEs that already have some form of digital presence (e.g., a basic website) that can be refined and improved. Future cohorts may include earlier-stage enterprises. This tiered approach allows tailored support based on digital maturity, with long-term plans to include a broader range of participants for inclusive growth.*

The discussions highlighted the interconnected challenges and opportunities in building resilient, inclusive, competitive digital agrifood ecosystems in the Caribbean. Certification, forward planning, digital readiness, and trust-based partnerships emerged as recurring themes. Strengthening institutional support and ensuring equitable value distribution will be key for sustainable digital trade in the region.

## Resources

### 1. Reports, articles and studies

- Deloitte. (2020). [Global Marketing Trends: Bringing authenticity to our digital age](#)
- Echeverría, R.G. 2021. [Innovation for sustainable, healthy, and inclusive agrifood systems and rural societies in Latin America and the Caribbean – Framework for action 2021-2025](#). Santiago, FAO.
- ECLAC. B. Díaz de Astarloa, "Practices and initiatives for the development of cross-border e-commerce in Latin America and the Caribbean and its impact in the post-pandemic era", Production Development series, No. 233 (LC/TS.2022/221), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2023.
- IBM. 2024. [Exploring the Future of SME Banking: Insights from IBM's Latest Research](#).
- IICA. (2023). [Digitalization of agrifood systems](#).
- ITC. (2021). [SME Competitiveness Outlook 2021: Empowering the Green Recovery](#).
- ITC. E-commerce. <https://www.intracen.org/our-work/topics/goods-and-services/e-commerce-policy>

Kowalczyk, Iwona & Stangierska, Dagmara & Gębski, Jerzy & Tul-Krzyszczuk, Agnieszka & Zmudczynska, Edyta. (2021). [Digital Consumers in the Foodservices Market](#). Sustainability. 13. 7403. 10.3390/su13137403.

McKinsey & Company. (2020). [How COVID-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point—and transformed business forever](#).

OECD/CAF (2023), [Digital Government Review of Latin America and the Caribbean: Building Inclusive and Responsive Public Services](#), OECD Digital Government Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris.

UNCTAD (2021). [COVID 19 and E-commerce. A global review](#).

UNCTAD. (2024). [Making e-commerce and the digital economy work for all](#).

World Bank. (2021). [Poor digital access is holding Latin America and the Caribbean back. Here's how to change it](#).

World Bank. (2021). [What's cooking: Digital transformation of the agrifood system](#).

World Bank. 2025. [The Digital Gender Divide: Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in the Digital Era](#).

WTO. (2020). [Government policies to promote innovation in the digital age](#).

## 2. Webinars

COLEAD-IICA Caribbean Agrifood Business Series: [https://agrinnovators.org/session\\_region/caribbean-iica-colead/](https://agrinnovators.org/session_region/caribbean-iica-colead/)

COLEAD-PAFO Innovations Session n°16. Niche marketing strategies for SMEs and smallholder farmers: <https://agrinnovators.org/innovation-session/session-innovations-n16/>

## 3. Trainings

Caribbean Export : <https://carib-export.com/resources/training/>

Caribbean Export : Caribbean Virtual E-Commerce Accelerator Programme: <https://carib-export.com/resources/technical-assistance/caribbean-virtual-e-commerce-accelerator-programme/>

COLEAD e-learning platform: <https://training.colead.link/>

FAO e-learning academy. Small and medium enterprises and nutrition - upgrading business models: <https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=816>

Interamerican Development Bank (IDB): <https://cursos.iadb.org/en>

IICA training: <https://seed.iica.int/>

DoaneX: Sustainable Agri-food Marketing: <https://www.edx.org/learn/agriculture/doane-university-sustainable-agri-food-marketing>

ITC SME Trade Academy: <https://learning.intracen.org/>

ITC. The ecomConnect programme: <https://market.ecomconnect.org/ecomconnect-programme/>

Mastercard and TechnoServe E-commerce toolkit: <https://strivecommunity.org/programs/technoserve>

University of West Indies (UWI): <https://global.uwi.edu/programmes>

### Coordination team for Caribbean Agrifood Business Series:

**IICA:** Allister Glean, Representative in Barbados – Shontelle Sealy, Technical Assistant – Roxanne Waithe, Technical Specialist

**COLEAD:** Isolina Boto, Head of Networks and Alliances – Nina Desanlis-Perrin, Project Officer – Ahoefa Soklou, Project Officer



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