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Welcome to AgriFocus

Your Gateway to Caribbean Agriculture

We're excited to introduce you to AgriFocus, your trusted resource for the latest innovations, insights, and developments in Caribbean agriculture.

Designed to connect regional agriculture with global advancements, AgriFocus fosters learning and collaboration, empowering you to stay informed and inspired. This special "Sneak Peek" issue offers a glimpse of the dynamic content we have in store for our April-June 2025 edition.

At AgriFocus, we believe accessibility should never be a barrier to staying informed and inspired. That's why we've tailored your reading experience to fit seamlessly into your lifestyle, no matter how you prefer to engage with our content. Whether you enjoy the sleek interactivity of our digital magazine, the portability of a downloadable PDF, or the adaptability of an EPUB file, AgriFocus ensures you have options at your fingertips. Prefer browsing articles on the go? All our features are readily available on our website,

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Our mission is clear and impactful—to spotlight the trends and challenges shaping Caribbean agriculture while inspiring innovative, resilient solutions. Gain expert insights into agricultural trends, from shifting trade dynamics to innovative climate adaptation strategies, with our regional analysis. Explore groundbreaking approaches and success stories that are driving positive change across the Caribbean. Additionally, we highlight the exceptional contributions of individual countries, fostering stronger connections and shared knowledge throughout the region. We believe collaboration is the foundation for progress, and AgriFocus is here to build bridges in Caribbean agriculture.

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Advancing Agriculture Agro-Economics & Trade in the Caribbean

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Traditional crops like sugar and bananas once dominated exports; however, global market shifts and reduced preferential trade agreements have challenged their viability

Caribbean agriculture plays a pivotal role in the region's economies by ensuring food security, creating employment, and generating export revenue. However, this vital sector continues to grapple with significant challenges, such as climate vulnerabilities, outdated farming practices, limited technological access, and market constraints in the global trade environment. To address these issues and modernize, governments across the Caribbean have implemented wide-ranging policy reforms and investments designed to enhance productivity, efficiency, and international competitiveness.

This article examines the intersection of agro-economics and trade in Caribbean agriculture, highlighting the essential role of innovation and investment in transforming this key sector.

The Role of Agriculture in the Caribbean Economy

Agriculture has long been a linchpin of Caribbean economies, contributing significantly to GDP, rural development, and trade.

Traditional exports like sugar, bananas, coffee, and cocoa have historically defined the region's agricultural output. However, changing trade agreements, declining preferential market access, and mounting global competition demand that nations innovate and adapt.

With the inherent challenges of small land areas and population sizes, diversification within the agricultural sector has become an imperative for survival and growth. Regional economies are increasingly exploring high-value crops such as organic fruits, niche tropical goods, and premium spices to tap into global demand and bolster long-term resilience.

Programs encouraging the use of renewable energy in agriculture and agroecological methods are not only reducing costs but aligning with climate resilience goals



Trade agreements, such as those under CARIFORUM facilitate access to markets in the EU and the U.S., giving Caribbean agricultural products opportunities for international competitiveness.

Agricultural Policy Reforms Driving Change

To modernize agriculture, policymakers in the Caribbean have introduced targeted reforms aimed at boosting productivity, building economic resilience, and enhancing food security. These reforms focus on integrating advanced technologies, improving sustainable practices, and addressing longstanding structural inefficiencies.

Encouraging Innovation and Modern Farming Practices

Government reforms are paving the way for greater adoption of mechanized and innovative farming techniques. Technological advancements, including the use of renewable energy and agroecological practices, have helped farmers improve yields while reducing costs and environmental impacts. For

example, sustainable initiatives that encourage the use of solar energy and integrated pest management are fostering a shift toward climate-resilient farming.

Strengthening Land Tenure and Infrastructure

Resolving land ownership disputes and modernizing rural infrastructure have been central to efforts aimed at empowering farmers. Investments in access roads, irrigation systems, and storage facilities are improving production processes and driving efficiency. By making it easier for farmers to access resources and



markets, these measures create an enabling environment for sustainable growth in the agricultural sector.

Trade Policies and International Agreements

Trade is a driving force in the development of Caribbean agriculture, providing opportunities for growth and economic stability. Favorable trade arrangements, such as those negotiated through the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM), have paved the way for increased market access for regional products. For example, under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between CARIFORUM and the European Union, Caribbean countries benefit from duty-free and quota-free access for a wide range of agricultural goods, including bananas, rum, and sugar. In 2020, the EU imported over €1 billion worth of agricultural products from CARIFORUM nations, showcasing the significance of this partnership.

Similarly, trade relationships with the United States under the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) have supported the export of fresh produce like mangoes, yams, and hot peppers. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that Caribbean agricultural exports to the U.S. exceeded



Efforts to strengthen the agricultural value chain—through processing, branding, and packaging—are unlocking premium pricing benefits in global markets.

Collaborative projects with institutions like the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and FAO provide vital funding for research, capacity building, and disaster management strategies.

\$500 million in 2021, reflecting the demand for regional specialty crops. These trade agreements not only enhance export opportunities but also encourage the diversification of Caribbean agriculture, driving innovation and resilience in the sector.

Diversifying Exports and Adding Value

To reduce reliance on traditional crops, Caribbean policymakers have promoted diversification into new product categories like niche tropical fruits, organic goods, and spices. Additionally, by focusing on value chain development—such as product processing, packaging, and branding—many countries are positioning their exports for higher market prices.

Meeting international food safety standards has become a priority for governments, and compliance initiatives are helping to improve the reputation and competitiveness of Caribbean agricultural exports. Unlocking new trade opportunities through enhanced branding and quality assurance has become a key strategy for the region’s agricultural transformation.

Investing in Agricultural Modernization

The modernization of agriculture in the Caribbean is gaining momentum, fueled by significant public and private investment. Regional governments



are prioritizing funding for research and development (R&D), technology adoption, and public-private partnerships (PPPs) to address the unique challenges of the region and boost productivity. Through national research programs and collaborations with international institutions, farmers now have access to high-yield, pest-resistant crop varieties that are better suited to the Caribbean's climatic conditions. These innovations are helping farmers adapt while improving efficiency and output.



Technology is also playing a transformative role. Precision agriculture tools, including GPS-enabled equipment, soil health monitors, and data-driven irrigation systems, are empowering farmers to maximize yields and minimize waste. Financial support from international organizations such as the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has been critical in this evolution. With grants, loans, and capacity-building programs, these institutions are strengthening infrastructure, modernizing agricultural operations, and enhancing disaster risk management. Together, these efforts are paving the way for a resilient and competitive agricultural sector in the Caribbean.

With the right policies, investments, and regional collaboration, the Caribbean can transform its agricultural sector into a resilient, sustainable industry that benefits economies and communities alike.



Growing beyond barriers

Agricultural Innovation Reshapes Caribbean Farming

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By aligning smart, sustainable solutions with traditional farming wisdom, Caribbean nations are not only growing beyond barriers but are also planting the seeds for a stronger tomorrow.

Food insecurity remains an urgent issue in the Caribbean, with over 60% of the English-speaking population affected. Heavy reliance on imports exacerbates the problem. Barbados, for example, imports 80% of its food, while Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines import 45% and 68%, respectively. Adding to this challenge, three countries in the region rank among the world's top 10 most exposed to climate risks. Yet, hope lies in the rise of smart agriculture solutions, a sector projected to grow from \$15.45 billion in 2022 to \$32.37 billion by 2028. This article explores how innovation is reshaping farming across the Caribbean, safeguarding food security, and creating more resilient agricultural systems.

The Current State of Caribbean Agriculture
Caribbean agriculture faces immense hurdles as food imports continue to climb. Between

2018 and 2020, food imports in CARICOM nations reached \$93.36 billion, accounting for about 5% of GDP. Key import categories include meat (23%), cereals (18%), and fruits and vegetables (15%). Currently, several countries import over 80% of their food, moving further away from CARICOM's goal of cutting imports by 25% by 2025.

Processed foods dominate imports, rising from 15% of the total in the 1990s to over 50% today. Meanwhile, the contribution of agriculture to local economies has plunged; for example, Antigua saw its agricultural GDP drop from 12% in 1980 to just 4.5% by 1996.

Traditional crops like sugar, bananas, and rice face tough global competition. Meanwhile, rising fertilizer costs and increasingly extreme weather patterns make it harder for farmers to maintain productive operations. Challenges like pest control, marketing difficulties, and limited access to modern technology are compounded by inadequate technical and business skills, leaving many smallholder farmers struggling.

Weathering Climate Change with Smart Farming

The dual pressures of climate change and extreme weather have devastated crops across the region. Hurricane Beryl in 2024 destroyed 75% of fruits in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' coastal areas, while Grenada lost 80% of its tree and staple crops in recent years.

St. Lucia and Dominica have also seen significant losses to crops like bananas due to storms and hurricanes.





Amid these challenges, innovation offers a way forward. Trinidad and Tobago stand out for their investments in climate-smart techniques, such as:

- Climate-controlled greenhouses to manage fluctuations in temperature and humidity.
- Precision irrigation systems designed to conserve water while ensuring crops are properly hydrated.
- Drought-resistant crops like cassava, sweet potatoes, and pigeon peas, which thrive in adverse environmental conditions.

Hydroponic farming is making some of the biggest waves

Additionally, the nation's Youth Aquaculture Project, run in collaboration with the University of the West Indies, trains young nationals in sustainable fish farming, offering certifications in tropical aquaculture management. Similarly, private ventures like FishFinstt Cascadura are expanding aquaculture, specializing in tilapia, prawns, and cascadura fish for both local and export markets.

Smart Farming Solutions Taking Root

Innovative agricultural practices are transforming traditional methods in the Caribbean. Among these, hydroponic farming is making some of the biggest waves. This soil-free method of farming uses minimal land and water, making it an excellent choice for regions facing resource constraints.

Jamaica's Agricultural Revolution: Embracing Technology for Growth and Inclusion

Jamaica is paving the way for a more efficient and inclusive agricultural sector by harnessing the power of technology. Significant advancements in digitization are reshaping the way farmers operate, delivering benefits across the agricultural value chain and empowering marginalized groups, including women and youth.

At the forefront of this transformation is the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), which has introduced innovative tools to streamline operations. One such initiative is the farming register platform, a comprehensive system that records data for over 200,000 registered farmers. This initiative enhances accountability and transparency at every stage of the agricultural process, fostering trust and efficiency in the sector.

RADA has further embraced digital transformation with the launch of a mobile application tailored to the needs of farmers. The app provides vital information on crop monitoring, pest management, and sustainable farming practices, encouraging the adoption of modern technologies to improve productivity and resilience.

Complementing RADA's efforts is the World Bank's Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), which

Complementing RADA's efforts is the World Bank's Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), which has had a profound impact on agricultural productivity and inclusivity in Jamaica.



The inclusivity of REDI's approach is also notable. Of the 19,000 beneficiaries, 22% are under the age of 30, and 51% are women, showcasing the program's success in encouraging youth and female participation in agriculture—a traditionally male-dominated field.

has had a profound impact on agricultural productivity and inclusivity in Jamaica. REDI's investments in modern farming technologies have yielded remarkable results, with productivity increases ranging from 50% to an astounding 400%. These improvements have translated into substantial financial gains for farmers, with incomes growing five to ten times compared to pre-REDI levels.

These efforts underscore Jamaica's commitment to modernizing its agricultural sector through technology and inclusive practices. By bridging the gap between tradition and innovation, the country is setting a benchmark for sustainable agricultural development and ensuring that no farmer is left behind in this new era of growth.



Success stories don't stop there. The RevoFarm digital platform, featured in Jamaica, provides real-time forecasts, market prices, and field monitoring data, proving how accessible technology can enhance farmer productivity. Additionally, Fork Farms' Flex Farm units, used in Anguilla's public schools, require 40% less energy than standard hydroponic systems, improving efficiency and sustainability.

Driving Innovation Through Investment

The Caribbean's agricultural

transformation is buoyed by significant investments:

- The European Union's Global Gateway initiative committed EUR 19 million to enhancing food production and resilience.
- USAID's Caribbean Agricultural Productivity Improvement Activity (CAPA) pledged \$35.96 million over three years.
- Local governments have launched numerous projects, with budgets ranging between EUR 400,000 and EUR 670,000, to promote precision farming and expand agricultural MSMEs.

These funds are channeled into creating more efficient, sustainable farming methods, reinforcing local food systems, and reducing dependency on imported food.

Guyana's Agriculture Revolution

Guyana is experiencing a transformative moment in its agricultural sector, leveraging its vast arable land and abundant water resources to become a leading agricultural hub for the Caribbean. Agriculture contributes significantly to Guyana's economy, accounting for approximately 20% of GDP and employing over 17% of the population. This growth is fueled by strategic investments in high-demand crops like rice and sugar, which have long been staples of the nation's economy. The sugar industry, once considered stagnant,



In 2022, Guyana produced approximately 610,595 metric tons of rice, solidifying its status as the Caribbean's leading rice exporter.



is undergoing a revival by shifting focus toward value-added products such as ethanol, specialty sugars, and molasses for rum production, tapping into international markets.

At the heart of Guyana's agricultural transformation stands the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA), a pioneering institution shaping the next generation of agricultural innovators. Since its founding in 1963, the GSA has been a hub for hands-on learning, offering practical training in everything from livestock management and agro-processing to soil conservation.

Each year, hundreds of students pass through the GSA's doors, going on to play pivotal roles in Guyana's agricultural sector. Their contributions ensure the country remains a leader in sustainable farming practices, balancing innovation with tradition to meet the demands of the future. For Guyana, the GSA isn't just an institution—it's the backbone of a thriving agricultural legacy.

Caribbean Agriculture's Bright Future

Agricultural innovation is lighting the way toward more resilient, sustainable food systems in the Caribbean. The region is proving that resourcefulness, investment, and modern practices can overcome even the toughest challenges. These innovations are improving food security, boosting local economies, and forging a path for future generations of farmers.

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From Soil to Sovereignty

Strengthening the Caribbean's Agricultural Resilience Through Seed Banks

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Seed banks preserve biodiversity, improve food security, and empower the Caribbean's agricultural future. A look at challenges and solutions.

The Caribbean has long been celebrated for its vibrant ecosystems and breathtaking landscapes. Yet, beneath its beauty lies a significant vulnerability—its heavy reliance on imported food, which leaves it exposed to global supply chain disruptions, natural disasters, and economic challenges. The region's agricultural sector faces growing threats from climate change, diminishing biodiversity, and unsustainable farming practices, threatening food security and self-reliance.

But there is hope. Seed banks, institutions that collect, store, and preserve seeds, are emerging as vital tools for agricultural resilience and sovereignty in the Caribbean. By protecting the foundation of all agriculture—seeds—these banks hold the power to preserve biodiversity, enhance food security, and empower communities to adapt to a changing climate.

What Are Seed Banks?

Seed banks serve as repositories for seeds, carefully stored to ensure they remain viable for future planting. These facilities play a critical role in safeguarding diverse plant species, many of which are at risk of extinction due to habitat loss, climate change, and other threats.



How Do Seed Banks Work?

Seed banks operate by collecting seeds from a variety of plants, including staple crops, wild species, and regionally significant plants. These seeds are then dried, cleaned, and stored in controlled environments to maintain their viability. Seed banks may focus on:

Long-Term Conservation: Ensuring the preservation of seeds for extended periods, often decades or even centuries, to maintain genetic diversity and safeguard against the loss of plant species. This helps protect future generations by providing a reservoir of genetic material that can be used to combat climate change, pests, and diseases.

Short-Term Access: Supplying seeds to farmers, researchers, and organizations for immediate use in planting, breeding programs, or experimentation. This supports agricultural development, innovation, and the testing of new crop varieties to enhance productivity and sustainability.

Globally, seed banks like the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway serve as “backup” protection against the loss of biodiversity. For regions like the Caribbean, locally oriented seed banks offer targeted support for preserving native species and addressing unique agricultural challenges.



Crisis Response: Acting as a vital resource during emergencies, such as natural disasters, conflicts, or large-scale crop failures. Seeds are distributed to affected areas to help communities recover quickly, restore food security, and rebuild local agricultural systems.

Benefits of Seed Banks for the Caribbean

Seed banks represent a lifeline for the Caribbean's agriculture. Here's why they are a game changer for the region:

Around 88% of higher plant species produce seeds that can survive for decades under proper storage conditions, making seed banks a cost-effective conservation strategy.

1. Preserving Local Biodiversity

The Caribbean is home to unique plant species that have evolved in harmony with its diverse ecosystems. However, many of these species are under threat due to urban development, deforestation, and industrial farming. Seed banks ensure that these valuable genetic resources are not lost, preserving the region's natural heritage and offering the raw materials for adapting agriculture to local conditions.

2. Enhancing Food Security

With up to 80% of food in some Caribbean countries being imported, the region is vulnerable to external shocks such as rising costs or disrupted supply chains. Seed banks can help reduce this dependency by promoting the cultivation of locally adapted crops that thrive in Caribbean conditions. This creates a more self-sufficient and food-secure region.

3. Supporting Climate Resilience

The Caribbean faces severe impacts from climate change, including increased hurricanes, droughts, and soil degradation. Seed banks can provide access to drought-tolerant, flood-resistant, and fast-growing crop varieties, enabling farmers to adapt to changing weather patterns while maintaining agricultural productivity.

4. Promoting Agricultural Sovereignty

Agricultural sovereignty is about empowering communities to control their food production systems. By preserving locally significant seeds, seed banks allow Caribbean farmers to prioritize crops that align with their cultural and nutritional needs rather than relying on imports or genetically modified seeds from multinational corporations.

Challenges and Solutions for Seed Bank Development

Despite their vital role, building and maintaining seed banks in the Caribbean poses challenges. However, innovative solutions can help overcome these barriers:

Challenge: Funding Limitations

Seed banks require significant investment for infrastructure, staffing, and ongoing operations.

Solution: Establish public-private partnerships and

Seed banks in the region have been instrumental in reintroducing native species for habitat restoration, addressing significant ecosystem degradation.



The Millennium Seed Bank Partnership has safeguarded seeds from 10% of the world's plant species, including contributions from the Caribbean.

tap into international grants focused on food security and climate resilience. Crowdfunding and corporate sponsorships can also be effective.

Challenge: Infrastructure Gaps

Storing seeds demands precise conditions such as temperature and humidity control. Many island nations lack such facilities.

Solution: Introduce mobile seed banks—portable units equipped with climate controls—or collaborate with regional agricultural institutions for shared resources.

Challenge: Limited Awareness and Community Engagement

Farmers, policymakers, and the public may not fully understand the importance of seed banks.

Solution: Increase outreach and education about the benefits of seed banks through workshops, campaigns, and partnerships with agricultural cooperatives.



Government Support

Governments play a critical role in fostering the development of seed banks. Policies should be implemented to incentivize biodiversity conservation, such as tax breaks for organizations and businesses contributing to seed preservation efforts. Direct funding for seed bank infrastructure, research, and operations is crucial to ensure their long-term viability. Governments can also integrate seed banks into national climate change strategies, emphasizing their role in food security and ecosystem resilience.

Investment Opportunities

Private-sector investment is essential to scale seed bank initiatives. Highlighting the long-term benefits of seed banks - such as improved food security, disaster resilience, and sustainable agriculture - can attract investors who value economic, social, and environmental returns. Governments and organizations can collaborate to create public-private partnerships that share risks and rewards, while offering incentives like grants, low-interest loans, or co-funding opportunities to encourage private-sector participation.



Policy and Investment Recommendations

To unlock the full potential of seed banks in the Caribbean, a unified and strategic approach involving governments, investors, and organizations is essential. These recommendations outline the key actions necessary to create a sustainable foundation for seed bank development and biodiversity conservation:

Regional Collaboration

Collaboration among Caribbean nations can maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of seed banks. By establishing shared facilities, resources, and expertise, countries can reduce costs and expand the reach of their seed conservation efforts. Regional agreements and partnerships could facilitate the exchange of seeds, technical knowledge, and research findings, strengthening the collective ability

Initiatives like Puerto Rico's "Desde mi Huerto" seed bank have reduced reliance on imported seeds (85% of seeds are currently imported) and aim to boost local agricultural economies.



The Caribbean and Latin America host a quarter of the world's plant species, emphasizing the critical role of seed banks in preserving this genetic diversity.

to address biodiversity loss and climate challenges. A centralized database of seed collections across the region could be created to enhance coordination and avoid duplication.

Capacity Building

Building local expertise is fundamental to the success of seed banks in the Caribbean. Training programs should be developed to equip local teams with skills in seed collection, processing, storage, and management. These programs could be offered through universities, research institutions, and international

collaborations, ensuring that communities have the knowledge and tools needed to maintain and expand seed banks. Capacity-building initiatives should also focus on educating farmers and community members about the importance of seed conservation, fostering grassroots support for these efforts.

Envisioning a Resilient Agricultural Future

Imagine a Caribbean where farmers have access to seeds they can truly rely on—seeds that are resilient, adaptable, and capable of thriving even in the face of hurricanes, prolonged droughts, or persistent pests. Picture an agricultural landscape that embraces sustainability and sovereignty, where local farmers lead the way with practices that reduce



dependence on costly imports and instead focus on bolstering their own communities. In this vision, agriculture is not just about survival but about thriving—empowering farmers, protecting ecosystems, and fostering economic growth.

This future is not a distant dream. It is within reach through the strategic development and widespread support of seed banks. Seed banks play a crucial role in ensuring farmers have access to high-quality, locally adapted seeds that can withstand the challenges posed by climate change and environmental unpredictability. By investing in seed banks, we lay the foundation for a self-reliant Caribbean, where agriculture is built on resilience, biodiversity, and innovation.

The time to act is now. Supporting seed banks is an investment in a resilient, self-reliant Caribbean—one where agriculture is not just a means of subsistence but a source of empowerment, innovation, and growth. Together, we can turn this vision into reality, securing a brighter and more sustainable future for generations to come.

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