



Session n°20:

Financing Caribbean agrifood entrepreneurs: strategies to access investment

Tuesday 31 March 2026

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 session n°20 explored the opportunities for agrifood entrepreneurs in accessing investment. The event featured 3 accomplished entrepreneurs, from Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Dominican Republic. The discussion also showcased support mechanisms from development partners. The session drew 432 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.

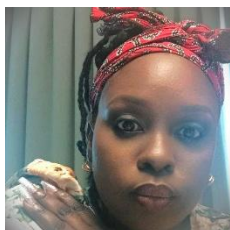
About financing Caribbean agrifood entrepreneurs

Agrifood systems are key to Caribbean economic resilience, rural livelihoods, and food security, but the region remains heavily dependent on food imports and highly exposed to climate and economic shocks. Strengthening domestic production, agro-processing, and regional value chains is therefore essential. Improving access to finance requires coordinated action: expanding suitable financing options, lowering perceived risk for lenders, and building stronger agrifood businesses that are financially transparent and investment-ready.

Key points discussed

- Access to finance is less about availability of capital and more about investment readiness and credibility of businesses.
- Agriculture is structurally seen as high-risk due to seasonality, climate exposure, and unpredictable returns.
- A major barrier is the lack of formalisation, financial records, and structured business documentation.
- Entrepreneurs often struggle with meeting eligibility requirements such as audited accounts, projections, and legal registration.
- Finance alone is not enough: blended support (grants, training, technical assistance, and matchmaking) is essential, but they each require different levels of readiness.
- Strong emphasis on value addition, processing, branding, and export orientation to unlock higher-value markets and finance.
- Investors and Development Finance Institutions increasingly require measurable impact reporting (social, environmental, inclusion outcomes).
- Entrepreneurs must build long-term credibility through consistent reporting, compliance, and disciplined operations.
- Successful businesses are those that align with policy priorities such as climate resilience, digital transformation, and gender inclusion.

Meet the businesses and entrepreneurs



Bevon Chadel Charles
 Founder, Akata Farms, Grenada



Gordon Shallow
 Founder, The Plant Doctor, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines



Nelfi Altigracia García
 Founder, Chocolala, Dominican Republic

Bevon Chadel Charles – Founder, [Akata Farms](#), Grenada

Bevon is a Grenadian entrepreneur who founded Akata Farms to combine climate-smart agriculture with digital tools that support farmers and strengthen rural economies. She explained how the structural mismatch between agriculture and finance can be overcome through formalisation, disciplined record-keeping, and alignment with funding priorities such as climate resilience and community impact, which enabled her to access multiple grants and scale her farm.

Gordon Shallow – Founder, [The Plant Doctor](#), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Gordon is a phytopathologist who founded The Plant Doctor to develop organic agricultural inputs such as bio-fertilisers and plant protection products to improve soil health and reduce import dependence. He stressed that agribusiness success depends on structuring operations, maintaining strong records, and building credibility to meet financing requirements and grow sustainably.

Nelfi Altigracia García – Founder, [Chocolala](#), Dominican Republic

Nelfi is a Dominican entrepreneur who founded Chocolala, a women-led artisanal chocolate business focused on cacao production and transformation. She explained that financing is essential for scaling production, equipment, and marketing, but is constrained by high interest rates, strict requirements, and barriers for rural entrepreneurs. She highlighted resilience, partnerships, and support programmes as key to overcoming these challenges and growing the business.

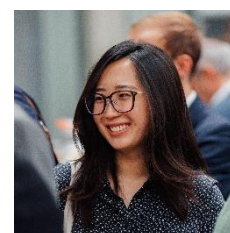
Meet the organisations supporting entrepreneurs



Wayne Elliott
 Manager of Technical Programmes,
 Caribbean Export Development
 Agency



Perrine Duffaure
 AgriFI Investment Officer, EDFI
 Management Company



Weiting Yao
 Project Manager in Access to
 Finance, COLEAD

[Caribbean Export Development Agency](#), represented by Wayne Elliott, Manager of Technical Programmes

The Caribbean Export Development Agency is the region's trade and investment promotion organisation supporting MSMEs to expand exports and drive sustainable economic growth. Wayne highlighted its work in providing grants, capacity building, and investment matchmaking, while also emphasising that weak documentation and limited investment readiness remain key barriers, which the agency addresses through training and export-focused support programmes.

EDFI Management Company, represented by Perrine Duffaure, AgriFI Investment Officer

EDFI Management Company manages AgriFI, an impact investment facility providing €1–5 million in long-term financing to agrifood SMEs and value chain actors in emerging markets. Perrine explained that AgriFI targets companies with strong financial track records and measurable impact on smallholder farmers, offering catalytic debt financing that strengthens entire value chains while meeting strict environmental and governance standards.

COLEAD, represented by Weiting Yao, Project Manager in Access to Finance

COLEAD's Access to Finance Department supports agrifood MSMEs by strengthening their investment readiness and linking them to finance opportunities across Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. Weiting emphasised that access to finance is a step-by-step journey, and COLEAD provides structured pathways including training, business model support, and financial planning tools to help entrepreneurs progressively build credibility and connect with funders.

Resources

1. Reports, articles and studies

AgriFocus Caribbean. [Gender Equality in the Fields: Women's Empowerment and Leadership in Caribbean Agriculture](#).

FAO. [Innovative finance for agrifood systems transformation](#).

Hope Research Group. [Caribbean Agriculture Market](#).

IFC. [Access to Finance for Smallholder Farmers](#).

IFPRI. [Four lessons for financial innovation in agrifood systems](#).

Prensa Latina. [Access to financing, a priority issue at Caribbean agricultural forum](#).

UN. [FAO project to boost financial literacy, capital for MSMEs in agribusiness](#).

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/

COLEAD Access to Finance Webinars:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DbrISuITDI&list=PLV5hWpGiR94I98JI9Ji3tyHjR9A_4fD2C

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/>



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