



## WHO ARE WE?

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is the specialized agency for agriculture of the Inter-American System that supports the efforts of Member States to achieve agricultural development and rural well-being.

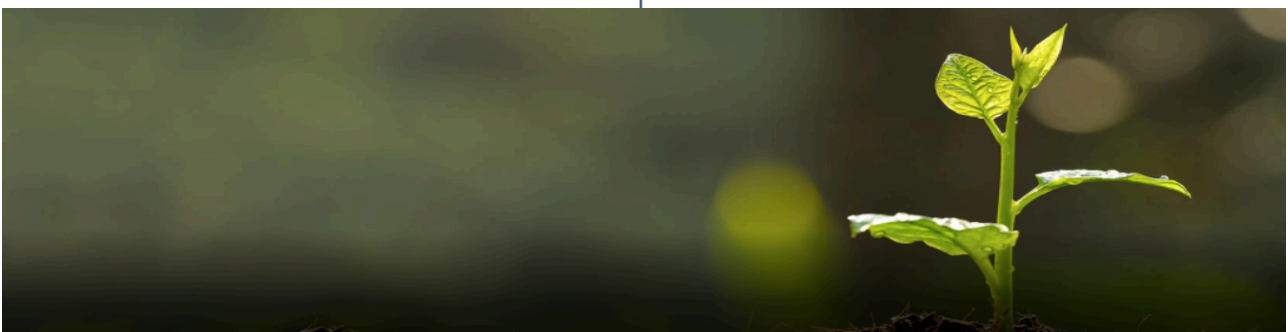
The Institute provides cooperation services through close and permanent work with its 34 Member States, addressing their needs in a timely manner. Without a doubt, IICA's most valuable asset is the close relationship it maintains with the beneficiaries of its work. We have broad experience in areas such as technology and innovation for agriculture, agricultural health, food safety and quality, international agricultural trade, family farming, rural development, natural resource management and the bioeconomy.

### MISSION

Our mission is to encourage, promote and support Member States in their efforts to achieve agricultural development and rural well-being through international technical cooperation of excellence.

### VISION

Our vision is to be a modern and efficient institution supported by a platform of human resources and processes that are capable of mobilizing the knowledge available in the region and around the world, with the aim of achieving a competitive, inclusive and sustainable agriculture sector that takes advantage of opportunities to contribute to economic growth and development as well as to foster greater rural well-being and sustainable management of its natural capital.





# Food Security in the Caribbean

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## Colaboradores

Duncan Turnbull

For decades the Caribbean has been **over-reliant** on expensive **food imports**. The World Bank estimates between **80-90%** of all food consumed in the region comes from abroad, and only three Caribbean countries (**Guyana, Belize and Haiti**) produce more than **50%** of their own food.

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*“The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities across the board, including in employment, housing, healthcare and food security.”*

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The **COVID-19** pandemic has **exacerbated** existing **inequalities** across the board, including in employment, housing, healthcare and food security. It is estimated that there are now **2.7 million** “**food-insecure**” people in the English-speaking Caribbean, and according to the third round of the *CARICOM COVID-19 Food Security and Livelihoods Impact Survey*, “71% of respondents observe higher than usual **food prices**” [\[link\]](#).

According to that survey, the burden is disproportionately felt by **low-income** householders: 68% **reduced** their food **consumption**, 40% struggled with food stocks, and, as the results indicated, this part of society is “much more likely to meet their food needs at the expense of **selling productive** assets and **cutting spending** on other priorities such as health and education”.

The impact also disproportionately cuts across other demographics. For example, only **7%** of Spanish-speaking respondents in Trinidad and Tobago had more than a week's worth of food stocks, compared to **54%** of English speakers. Spanish speakers in the country (many of whom are **migrants** from Venezuela) are comparatively reliant on informal/casual labour for income and thus faced significantly contracted incomes at a time of rising food prices.

The pandemic has highlighted the **fragility** of **regional supply chains**. Sea freight **costs** and **delays** increased, the cold-storage chain was **under-pressure**, and farmers reported a **lack of supplies**. None of this was new – the region suffers frequent disruption from hurricanes – but after months of vastly **reduced tourism** (and tourist dollars), foreign reserves dwindled, and **food prices** became a serious and prolonged **concern** for much of the population.

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*“Solving [the challenges to achieve zero-hunger] requires redesigning the Caribbean food supply-chain in a way that considers water, energy and food security in the same breath.”*

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**Looking forward**, the Caribbean **population** and **income** per capita are expected to **grow substantially** in the next 20 years. Yet the UN’s Sustainable Development Report 2020 warns of “significant **challenges** remaining” or “major challenges remaining” for each Caribbean state’s efforts to **achieve** their **goal** of “zero hunger”.

Solving this problem requires **redesigning** the Caribbean food **supply-chain** in a way that considers water, energy and food security in the same breath. These topics are intricately related in terms of **synergies**, **linkages** and **trade-offs**. Water is a finite resource yet both agriculture and energy depend heavily on it; tackling the food security challenge necessitates **efficiency measures** to reduce **water** and **energy** consumption yet simultaneously increasing yields and nutrition. However, given the wide **variation** in environmental, economic and technological **systems** in the **Caribbean**, both policy and technical interventions will look different across the region. For example, **water is not distributed evenly** within the Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda has around 600 cubic meters (cbm) renewable freshwater resources per inhabitant per year, compared to over 350,000cbm per inhabitant per year in Guyana [[Link](#)].

Until now, the Caribbean is predominately a **raw material producer** and in recent years the region has largely grown **crops** that are either in **structural decline** (such as tobacco and sugar) or simple crops that require little or **no processing** (such as bananas and sweet potatoes). Exporting unprocessed primary products means the region captures less of the value-chain, thereby reducing **local revenues** and new **job opportunities** and skills **training**. It also means **farmers** are more **exposed** to raw commodity **prices** as they have no differentiated product.

Therefore, leaders in the Caribbean agriculture sector must shift to encompass greater **vertical integration**. There will be a pivot to **value-add crops**, construction of processing facilities, and a focus on exporting finished products. This requires **investment** in internationally certified **food facilities**, cold-chain **distribution**, and building **human capacity** across the sector. Careful consideration must be given to **water management**, both in the **agriculture** and the **processing** legs of the industry. **Micro-grids**, powered by **renewable energy**, will increasingly provide localised and consistent power to island communities, and can be strategically positioned next to large industrial customers (such as food processing facilities) but also service **dispersed** residential communities. Large-scale farmers will grow alongside smallholder farmers, both selling into the same processing facility and thereby opening up **new markets** for **smallholders**.

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*“A more expansive Guyanese agriculture sector positively contributes to the Caribbean food security balance abroad, and helps Guyana diversify its economy and avoid the resource curse back home.”*

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**Guyana** – the Caribbean’s **fastest growing economy** – has all the ingredients to **be the breadbasket for the region**. It has rich agricultural **traditions**, fertile **soils**, excellent **climate** and plentiful **land**. Moreover, it has the ingredients to be a **processing powerhouse**: high availability of **freshwater**, a young **workforce**, an under-capacity **port** with regular routes to the Caribbean and North American markets, and a promising outlook for micro-grid **renewable energy** solutions. With the billions of dollars of **international investment** currently flowing into the nation (as part of the recent **oil** discoveries), the nation is in a **critical stage** of development. A more expansive Guyanese agriculture sector positively contributes to the **Caribbean food security balance** abroad, and helps **Guyana** diversify its economy and avoid the resource curse back home.



*Duncan Turnbull was educated at the University of Oxford and Stanford Graduate School of Business, and works in the intersection of agriculture and renewable energy. He has invested in and operated over 15,000ha of agriculture projects in three continents.*

<https://blog.iica.int/en/blog/food-security-caribbean>