

A New and Sustainable Path for Caribbean Agriculture

Historically, the Caribbean islands were known for producing and exporting very valuable commodities like bananas, sugar, rice, coffee, and cocoa. But over the past two decades, agriculture in that part of our region has been in a state of decline. With limits on available land, relatively high costs of living, environmental issues, and other challenges, it's difficult for Caribbean farmers to compete with larger producers on the North and South American continents. The way forward will have to focus on specialization and sustainability.

The MIF and Compete Caribbean recently commissioned a study on sustainable agriculture initiatives and how they might be introduced in the Caribbean. Since agricultural production in the islands is dominated by smallholder farmers who are undercapitalized, technologically limited, unaware of best practices and certification standards, and extremely vulnerable to climate change effects, the study suggests that a comprehensive policy framework should be established to support coordinated investment.

Promoting sustainable agriculture is one option, as shown in this report. Some countries in Latin America have pioneered the adoption of organic farming by small farmers through technical assistance projects supported by the MIF and other donor organizations that encourage the use of local resources and non-chemical inputs and advise farmers' organizations on marketing techniques. These types of projects have indeed increased farmers' income and boosted sector growth. However, a comprehensive understanding of their successes and challenges, as well as data analysis, are needed to drive policy and concrete practical actions.

This report can be a useful tool for public and private officials to analyze potential means of further support. It clearly explains how the Caribbean could benefit greatly from introducing sustainable agriculture practices that generate better social and environmental benefits, much as countries in the rest of the Latin American region have. However while it seems logical for Caribbean small farmers to concentrate on organic and/or higher value niche products (such as organic vegetables, spices, coffee, specialty grains, seafood, oils, and cocoa), there are still challenges in promoting and attracting investment in this area. This publication aims to encourage public officials, international experts, and local farmers to work together and provide insight into the design of incentives and adequate infrastructure support to make the most of these current conditions and opportunities.

Download the study: https://www.competecaribbean.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Strengthening_Sustainable_Agriculture_in-the-Caribbean_web.pdf