



Session 22:

Exploring international and intra-regional market opportunities for Caribbean agrifood MSMEs

Tuesday 22 September 2026 – 14:00-16:00 UTC / 10:00-12:00 AST

[Online \(Zoom\)](#)

Live interpretation in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese

1. Context

The Caribbean agri-food sector is a key driver of regional economies, encompassing primary production, agro-processing, input supply, and a wide range of supporting services. Across CARICOM Member States, agriculture and fisheries contribute an estimated 3–5 percent of GDP, while the wider agrifood system makes an even greater contribution to employment, income generation, rural livelihoods, and foreign exchange earnings¹. Despite this importance, the Caribbean remains a net food-importing region, with an annual food import bill estimated at approximately US\$6 billion².

Reducing this import dependence has become a major regional priority. The CARICOM "25 by 2030" initiative, which aims to reduce the Region's food import bill by 25 percent by 2030, recognizes that increased domestic production, stronger regional trade, and expanded exports must all contribute to building a more resilient and competitive agrifood sector. While efforts to strengthen intra-regional trade continue, imports are still largely supplied from outside the Region, indicating considerable scope for Caribbean producers to replace imports while increasing regional supply.

Although much attention is often given to large agricultural enterprises, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) account for between 70 and 80 percent of businesses across the Caribbean and make an important contribution to employment, entrepreneurship, and value addition³. However, many MSMEs face persistent constraints related to finance, certification, logistics, technology, market information, and compliance with export requirements. These challenges frequently limit their ability to compete consistently in both regional and international markets.

Despite these constraints, significant opportunities exist for Caribbean agrifood MSMEs to expand into both regional and international markets. Capturing these opportunities will require greater competitiveness, improved compliance with market requirements, and stronger understanding of buyer expectations. Against this background, this webinar seeks to encourage Caribbean agrifood businesses to adopt a more outward-looking market orientation by exploring opportunities beyond their domestic markets while strengthening commercial linkages within the Caribbean.

¹ Commonwealth Secretariat. (2024). National agricultural data infrastructure: Caribbean (Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda Policy Brief).

² Caribbean Business & Travel. (2024). Caribbean Food Security Report and Investment Opportunities. In S. A. Baptiste (Ed.), G. Bindley-Taylor (Assoc. Ed.), R. Seeram, K. De Abreu, M. Buckmire, D. Gonsalves, M. Stevens, Z. Spencer, & S. Mok (Contributors). Carigold Signature.

³ IICA-COLEAD. Caribbean Agrifood Business Session n°9: innovative youth-led businesses and Caribbean Agrifood Business Session n°8: successes from women-led businesses

2. Opportunity areas

International markets

International markets continue to offer attractive opportunities for Caribbean agrifood products that combine authenticity, quality, sustainability, and convenience. Europe remains an important destination for high-quality and niche agricultural products, while North American and diaspora markets continue to demonstrate strong demand for Caribbean fruits, roots and tubers, sauces, spices, seasonings, processed foods, coconut products, herbal items, and other culturally distinctive products⁴.

Growing consumer interest in sustainability, authentic origin, convenience, traceability, and healthier food choices creates new opportunities for Caribbean exporters that invest in quality improvement, innovation, branding, and value addition. The European market, although highly regulated, offers strong prospects for producers capable of meeting demanding food safety, traceability, sustainability, organic, and fair-trade requirements. Meanwhile, established Caribbean communities in North America and the United Kingdom provide important entry points for products that already enjoy strong cultural recognition and consumer loyalty.

Intra-regional markets

Regional markets provide an equally important and often more accessible pathway for Caribbean agrifood businesses. Within CARICOM, there is considerable potential to replace imported food with regionally produced alternatives. The Caribbean Private Sector Organization (CPSO) has identified opportunities in products such as poultry, hatching eggs, feed inputs, meat, roots and tubers, niche vegetables, cassava, coconut products, and other priority commodities, with import substitution potential estimated at more than US\$418 million⁵.

Shared consumer preferences, shorter transport distances, and CARICOM's commitment to regional integration create favourable conditions for expanding trade in both fresh and processed products⁶. Agro-processing offers particular opportunities by extending shelf life, reducing post-harvest losses, facilitating transportation, and creating stronger branding opportunities for Caribbean products. Expanding intra-regional trade therefore supports food security and import substitution while providing businesses with valuable experience in meeting commercial standards, developing supply consistency, and building buyer relationships that can ultimately facilitate entry into more demanding international markets.

3. Enabling support

Realizing these opportunities will require coordinated action from governments, development partners, and the private sector, including producers and business support organizations. Governments have an important role in strengthening the enabling environment through targeted support for certification, quality infrastructure, product development, and compliance with international standards, particularly for MSMEs with strong export potential⁷.

Development agencies and technical partners, such as IICA or COLEAD, can further strengthen export readiness by providing tailored training, technical assistance, and market intelligence on standards, labelling, packaging, traceability, food safety, sustainability, and

⁴ IICA-COLEAD. Caribbean Agrifood Business Session n°5: Agriculture Trade: Opportunities for SMEs in Export Markets

⁵ CARICOM Private Sector Organization. (n.d.). Twenty-Five (25%) by 2025 initiative. <https://thecpso.org/twenty-five-25-by-2025-initiative>

⁶ Sandiford, R (June 2026). *CARICOM Market Opportunity Assessment*. Presentation at IICA Delegation in Jamaica Workshop titled Exporting to the Caribbean

⁷ OECD/IDB (2024), Caribbean Development Dynamics: Regional Integration and International Partnerships.

export procedures. Export promotion agencies also play a critical role in identifying export-ready businesses and supporting market entry through targeted promotion, buyer engagement, trade missions, and business matchmaking activities.

MSMEs themselves must continue investing in product quality, innovation, branding, production planning, and regulatory compliance. At the same time, addressing persistent challenges related to finance, logistics, technology, and market access requires stronger collaboration across public and private sector institutions. Regional initiatives led by the CARICOM Ministerial Task Force, together with organizations such as IICA, COLEAD, FAO, ITC, Market Information Organization of the Americas (MIOA), CDB, Caribbean Export, and business support organizations, can help strengthen the ecosystem needed to support export-ready agrifood enterprises.

Partnerships with organizations such as the Caribbean Chamber of Commerce in Europe, the CPSO, national Chambers of Commerce, and other private sector organizations can further strengthen commercial linkages by connecting Caribbean businesses with regional and international buyers while supporting efforts to replace extra-regional imports with competitively produced regional products.

4. Way forward

Expanding participation in regional and international markets requires a coordinated approach that strengthens MSME capabilities, improves access to support services, and facilitates stronger connections with buyers and market partners.

This webinar will bring together producers, exporters, policymakers, business support organizations, and development partners to share practical insights and strengthen pathways for expanding both international exports and intra-regional trade. Participants will gain insights into market opportunities, buyer expectations, and key export readiness requirements, including standards, certification, packaging, traceability, and market positioning.

Ultimately, the webinar aims to help Caribbean agrifood MSMEs strengthen their competitiveness, build commercial linkages, and develop practical strategies for expanding into new markets while contributing to stronger regional trade and international market integration.

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

14:00-14:10 Introduction remarks

- *Ines Bastos, Head of Networks and Alliances, COLEAD*

14:10-14:50 Panel 1: Experiences from entrepreneurs

- *John Robin, Managing Director, Benjo Seamoss, Dominica*
- *Madhevi Gopal, Co-Director, Gopex, Suriname*
- *Roderick St. Clair, General Manager, Grenada Co-Operative Nutmeg Association, Grenada*

Moderation: *Ahoefa Soklou, Project Officer, COLEAD*

14:50-15:30 Panel 2: Insights from experts

- *Julia Deane, Business Development Officer, Export Barbados*
- *Ruel Sandiford Edwards, Managing Partner, Soleil Consulting*
- *Koen Vanderhaegen, Market Insights Manager, COLEAD*

15:30-15:50 Q&A session

15:50-16:00 Conclusion and way forward



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