



## IICA-COLEAD Caribbean Agrifood Business Series

### Session n°18: E-commerce and digital marketing for agrifood products

*Tuesday 1 July 2025 – 14:00-16:00 UTC / 10:00-12:00 AST*

[Online \(Zoom\)](#)

*Live interpretation in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese*

#### 1. Context

The agrifood sector is undergoing a significant transformation driven by digital technologies. E-commerce and digital marketing are rapidly becoming key enablers for producers, processors, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to reach broader markets, improve competitiveness, and build stronger connections with consumers. For Caribbean agrifood stakeholders, these tools present valuable opportunities to overcome traditional barriers such as limited market access, high logistics costs, and geographic isolation.<sup>1</sup> These technologies are not only changing the dynamics of supply and demand but also redefining consumer expectations for convenience, transparency, sustainability, and traceability.

For producers, processors, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially those in the Caribbean, digital platforms present an unprecedented opportunity to overcome structural challenges that have historically limited their growth potential. Traditional barriers such as fragmented supply chains, limited physical market access, high logistics costs, seasonal demand fluctuations, and the geographical isolation of many island nations can now be mitigated through smart use of e-commerce and digital marketing tools.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this digital shift, highlighting the critical role of online channels in ensuring market continuity and food system resilience. Consumers increasingly turn to digital platforms for purchasing fresh produce, processed foods, and value-added agrifood products. Moreover, the expansion of mobile technologies, social media, and online payment systems is making it more feasible for even micro and small agrifood businesses to participate in e-commerce ecosystems.

#### **E-Commerce: A game changer for agrifood value chains in the Caribbean:**

The global shift towards online purchasing has accelerated, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Consumers now seek greater convenience, traceability, and direct access to producers. E-

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank. (2022). The digital divide in the Caribbean: Infrastructure and access challenges.

<sup>2</sup> McKinsey & Company. (2020). [How COVID-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point—and transformed business forever](#).

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



commerce platforms enable agrifood businesses to market their products beyond traditional local markets, expand their consumer base, and build resilience against supply chain disruptions.

Direct-to-consumer sales allow producers to capture a greater share of value by reducing dependency on intermediaries, increasing profit margins, and reinvesting in quality improvements, packaging, and customer service.<sup>3</sup>

E-commerce also facilitates market diversification, including access to regional and international markets, reducing reliance on local demand and increasing resilience to economic fluctuations.<sup>4</sup> Caribbean products—such as specialty cocoa, spices, tropical fruits, and traditional processed goods—can leverage their origin, authenticity, and sustainability to appeal to niche markets globally.<sup>5</sup>

E-commerce platforms provide small producers with equitable access to digital storefronts and customer engagement tools that can help them reach previously inaccessible audiences. The digital space also enables product experimentation, flexible pricing, and rapid feedback cycles to support agile decision-making.

Digital channels open opportunities for businesses to create subscription models, loyalty programs, and personalized marketing strategies that foster long-term customer relationships. The growth of e-commerce can further stimulate the development of local delivery systems, cold chain logistics, and accessible payment solutions—building a more supportive ecosystem for agrifood businesses.

Adopting e-commerce requires a shift in mindset, investment in digital skills, and new approaches to inventory management and customer service. However, the potential benefits in terms of growth, resilience, and market reach make it a critical pathway for the sustainable development of Caribbean agrifood enterprises.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. Digital marketing: building brands and consumer trust**

In a competitive digital landscape, effective digital marketing is essential for agrifood businesses to distinguish their products and connect with consumers. Today's consumers value authenticity, transparency, and sustainability.<sup>7</sup> Digital storytelling—highlighting a product's origin, social impact, and cultural heritage—can foster emotional connections and build trust.

Social media, email marketing, and direct customer interactions provide valuable, cost-effective channels for businesses to build strong consumer relationships. These platforms support regular updates, live sessions, customer service, and interactive marketing strategies that strengthen customer loyalty.

Digital marketing tools also enable businesses to access data analytics that provide real-time insights into consumer preferences, market trends, and campaign performance, allowing for quick and targeted response.<sup>8</sup>

Consistent digital engagement helps businesses cultivate brand communities and deepen consumer loyalty. Initiatives such as loyalty programs, user-generated content, and support for social causes can further solidify these connections.

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<sup>3</sup> World Bank. (2021). [What's cooking: Digital transformation of the agrifood system](#).

<sup>4</sup> WTO. (2020). [Government policies to promote innovation in the digital age](#).

<sup>5</sup> ITC. (2021). [SME Competitiveness Outlook 2021: Empowering the Green Recovery](#).

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Deloitte. (2020). [Global Marketing Trends: Bringing authenticity to our digital age](#)

<sup>8</sup> Kowalczyk, Iwona & Stangierska, Dagmara & Gębski, Jerzy & Tul-Krzyszczuk, Agnieszka & Zmudczynska, Edyta. (2021). [Digital Consumers in the Foodservices Market](#). Sustainability. 13. 7403. 10.3390/su1317403.



By leveraging high-quality visual content, collaborating with influencers, optimizing search engine visibility (SEO), and using multi-channel strategies, agrifood SMEs can significantly enhance their digital presence and build a competitive advantage.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Key challenges for entrepreneurs and support needed

Despite the potential benefits, several challenges hinder the adoption of e-commerce and digital marketing by agrifood businesses in the Caribbean:

**Limited Digital Literacy and E-Commerce Skills:** Many entrepreneurs lack the necessary skills to operate online stores, manage digital payments, and execute effective digital marketing strategies.<sup>10</sup> Tailored training and mentorship programs are essential.

**Inadequate Digital Infrastructure:** Limited access to reliable, affordable internet services in rural areas constrains participation in the digital economy.<sup>11</sup> Investment in infrastructure and mobile connectivity is urgently needed.

**Logistics Constraints:** Delivery of perishable goods remains a significant challenge, particularly due to weak cold chain infrastructure, high transport costs, and limited last-mile delivery options.<sup>12</sup> Regional partnerships and logistics innovation can help address these barriers.

**Limited Access to Payment Solutions:** High transaction fees, limited integration with local banking systems, and cross-border payment restrictions present significant obstacles for SMEs.<sup>13</sup> Mobile payment solutions and regional payment frameworks can offer viable alternatives.

**Low Awareness of Digital Compliance and Cybersecurity:** Many businesses are unaware of consumer protection laws, data privacy regulations, tax obligations, and cybersecurity risks associated with e-commerce.<sup>14</sup> Regulatory guidance, awareness campaigns, and cybersecurity capacity building are needed to close this gap.

**Gender Inequality in the Digital Economy:** Despite progress, various individual and societal factors still hinder women's participation in the online world. These include household responsibilities, wage gaps, and unaffordable telecom services and devices. Women are less likely to receive digital tech training, feel confident in their skills, or work in the digital sector. Additionally, women in LAC express greater concerns about online privacy, security, reliability of information, scams, and harmful content exposure. In addition, women face greater exposure to automation compared to men. And in countries with significant gender digital divides, women employed in positions conducive to artificial intelligence may encounter barriers to effectively utilizing this technology.<sup>15</sup> Addressing these challenges requires targeted, multi-faceted solutions. Expanding affordable access to devices and internet services,

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<sup>9</sup> UNCTAD. (2024). [Making e-commerce and the digital economy work for all](#).

<sup>10</sup> IICA. (2023). [Digitalization of agrifood systems](#). Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank. (2021). [Poor digital access is holding Latin America and the Caribbean back. Here's how to change it](#).

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> IBM. 2024. [Exploring the Future of SME Banking: Insights from IBM's Latest Research](#).

<sup>14</sup> ITC. E-commerce. <https://www.intracen.org/our-work/topics/goods-and-services/e-commerce-policy>

<sup>15</sup> World Bank. 2025. [The Digital Gender Divide: Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in the Digital Era](#).



providing digital skills training tailored for women and girls, and creating safer, more supportive online spaces are critical steps. Public and private stakeholders must work together to strengthen digital security, protect privacy, and prevent online harassment. Embedding gender-sensitive policies with clear targets in national digital strategies will also be key to closing the digital gender gap.

#### **4. The way forward**

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.



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### Agenda

14:00-14:05 Introduction

**Moderation:** *Isolina Boto, Head of Networks and Alliances, COLEAD*

14:05-15:00 Panel 1: Opportunities for entrepreneurs in e-commerce and digital marketing

- Chavara Roker, CEO, Chiccharney Farms, Bahamas
- Shelly Heaven, Founder and CEO, Farm Linkr Ltd, Jamaica
- Gillian Goddard, Co-Founder, The Alliance of Rural Communities, Trinidad and Tobago
- Agyei Archer, Business Lead, AgriConnect, Trinidad and Tobago

**Moderation:** *Allister Reynold Glean, Representative in Barbados, IICA*

15:00-15:30 Panel 2: Insights from experts

- Jonathan Seecharan, Innovation & Digital Business Officer, Caribbean Export Development Agency
- Allyson Francis, International Trade and Development Specialist, Caribbean Development Bank

15:30-15:50 Q&A session

15:50-16:00 Conclusion and way forward



*This event was organised by the Fit For Market Plus programme, implemented by COLEAD within the framework of Development cooperation between the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), and the European Union (EU).*

*This publication has been produced with the financial support of the EU and the OACPS. Its contents are the sole responsibility of COLEAD and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the EU or the OACPS.*