Session n°21:
Advancing agroecology for Caribbean SMEs

Tuesday 16 June 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°21 explored the opportunities for Caribbean SMEs to adopt agroecological practices. The event featured 3 accomplished entrepreneurs, from Saint Lucia and Barbados. The discussion also showcased experts in agroecology. The session drew 398 registrants from across continents.

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.

Key points discussed

- Agroecology and related approaches overlap in practice, and "sustainable agriculture" has no single definition; it depends on balancing environmental, social, and economic goals in context-specific ways.
- Many Caribbean and Global South farming systems already show agroecological traits but still face constraints like low productivity, soil degradation, and post-harvest losses.
- Applying agroecological principles is highly context-dependent, so solutions must be adapted to local ecological and socio-economic realities.
- Examples of practical implementation were presented, including permaculture zoning, syntropic agriculture, biodiversity-based pest control, renewable energy use, and participatory research.
- Agroecology may offer opportunities for resilience, innovations and stronger local food systems, especially by improving resource efficiency.
- Scaling sustainable practices requires enabling conditions such as knowledge exchange, technical support, innovation, and supportive policy and governance.
- Economic viability and labour constraints remain key factors for making agroecology workable for SMEs.

Key insights from panellists

Anja Fernand – Founder and Director, Food Harmony Incorporated, Saint Lucia

Anja Fernand is a Saint Lucian food systems entrepreneur and regenerative agriculture practitioner who shared her transition from conventional farming to regenerative agroecology, motivated by personal health challenges and degraded soils on her farm. She rebuilt her system using no-till, chemical-free practices, heavy organic matter inputs, multistrata agroforestry with over 20 crops, continuous soil cover, and limited livestock integration. Over time, she observed improved soil structure, better water retention, higher drought resilience, and increased yields without irrigation. She emphasized soil regeneration as the foundation of resilient farming systems, especially for small island contexts facing climate change and land scarcity. While

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acknowledging short-term difficulties, she highlighted agroecology as a pathway to long-term productivity, sustainability, and system-wide resilience.

Rashonda Stuart – Tour Guide, Coco Hill Forest, Barbados

Rashonda Stuart presented Coco Hill Forest in Barbados as a long-term regenerative agroforestry project aimed at restoring degraded land while strengthening food sovereignty. She explained how the site was transformed over more than a decade using agroecological methods such as syntropic farming, contour-based design, diverse intercropping, and soil regeneration practices to rebuild biodiversity and stabilize erosion-prone soils. She highlighted how these approaches also support agro-tourism and value-added production, helping to fund and sustain the system. Despite challenges such as climate stress, invasive species, and structural barriers, she emphasized that the project demonstrates clear improvements in soil health, resilience, and productivity. She concluded that agroecology offers a scalable model for Caribbean SMEs, linking ecological restoration with economic opportunity and knowledge sharing.

Damian Adjodha – Founder and Director, New Flower Regenrative Garden, Saint Lucia

Damian Adjodha presented agroecology as both a mindset and a systems-based approach to building resilient small-scale farming in the Caribbean. Drawing on his work at New Flower Regenerative Garden in Saint Lucia, he described an integrated model where production, education, and farm design are interconnected to create multiple benefits and strengthen food sovereignty. He reframed weeds such as nutgrass as indicators of ecological conditions rather than just pests, arguing that they should be managed by understanding their ecological role. Instead of relying on chemicals or repeated tillage, he proposed suppressing them through dense planting, minimal soil disturbance, mulching, and maximizing ground cover to outcompete them. Overall, he emphasized that agroecology addresses root causes of farm challenges by increasing diversity, ecological function, and system resilience.

Margarita Fernandez – Executive Director, Caribbean Agroecology Institute

Margarita Fernández highlighted the Caribbean Agroecology Institute's work in advancing agroecological transitions through four main areas: regional learning exchanges, community-led field projects, participatory action research, and narrative change. She emphasized agroecology as a paradigm shift rooted in farmer and Indigenous knowledge, now increasingly supported by policy and institutions, but requiring stronger collaboration across actors in the Caribbean. Drawing on examples from Cuba and wider regional initiatives, she stressed the importance of knowledge sharing, policy implementation, renewable energy for farm systems, and reducing post-harvest losses to strengthen local food economies. She concluded by underlining the need to scale agroecology through stronger regional networks, evidence-based practice, and coordinated action across research, policy, and farming communities.

Pieterjan De Bauw – Senior Project Manager, COLEAD

Pieterjan De Bauw took a conceptual perspective, reflecting on the complexity of defining sustainable agriculture and agroecology in a global context. He emphasized the tensions between competing demands on agriculture (food production, environmental protection, and social equity) and argued that sustainability cannot be defined through a single universal model. Highlighting global population growth and yield gaps, he stressed the need to increase productivity in some regions while also conserving ecosystems, noting that "one-size-fits-all" solutions do not work. He cautioned that agroecological principles must be carefully translated into local agronomic practice, as context matters and poorly adapted approaches can produce unintended or negative outcomes. He concluded that true sustainability requires integrating environmental, social, and economic dimensions while adapting interventions to local realities rather than applying principles rigidly.

Erle Rahaman-Noronha - Director, Caribbean Permaculture Research Institute & Wa Samaki Ecosystems

Erle Rahaman-Noronha describes permaculture as a way of designing farms that work with natural ecosystem processes rather than relying on external inputs, drawing on his long-term experience at Wa Samaki Ecosystems in Trinidad, where degraded land was gradually restored into a diverse, productive landscape. He outlines how the system is organized into functional zones (from household food production to commercial crops, timber, and conserved natural areas) and how biodiversity is deliberately integrated to create self-regulating systems, including natural pest control through wildlife like bats, snakes, and insects. In fact, he signals that pests and weeds are signals of imbalance within systems that need to be better understood and managed through design. He also highlights syntropic agriculture and ecological succession as ways of building layered, productive plant communities, and emphasizes hands-on learning and low-impact resource use.

Resources

1. Reports, articles and studies

AgriFocus. 2025. Sustainable Farming for Caribbean Smallholders.

FAO and CDB. 2020. Study on the state of agriculture in the Caribbean.

FAO. 2013. Smallholder integration in changing food markets

FAO. 2020. Supporting climate adaptation in smallholder agriculture.

FAO. 2022. Transforming public agricultural extension and advisory service systems in smallholder farming.

FAO. Agroecology Knowledge Hub : What is Agroecology?

FAO. The 10 Elements of Agroecology framework process.

IDB. 2025. Agricultural productivity in Latin America and the Caribbean.

IFAD. Markets and value chains.

IMF. 2021. Fintech and Financial Inclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mudombi-Rusinamhodzi, G. & Rusinamhodzi, L. 2022. Food sovereignty in sub-Saharan Africa: Reality, relevance, and practicality.

Stark, F. & al. 2017. Crop-livestock integration determines the agroecological performance of mixed farming systems in Latino-Caribbean farms.

Suwilanji, S. 2023. Opportunities and Challenges for the Promotion of Transitions to Agroecological Practices for Sustainable Food Production in Sub-Sahara Africa.

UNCTAD. 2018. Standards keep people and planet healthy but cost small firms.

Wordsell, L, S. 2025. Has agroecology lost the plot? The fracture between science, movement, and practice in the Insular Caribbean

2. Webinars

Agroecology Partnership Webinar Series. https://www.agroecologypartnership.eu/en/activities/webinar-series

COLEAD-IICA Caribbean Agrifood Business Series: https://agrinnovators.org/session_region/caribbean-iica-colead/

3. Trainings

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

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

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

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

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

Route to Food: Introduction to Food Systems Transformation through Agroecology. https://routetofood.org/courses/agroecology-class/

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