



IICA-COLEAD Caribbean Agrifood Business Series

Session n°19: Transforming Agrifood Systems: Opportunities for entrepreneurs in the Caribbean and Latin America

Thursday 23 October 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°19 explored the opportunities in transforming agrifood systems. The event featured 4 accomplished entrepreneurs, from Jamaica, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Mexico. The discussion also showcased support mechanisms from development partners. The session drew 321 registrants from across continents, eager to learn more and access additional resources.

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

Join our [Forum](#) to drive innovation in agriculture, transform food systems, and build a greener future through collaboration and shared insights.

About transforming agrifood systems

The agrifood sector in Latin America and the Caribbean is entering a decisive period of transformation. The combined pressures of climate change, global market volatility, and shifting consumer preferences are exposing the vulnerabilities of current food systems while also creating space for innovation and renewal. Rising food prices, heavy import dependency, and climate-driven disruptions threaten the security of millions, particularly women, children, smallholder farmers, and the urban poor. At the same time, the growing demand for safe, sustainable, and transparent food offers new avenues for growth, entrepreneurship, and regional self-reliance. Entrepreneurs stand at the centre of this transition. By harnessing technology, adopting climate-smart approaches, and building inclusive business models, they can lead the development of more resilient supply chains and reduce the region's dependence on external markets.

Key points discussed

- Strengthening networks of smallholders and cooperatives helps improve productivity, market access, and income stability for farmers.
- Climate-resilient agricultural practices are essential to mitigate the impacts of drought, extreme weather, and water scarcity.
- Digital tools and data management platforms provide farmers with guidance on climate, crop management, and traceability while ensuring they maintain ownership of their data.
- Initiatives prioritize the inclusion of women, youth, and marginalized producers to ensure equitable access to resources, markets, and training.
- Blended financing solutions, guarantees, and partnerships with local lenders help smallholders and agribusinesses overcome barriers to finance.
- Investments in infrastructure, such as cold storage, renewable energy, and processing facilities, reduce post-harvest losses and support expansion into domestic and export markets.
- Sustainable production and high-quality practices, including preservative-free and regenerative approaches, enhance environmental sustainability and market competitiveness.
- Market linkages and regional trade platforms, including virtual business fairs, connect producers with local, regional, and international buyers.
- Capacity building and technical assistance for farmers, cooperatives, and agronomists promote the adoption of best practices in cultivation, processing, and business management.
- Strategic partnerships across sectors (public, private, and non-profit) play a critical role in transforming agri-food systems by combining resources, knowledge, and networks to scale solutions, improve market access, and support sustainable development.
- Aligning policies, harmonizing regulations, and fostering regional collaboration strengthens food systems, trade, and economic development across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Meet the businesses and entrepreneurs

David Crum-Ewing – Operations Executive, [Grace Kennedy](#), Jamaica

David Crum-Ewing described how Grace Kennedy transforms its farmer network into “agropreneurs,” encouraging small-scale farmers to treat farming as a business. Grace Kennedy’s export-oriented products—hot pepper sauces, jerk seasonings, and canned goods—depend on ingredients like scallions and peppers. To address market uncertainties and rising costs, the company helps farmers optimize yields, reduce expenses, and adopt best practices such as soil management, seed selection, and adaptive nutritional plans. Using climate data, they shifted the scallion growing season, achieving record production and boosting incomes in small communities. For pepper cultivation, organic fertilizers and pesticides made from factory by-products lower costs while meeting export standards. Technology adoption is central, including GPS-based weather modeling, drones, satellite imagery for pest detection, and developing robotic harvesting. Grace Kennedy’s approach combines capacity building, science-driven practices, and innovation to enhance productivity, support small farmers, and strengthen Jamaica’s agri-food export sector.

Maryan Setrodikoro – Director, [Eden Herbs and Spices](#), Suriname

Maryan Setrodikoro shared how her young company (less than four years old) specializes in producing pure, preservative-free medicinal and culinary herbs, including moringa, hibiscus, turmeric, and gotu kola, as teas, powders, oils, and other products. Operating with small-scale outgrowers and cooperatives, the company focuses on clean, high-quality production. Maryan highlighted challenges, including climate-induced crop losses, high costs and limited availability of processing machines, scarce skilled labor, limited access to affordable finance, expensive certification, and high cross-border logistics costs. To overcome these, Eden Herbs and Spices collaborates with cooperatives for training and production, negotiates annual price

agreements with growers, sources custom machinery directly from China, maintains fast-response technical support, and works closely with freight forwarders and government agencies. Looking forward, the company plans regional market expansion, including Latin America, the Caribbean, the Netherlands, and Dubai, capitalizing on growing demand for natural, high-quality products despite persistent operational and regulatory challenges.

Larry Holder – Public Relations Executive, [Novo Farms](#), Trinidad and Tobago

Larry Holder shared an overview of Novo Farms and the group's agro-processing and consumer brand "Life." Novo converts local products into convenient, preservative-free instant meals, frozen goods, and beverages, appealing to both regional and international Caribbean diaspora markets. Their offerings include callaloo, dal corn soup, choker, oil down, sweet potato fries, and a beverage line repurposing leftover product bits for sustainability. Novo emphasizes quality, holding local and international certifications (FDA, ISO), and has won multiple awards for innovation, environmental practices, and market success. Larry highlighted the company's active participation in trade shows across the Caribbean, U.S., and Canada for market exposure. Looking forward, Novo aims to establish European market presence and foster partnerships with micro and small entrepreneurs, offering support in scaling production, business planning, product development, and retail access, creating mutually beneficial opportunities for growth and regional food security.

Maria Luisa Luque Sánchez – Co Founder, [Nuup](#), Mexico

Maria Luisa introduced Nuup as a Mexican non-profit social enterprise focused on accelerating sustainable and inclusive food systems. Their mission is to support smallholder farmers through technical assistance, market access, financing, and technology while ensuring farmers retain ownership of their data. Nuup works across multiple value chains, including livestock, strawberries, agave, coffee, grains, and honey, combining regenerative farming practices with economic viability and environmental stewardship. They connect farmers to both large buyers, like Danone, and smaller dynamic enterprises, ensuring secure markets for produce. A key innovation is their digital platform, Sirio, an offline-first, user-friendly tool that helps cooperatives manage data for certification, traceability, and farm management, while keeping data ownership with farmers. Nuup also develops blended financing solutions to improve access to capital for smallholders. Currently, they operate primarily in southeast and central Mexico, with plans to expand Sirio and their services across Latin America, empowering farmers and strengthening sustainable value chains.

Meet the organisations supporting entrepreneurs

Juan Carlos Estrada – Commercial Support Technician, [Secretary of Economic Integration of Central America \(SIECA\)](#)

SIECA is the regional organization that promotes economic integration and trade facilitation among Central American countries. It supports initiatives like the Central American Trade Network, a regional platform designed to promote trade, provide market intelligence, and facilitate business connections across Central America and beyond, strengthening business linkages and fostering regional economic growth. Juan Carlos presented the platform, which hosts virtual business fairs, enabling companies of all sizes to connect, schedule meetings, and explore partnerships at no cost. To date, it has over 31,000 registered businesses, held 43 virtual fairs, facilitated 14,000 business meetings, and generated an estimated \$300 million in intended deals. Juan Carlos highlighted the upcoming fifth Caribbean Agri-Food Virtual Business Fair (October 28–30), covering sectors such as food preparations, beverages, bakery products, seafood, and packaging. The platform offers guidance, translation support, and tools to filter companies by country, products, and interests, making it easy for entrepreneurs to engage and expand business opportunities.

Melissa Brown – Senior Agriculture Economist, [World Bank](#)

Melissa Brown highlighted the World Bank's evolving approach to the agricultural sector. She emphasized the importance of integrated investments in agri-food systems to generate jobs, support economic development, and reduce poverty. The World Bank's Agri-Connect initiative seeks to strengthen core infrastructure, leverage digital tools, and connect smallholders, cooperatives, and aggregators in innovative ways. It also focuses on policy alignment, trade facilitation, land tenure, public goods development, and improving access to finance and markets. These efforts aim to scale up agri-value chain investments through collaboration across the World Bank Group's institutions, including the International Finance Corporation and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency.

Phelese Brown – Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, [Jamaica Social Investment Fund](#)

Phelese presented on Jamaica's Second Rural Economic Development Initiative (READY II), funded by the World Bank and implemented by the Jamaica Social Investment Fund, which promotes rural economic development, climate-resilient practices, and improved market access for agricultural stakeholders, while also supporting community tourism. A key success story is the St. Mary's Multi-Purpose Cooperative, which rehabilitated and expanded its cold storage facility, including commercial scales and a grid-tied solar PV system to address frequent power outages. This support led to a 45% reduction in post-harvest losses, increased storage capacity from 5,000 to over 15,000 pounds, improved produce quality, expanded market access (supermarkets and health sector), and timely payments to farmers. READY II also supports women and youth, providing livestock, crop equipment, and water storage systems to enhance climate resilience. Over 4,000 beneficiaries have been reached, 67% of whom are women. Going forward, the project will continue promoting agro-processing, cold chain facilities, protected agriculture, and climate-smart technologies to drive sustainable rural development.

Questions and Answers Session

David Crum-Ewing – Operations Executive, [Grace Kennedy](#), Jamaica

How are small cooperative farmers encouraged to be more productive in the agricultural business?

Jamaicans are tactile and experiential learners. This is one of the primary reasons Grace Kennedy set up its research farm, so farmers can see best practices in action. Information is also shared through workshops and through the Rural Agricultural Development Agency (RADA), which is part of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Aren't you concerned that the use of certain types of technology, especially robotics, could impact employment for workers in local communities?

No. Jamaica has an unemployment rate of less than 5%, with more people learning technical skills due to the government's technical school, HEART Trust/NTA, being free of charge. This is resulting in fewer low-skilled laborers available for tasks like harvesting, so the use of technology is vital to ensure the agricultural industry can handle menial tasks that will still be needed.

How do farmers finance their inputs and technologies?

Most farmers in Jamaica are self-funded and can access low-cost special agricultural loans from the Development Bank of Jamaica. Some have also been able to access grants through agencies such as FAO and WUSC. The government offers assistance with inputs from time to time and makes research data available from the Bodes Agricultural Research Station. RADA also has tractors stationed across Jamaica to assist farmers with heavy-duty activities like ploughing, and low-cost water supply is provided to most farming areas by the National Irrigation Commission (NIC).

Can you provide more details on the EMI adoption process?

There are multiple EMI brands available, which can be contacted for product and application information. EMI can also be manufactured if you have a steady supply of organic plant waste, a source of non-chlorinated water, and a bio-digestion process. A quick search on Amazon will show the more popular brands, and a lot of information also exists through other sources such as ChatGPT, YouTube, etc.

Maryan Setrodikoro – Director, [Eden Herbs and Spices](#), Suriname

You have farmers under contract. How do you manage to retain them so that they stay with you regardless of market conditions, particularly when demand for their raw materials is high among other downstream customers?

We work with cooperatives whose clients are our out-growers. As a company, we cover all the costs of training and provide support whenever there are problems in the field. This creates a very close business relationship between our company, the cooperative, and the out-growers. As a result of this collaboration, our out-growers enjoy year-round stable sales and income.

Have nutritional analyses been conducted on any of these products, and do they carry nutritional fact labels?

We are currently focusing on this phase. We also offer customized market packaging, so for our buyers, the packaging is designed to meet the specific requirements of each target market.

Maria Luisa Luque Sánchez – Co Founder, [Nuup](#), Mexico

How do you support producers in tackling climate challenges, is it through climate risk insurance, or through other mechanisms?

First, in terms of adaptation and preparation, in our direct technical assistance, we work with farmers in improving practices around water usage and infiltration, but also soil improvement or soil health. Depending on the crop or region, we will adapt our trainings and the practices we work on the farm with farmers. An area where we have seen farmers receiving very little assistance (and this is true both for large and small farmers) is regarding farm design or soil preparation, i.e., taking into account that the plot might not be flat but actually on a hill, and this is important to consider. Second, we also work with small farmers on developing income diversification options. We find that many times a farmer is considered a “coffee farmer” and receives training and market access on that activity, but the truth is that most family farms have many different activities. We are working with farmer groups to support other important activities that might be oriented towards local markets or a smaller scale but provide diversification and allow preparation for a future where maybe other crops might work better. We are also working with UNDP and partners on establishing parametric insurance solutions for coffee farmers, but we are actually working with buyers, so they take on the cost of the insurance, and it is distributed across the value chain towards the client. The idea here is that many times farmers are the ones bearing the climate risk, and they are expected to cover the cost of insurance. In the model we are testing, the idea is to say, “Well, the farmer already bears a lot of the risk; the cost of mitigation should be distributed through the value chain, so we all participate and share the risk.”

Resources

1. Reports, articles and studies

Aguilar Revelo, L. 2021. [Gender equality in the face of climate change: what can mechanisms do for the advancement of women in Latin America and the Caribbean?](#)

Caribbean Agribusiness. 2020. [Linkages between Tourism and Agriculture](#).

Caribbean Agribusiness. [Women in Agriculture](#).

Caribbean Policy Development Centre. 2023. [Transforming agri-food systems in the Caribbean: Helping Small and Medium Scale \(SMS\) Food Producers to Eradicate Hunger and Malnutrition](#).

- CGIAR. 2025. [Financing the transition. Takeaways from the II EU–LAC Agri-Food Dialogue on strategies and instruments to promote sustainable livestock.](#)
- Cortbaoui, P. E., & Ngadi, M. O. 2016. Characterization of Postharvest Practices and Losses of Fresh Produce along the Caribbean Supply Chain: Guyana and St. Kitts-Nevis. *Journal of Postharvest Technology*, 4(1), 16-25.
- FAO. 2021. [Strategic Framework 2022-2031.](#)
- FAO. 2024. [Four priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean.](#)
- FAO. 2024. [Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition.](#)
- FAO. 2024. [Opportunities and challenges for agrifood trade between Central American Integration System and Caribbean Community countries.](#)
- Hologram. 2025. [From 50% water savings to 25% yield increases: Latin America's AgTech revolution by the numbers.](#)
- IDB. 2024. [Digital transformation and agribusiness: trends and opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean.](#)
- IICA. 2025. [More than 540 Latin American and Caribbean companies negotiated USD 20 million in tentative business deals at a virtual agrifood trade event.](#)
- IICA. [Digital Week 2025.](#)
- Santamaría, V. 2024. [Opportunities and Challenges for Agrifood Trade Between Central American Integration System and Caribbean Community Countries.](#)
- Thevenin, R. 2024. [Cómo los consumidores están impulsando el avance hacia procesos de agricultura sostenible.](#)
- World Bank Group. 2020. [Future Foodscapes: Reimagining Agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean.](#)

2. Webinars

- CLIC. Blended finance in agrifood systems: The case of Latin America and the Caribbean. <https://climateshotinvestor.org/updates/blended-finance-in-agrifood-systems-the-case-of-latin-america-and-the-caribbean>
- COLEAD-IICA Caribbean Agrifood Business Series: https://agrinovators.org/session_region/caribbean-iica-colead/
- FAO. Agrovisiones: Webinar series on innovation for agrifood transformation. <https://www.fao.org/americas/events/agrovisiones/>

3. Trainings

- Caribbean Export : <https://carib-export.com/resources/training/>
- COLEAD e-learning platform: <https://training.colead.link/>
- Interamerican Development Bank (IDB): <https://cursos.iadb.org/en>
- IICA training: <https://seed.iica.int/>
- ITC SME Trade Academy: <https://learning.intracen.org/>

Coordination team for Caribbean Agrifood Business Series:

IICA: Allister Glean, Representative in Barbados – Shontelle Sealy, Technical Assistant – Roxanne Waithe, Technical Specialist
COLEAD: Nina Desanlis-Perrin, Project Officer – Ahoefa Soklou, Project Officer



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.