



IICA-COLEACP Caribbean Agrifood Business Series

Session N°3 Post-COVID-19 : Building stronger linkages between agriculture and tourism: the key role of SMEs and businesses

7th October 2021 – 10:00-12:00 (EST)

Summary

IICA and COLEACP, with international and regional partners, support a more resilient and greener agriculture and a strong agrifood business sector in the Caribbean providing technical assistance, training and business development to entrepreneurs. Every two months, the two organisations held Caribbean Agrifood Business Sessions centered on inspiring stories from successful local entrepreneurs in a wide range of value chains, markets and sectors. Views from experts in finance, technology, policy and research will also be featured.

The third session held on 7th October 2021 focused on examples of resilient and versatile businesses that have adapted to the COVID-19 situation and overcome the challenges which resulted from the crisis and heavily impacted tourism-dependent sectors. The featured local micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and businesses presented how they are building stronger linkages between agriculture and tourism to recover and innovate in the (Post-)COVID-19 environment.

Key drivers of success: Lessons learned

Of the 20 most tourism-dependent small economies in the world, 13 are in the Caribbean. Tourism is an important source of income accounting for 50 % of total exports for many small economies, particularly Small Islands Developing States (SIDS).¹ As a major economic sector, tourism has a particular socio-economic importance, as it employs many women and young people and provides a livelihood to many informal workers.

On average, the tourism sector accounts for almost 30% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the SIDS.² This share is over 50% for the Maldives, Seychelles, St. Kitts and Nevis

1 UNCTAD (2020b) [Impact of COVID-19 on tourism in small island developing states](#).

2 World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC) based on data from UNCTADStat. [Impact of COVID-19 on tourism in small island developing states](#)

and Grenada. It is expected that for many SIDS, the COVID-19 pandemic will directly result in record amounts of revenue losses without the alternative sources of foreign exchange revenues necessary to service external debt and pay for imports.³

Despite numerous disruptions and effects of the COVID-19 crises, some of the challenges affecting Caribbean MSMEs and businesses can be transformed in new opportunities, including to rethink the future of tourism in a sustainable way, promoting links with agriculture and environmental protection as well as diversification of the economy.

Successes from businesses which contribute to strengthening linkages between agriculture and tourism in the Caribbean region towards a greener, more local and digital tourism engage in one or several of various common trends:

- The increasing interest in nature and adventure tourism, as consumers attach more importance to local, authentic and sustainable experiences. Opportunities in the growth in wellbeing tourism, local food offers and an increased knowledge of local farmers through farm-to-table experiences are to be seized.
- Sustainable and community-based tourism will be key features of post-COVID-19 tourism with increasing domestic destinations and proximate travel, as well as growing demand for open-air and nature-based tourism and ecotourism activities.
- Digitisation (touchless technologies, automated services, connected rooms, etc.), virtual tourism and experiences, as well as online promotion of food and culture are key to connect with travellers, to showcase the rich cultural offerings and to boost the use of Caribbean-produced foods both domestically and internationally.
- The awareness of local food products, the need to strengthen responsible and sustainable food production, as well as consumption and healthy diets.
- Innovation at all levels of the value chain will be key in developing services which respond to new expectations from tourists and building consumer confidence.

Promoting green growth of the tourism sector in the Caribbean and building stronger linkages between agriculture and tourism

MSMEs represent the bulk of tourism firms and account in some cases for more than 90% of tourism-related businesses. Measures to support business survival in COVID-19 times need to continue and/or increase, especially for smaller operators. Developing incentive packages for businesses to adjust and reinvent themselves to adopt new business models involving different customers will be critical. Assistance to improve digital skills to better serve new needs of the hospitality and agriculture sector, support to e-commerce and to a more direct relation with the customer (i.e. social media communication) are needed. Awareness of the potential of these technologies is needed and specific support required for MSMEs which face technical, managerial and financial difficulties.

Access to credit is critical for MSMEs to recover, upgrade facilities/equipment to meet health and social distancing standards and build better. Support from regional and international financial institutions through grants and low-cost loans can provide the necessary resources to make the required upgrades and increase attractiveness to visitors. Such initiatives should target small, locally owned tourism service providers given their high vulnerability to business failure because of the pandemic.

3 UNCTAD (2020b) [Impact of COVID-19 on tourism in small island developing states](#).

Furthermore, during the assessment of disasters in the Caribbean, it has been observed that un- and underinsurance are widespread in the tourism sector. It is recommended to establish group or activity insurance schemes that attract more MSMEs and ease insurance conditions. In the tourism sector, these measures must target women, both due to their ownership of MSMEs and their difficulties to obtain credit.⁴

Meet our four entrepreneurs and their inspiring stories

Belmont Estate Group of Companies, Grenada



**BELMONT
E S T A T E**
History in the Making

Belmont Estate is a small agritourism business, located in the north of Grenada (St Patrick), which produces and manufactures cocoa, spices, fruit, vegetables, herbs and goat cheese. Most of the products can be tasted at its Creole restaurant. Belmont Estate received in 2019 the award of 1 of the 50 best cocoa samples in the world by the Cocoa of Excellence.

The agricultural estate, passed through many generations of farming for centuries, has been diversified into agritourism in 2002 to integrate local culture, history, traditions and cuisine. **Shadel Nyack Compton, Managing Director**, presented the various interactive tours offered by Belmont Estate which present Grenadian farming, sustainable agriculture and tourism practices. In addition to the goat dairy and organic farming

tours, the tree to bar tour offers to experience the entire process of cocoa growing, harvesting, farming, processing and chocolate making. Belmont Estate also offers educational experiences and activities to both local and international students, including internship. Belmont Estate is a social enterprise committed to contribute to continued livelihoods, including of its employees residing within the surrounding communities, to provide greater employment opportunities to farmers and to increase their income and spending power.



With the COVID-19 crisis, Belmont Estate developed solutions to keep connected with its customers and to generate revenue. The business engaged with its international guests through dynamic social media presence to inform them continuously about its activities and developed virtual tours and experiences. Belmont Estate also increased its digital online presence with two shops: [Belmont Organics](#) to shop its manufactured products and [My Grenada Box](#), a joint initiative developed by Grenadian manufacturers and small businesses to export Grenadian products to the US market for Christmas. The launch of My Grenada Box has been a success in 2020 and will be pursued in 2021. It also gives Belmont Estate the opportunity to help other small businesses to launch their online stores. During the COVID-19 crisis, Belmont Estate re-focused on manufacturing and expanded its lines of products for exports to both the diaspora and guest markets. The business also got kosher certified and opened a sister restaurant in a town nearby, Granville, to serve the local market as its touristic restaurant was closed.

⁴ ECLAC. [The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and options for a sustainable and resilient recovery](#). 2020.

D'Market Movers, Trinidad and Tobago



D'Market Movers is an online distribution company established in 2009 specialised in the delivery of fresh produce and groceries, throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The company focuses on farm to table initiatives that secure the freshest local products and brings them directly to its customers. **Rachel Renie, Co-founder and Managing Director**, explained how the company has enhanced the linkages between

tourism and agriculture: D'Market Movers works closely with a network of about 250 farmers/artisans and provide them with new trade opportunities. Through its online sale platform, D'Market Movers can identify trends in consumption and demand and so advice its suppliers about the fruit and vegetable which are highly demanded and about the customers' expectations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the online shop has enables customers to be supplied with fresh food while ensuring their security as they could do their food shopping from home. However, D'Market Movers recently launched a click and collect store to meet the customers' demand to go in store and be able to interact with staff, adapting the experience to the current health measures in place.



D' Market Movers focuses on indigenous foods, health and convenience and so created three additional brands. Farm & Function is a line of local, exotic frozen fruit products mainly intended to substitute some of the imported frozen fruit (such as pineapple and mango). The brand adds value to local fruit such as papaya, pineapple, guava, passion fruit by processing and freezing to make local and nutritious food accessible to everyone. Farm & Function frozen fruit products are available in retail stores, food services such as hotels and restaurants, online sales and also exported to Barbados and more islands (under expansion).

Our Moving Table is a monthly farm to table fine dining experience with menus prepared with local ingredients to show how they can replace imported produce used in restaurants and hotels and to educate the public on the importance of local agriculture. Events held before the COVID-19 crisis have been attended by both local customers and tourists.

The last brand is Market Movers Design, a company specialized in in branding, packaging & E-commerce solutions for local food businesses in Trinidad and Tobago and across the region. Market Movers Design aims to help start-ups and small companies to improve their branding and packaging in order to be competitive, meet the industry standards and be able to export. Adding value to local packaging also strengthens the agritourism connection because well communicated product information on packaging comes better across to the consumers who might not be familiar with the product. It also incentives locals to buy local products, and so to be more engaged with local production and agriculture.

Caribbean Villa Chefs



Caribbean Villa Chefs is a culinary company created in 2012 to use and promote local ingredients and to work with local farmers in order to source and provide clients with the best, freshest and healthiest options available. **Dane Saddler, Founder and Executive Chef**, highlighted the opportunities and needs to use more local ingredients. As they grow locally, they are more easily available and cheaper than imported competitive products. Moreover, they are key intake of healthy diets which are of tremendous importance in COVID-19

times and to tackle non-communicable diseases (NCD) which highly affect the Caribbean population. Innovative and healthy dishes prepared with local ingredients by Caribbean Villa Chefs include lasagna with plantain or breadfruit as a pasta-substitute and pulled pork or chicken as a substitute of the traditionally used beef. Another creation is the breadfruit bowl prepared with locally available, cheap and nutritive breadfruit, which has become famous and demanded in Barbados. These new dishes create a new market for local ingredients. Farmers/growers' and chefs' activities are intertwined as chefs rely on the quality products supplied by farmers/growers, and chefs create the demand for these products in showcasing them in their culinary creations.



Chefs and farmers have faced numerous challenges with the COVID-19 crisis which caused major disruptions resulting from hotels and restaurants having to close or to reducing their seat capacity. Both chefs and farmers had to become creative to diversify from the tourist market and so to maintain an income. As the pandemic caused for many local people to loss revenue and reduced their buying power, farmers could supply this new market with cheaper products than the one available in supermarkets.

With tourism slowly starting again, chefs, farmers and hotels have to offer the most value for tourists to spend money. Sandals Resorts, the largest hotel chain in the Caribbean, supplies 90% of its products from local farmers in Jamaica who grow products according to the need of the resort. This shows the opportunities of chefs and farmers directly collaborating, and of farmers working together as an organised group (eg cooperative). Chefs also need to promote more farm to table cuisine and to link it with the promotion of agriculture, such as farm tours (Jamaican business [Stush in the Bush](#) offers farm to table meal and to visit its organic farm). Marketing and digital presence are key tools to communicated, especially for (smallholder) farmers who usually do not have an online activity, especially during the (post-)COVID-19 times.

Nevis Growers' Co-operative, St Kitts and Nevis



The Nevis Growers' Co-operative Ltd was operationalized in 1992 with nine local fruit and vegetable farmers to supply the newly built 5 star Four Seasons Resort in Nevis. The Nevis Growers' Co-operative was established by the Nevis Island government to assist farmers, as a unified body of growers, with the storing and marketing of their products to enable sustainable livelihoods. The co-operative received supports

from various institutions (including IICA, the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI)) to produce, process, store and transport the crops to the hotel.

Since its creation, the Nevis Growers' Co-operative has established a strong agrotourism linkage with its members supplying produce to a specific market-led system. It nowadays comprises over 40 farmers cultivating approximately 70 acres to supply hotels and supermarkets. The cooperative uses the eco-friendly approach of mixed crops, blending tree crops with other fruit and vegetable crops, with minimal land preparation and increased crop diversity.

William Thompson, Treasurer, explained that the members of the Nevis Growers' Co-operative were affected by the COVID-19: In Nevis, the hospitality industry accounts for 40% of the economy, resulting in all farmers having to reduce the volumes of crops produced when hotels and restaurants closed. Moreover, the cooperative members are facing logistic issues and cannot buy inputs like seeds and fertilizers.



As part of its response to the economic upheaval due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, the Nevis Growers' Co-operative granted a \$15,000 contribution to thirteen farmers to support them starting to produce again and so to supply supermarkets and hotels, as the restrictions are being lifted.

A supportive ecosystem for stronger linkages between agriculture and tourism

Operators need to be aware of the opportunities and potential of improved linkages between agriculture and tourism, as well as of the rising demand in environmentally friendly, local and authentic tourism. Capacity building and training packages targeting local MSMEs and entrepreneurs should be scaled up (i.e. digital marketing, promotion and marketing campaigns, use of social media tools, innovation in product development, financial skills, business development, contingency planning, pricing models in view of reduced customers and capacity restrictions to be applied for social distancing).

MSMES need to be informed about the trends and existing support to develop innovative and sustainable activities which meet the new consumer demand.

In this context, experts representing policy-makers, research and finance shared their insights on how their institution supports the entrepreneurs.

Rhea Simms, Global Program Manager, Planeterra Foundation, presented how the Canadian not-for-profit organisation founded in 2003 helps local organisations and communities use tourism as a catalyst to improve people's lives, protect their natural environments, and celebrate their culture. It is a market-driven, traveler-centric model aimed to generate income to local people and ensure it stays in their hands. Planeterra supports community tourism which consists of travel experiences owned, led and run by communities, non-profits, cooperatives or social enterprises. Travel experiences include farm tours, such as the agriculture cooperative Mi Cafecito, Costa Rica, created by coffee producers to better access tourism revenue by working together and hosting travellers for meals, offering coffee tours and teaching about coffee production. During COVID-19, the cooperative developed and promoted a new experience - a guided tour to a nearby waterfall – on social media, resulting in locals being interested in it. Another inspiring business adaptation to the COVID-19 restrictions is how a homestay host in Thailand, Mae Hong Son Hilltribe Trek, could not showcase local culture and lifestyle to its guest on site and so adapted to sell agriculture products via Facebook to reach a wider audience.

Planeterra's supports community tourism enterprises to achieve their social and environmental goals by providing on the ground trainings from communication and storytelling to health and safety, as well as grants and investments. It also has [online free material](#) from pricing to health and safety to social media to developing tourism experience.

Sandra Carvao, Chief, Market Intelligence and Competitiveness, UNWTO, started by sharing that they are good insights for tourism recovery in the Caribbean in the coming months and provided key recommendations on how to develop gastronomy tourism. The public sector plays a significant role in creating a framework that includes and brings together all gastronomy stakeholders, including producers and chefs. Some key recommendations are (i) for governments to develop gastronomy tourism a tourists increasingly attach importance to what they eat and are willing to pay more for it as it is part of the memory of the destination; (ii) to improve the scenario, environment, venues, and systems for hosting gastronomy tourism (eg safety and security protocols, digital payment at local level, clear product explanation etc); (iii) to define and adopt a plan to promote and support the marketing of gastronomy tourism; and (iv) to maximise the power of technology as a driver for developing gastronomy tourism. Promoting gastronomy offers an important potential

to promote the destination, the products and the agriculture. The UNWTO has issued a series of guidelines for the development of gastronomy tourism for destinations or smaller community which are available [online](#).

Way forward presented by Jeremy Knops, General Delegate, COLEACP

One core activity of COLEACP is to facilitate market access by enhancing human capital (skills, competencies, knowledge). The tourism market is a type of market which is common to the different geographical market categories as they are some similarities between some of the core requirements in terms of hard skills (certifications, digital tools etc) and soft skills (creativity, adaptability, resilience etc). Food safety and quality is a fundamental element for the tourism market but additional elements are becoming significant, such as the branding, storytelling, environmentally sound practices, the social impact on community building etc. To build stronger linkages between agriculture and tourism in the Caribbean, it is essential to widely disseminate key advanced practices to benefit more farmers and wider segments of the agricultural sector.

The Caribbean Agrifood Business Sessions are organised and facilitated by Isolina Boto, Head of Networks and Alliances, COLEACP; Ena Harvey, IICA Representative, Barbados and Hemispheric Agrotourism Specialist; and Axelle Rupert, Project Officer, COLEACP.