



## CONCEPT NOTE

"SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DIGITAL AGRICULTURE:  
EMPOWERING WOMEN, YOUTH, AGRICULTURE FARMERS, AND INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLES,"

**OCTOBER 10<sup>TH</sup> 2024  
DURING THE  
CARIBBEAN WEEK OF AGRICULTURE 2024**

*Venue: St. Vincent and the Grenadines Date: 7th to 11th October 2024*

# Table of Contents

- Background.....2
- Objectives.....3
- Format.....3
- Proposed Participants.....3
  - Proposed Keynote Speaker:.....3
  - Proposed Panel Participants:.....4
- Draft Agenda.....5
  - Appendix One: Questions For The Panel.....6
  - Appendix Two: Question Prepared by the Moderator Ms Bevon Chadel Charles.....6

## BACKGROUND

The Agriculture Sector remains a fundamental pillar in the development of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), serving as a vital conduit for acknowledging the benefits of economic globalization. Acknowledging the sector's pivotal role, the "25 by 2025" initiative is a strategic move to reduce CARICOM's extra-regional food import bill by 25% by 2025. This strategy underscores the urgent need for enhancements in food production, reduction of the agri-food trade deficit, and stimulation of economic growth and employment throughout the region.

Central to the "25 by 2025" strategy is the adoption of an E-Agriculture Strategy, which involves digitizing the region's agricultural sector. This entails streamlining regional trade, removing technical barriers to the trade of agricultural produce, and furthering the digital transformation of the sector through advanced technologies<sup>1</sup>.

Digital agriculture is revolutionizing traditional farming by integrating cutting-edge technologies and data analytics, fostering informed decision-making, precision farming, sustainability, and supply chain optimization. Despite its promise, the Caribbean region grapples with challenges in data collection and management, largely due to its intricate geographical landscape, inadequate internet penetration in rural areas, and a lack of technological resources and skills<sup>2</sup>.

In response to these hurdles, the "25 by 2025" strategy places significant emphasis on research and development, capacity building, and technical exchange. This focus aims to cultivate a more resilient and sustainable agricultural sector, with increased access to markets, financial services, and value chains<sup>3</sup>.

Youth engagement in agriculture holds significant promise for addressing critical issues in developing countries, where young people represent a substantial portion of the population. Investing in this demographic can help tackle challenges such as poverty, crime, food insecurity, and economic development. In the Caribbean, economic growth has been hindered by various crises over the past decades, leading to high levels of poverty and unemployment, particularly among youth and women. Agriculture offers a vital opportunity for advancing development and reducing poverty in the region. Research indicates that agricultural growth is the most effective strategy for alleviating poverty in rural areas, especially for households that are less integrated into tourism or financial services. Additionally, modern technologies such as sensors, drones, and satellite imagery can provide farmers with real-time data, enhancing their decision-making and fostering more sustainable agricultural practices. Integrating youth into agriculture, supported by technological advancements, could significantly address the region's economic and social challenges<sup>4</sup>.

Recognizing the vital role of capacity building in digital agriculture practices, the CARICOM Secretariat in partnership with regional organizations, will deliver a panel discussion on digital agriculture. This panel discussion will act as a catalyst for strategic regional discussions. This proposed panel discussion will be focused on empowering women, youth, agriculture farmers and Indigenous Peoples in the Caribbean

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://state-digitalagriculture.thecommonwealth.org/digital-agriculture/contents-executive-summary>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41133075/RDR\\_report.pdf/7282db66-2d67-b514-d004-5ec25d9729a0](https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41133075/RDR_report.pdf/7282db66-2d67-b514-d004-5ec25d9729a0)

<sup>3</sup> <https://agricarib.org/caricom-25-by-2025-initiative/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.caribank.org/sites/default/files/publication-resources/Study%20on%20the%20State%20of%20Agriculture%20in%20the%20Caribbean.pdf>

Community, ensuring their active participation in the agricultural digital transformation and promoting their economic autonomy.

## OBJECTIVES

The workshop aims to create an enabling environment for CARICOM youth and farmers by focusing on the following primary objectives:

### 1. Support the “25 by 2025” eAgriculture Focus Area:

- Share successful experiences, initiatives, programs, and public policies that promote employment and entrepreneurship in agrifood/digital agri-food systems.
- Identify challenges, opportunities, and concrete recommendations for promoting employment and entrepreneurship among youth and farmers in agriculture.

### 2. Promote Inclusion in Digital Agriculture

- Sharing successful experiences, initiatives, programs, and public policies that promote digital transformation in agriculture and the opportunity to find decent employment for youth, women, agriculture farmers, and Indigenous Peoples.

### 3. Provide Strategic Recommendations

- Identifying challenges, opportunities, and two to five concrete recommendations (e.g., policy, technological adoption, financial diversification, literacy) related to digital transformation and employment/entrepreneurship in agriculture.

## FORMAT

**Date: October 10<sup>th</sup> 2024**

**Time: 1:30 PM – 3:00 pm**

**Platform: Zoom**

The Digital Agriculture Workshop, titled "Sustainable Development Through Digital Agriculture: Empowering Women, Youth, Agriculture Farmers, and Indigenous Peoples," will be held on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at the University of the West Indies, Open Campus, in Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This hybrid event, lasting one and a half hours, will combine a keynote speech, a panel discussion, and interactive audience participation. The workshop will bring together stakeholders, including women, youth, farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and digital agriculture experts, to explore strategies for advancing sustainable development through digital agriculture. Participants can join both in-person and online.

## PROPOSED PARTICIPANTS

PROPOSED KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

**Dr. Benjamin Addom – Adviser, Agriculture and Fisheries Trade Policy (Digital) at The Commonwealth**

An international development expert with technical and policy experience in the domain of digital agriculture. He is currently leading the design and validation of a data management framework for the Commonwealth. This is called "National Agricultural Data Infrastructure (NAGDI)", a model of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for agricultural data management at country level.

#### PROPOSED PANEL PARTICIPANTS:

##### **Moderator - Ms. Bevon Chadel Charles – Owner of Akata Farms - Confirmed**

Bevon Chadel Charles, a visionary leader from Grenada, is transforming agriculture through her sustainable farm, Akata Farms. Leveraging technology and innovation, Bevon has received numerous accolades, including the 2021 Commonwealth Youth Award and the 2024 Young Person in Agriculture of the Year Award. She is featured in the 2023 Caribbean Impact Highlights and serves on the Pan-Commonwealth Adjudication Panel. Most recently she became one of 17 selected by the Caribbean Development Bank Future Leaders Network to pioneer youth economic development and engagement across the Caribbean and the OECS Young Person in Agriculture of the Year 2024 award winner.

##### **Mrs. Constantina Hamilton McKenzie - Founder and Executive Director of Proserpina AgTech (AgriTech Representative) - Confirmed**

Founder and Executive Director of Proserpina AgTech, a business dedicated to improving the profitability of farming through the use of agribusiness strategies, green technology, and renewable energy. She holds a Bachelor's of Science with a double major in Agribusiness and Environmental Resource Management from the University of the West Indies.

##### **Ms. Tania Liew-A-Soe - Founder of a Women's Cooperative in Suriname (Indigenous Peoples Representative)**

Liew-A-Soe, the founder and President of a Women's Cooperative in Suriname that produces, processes, and exports food, has achieved remarkable success by industrializing and exporting added-value traditional crops. She has been honored as one of the "Leaders of Rurality of the Americas" by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and will receive the "Soul of Rurality" award for her impactful contributions to food security and environmental sustainability.

##### **Mrs. Natasha Beerjit-Deonarine – Director of Planning (Monitoring and Evaluating) at the Ministry of Agriculture, Guyana (Youth Representative)**

Mrs. Natasha Beerjit-Deonarine is the Director of Monitoring and Evaluation at the Ministry of Agriculture, Guyana. She plays a key role in overseeing the assessment of agricultural programs and initiatives, ensuring their effectiveness and alignment with national development goals. With extensive experience in agricultural management, she is dedicated to enhancing the sector's impact and sustainability in Guyana.

##### **Mr. Alpha Sennon – Founder and CEO at WHYFARM (Youth Representative) - Confirmed**

Mr. Sennon founded WHYFARM, a globally recognized and award-winning nonprofit organization that pioneers Agriculture Educational Entertainment. Mr. Sennon is globally known as a farmer-prenuer, motivational speaker and argi-youth advocate who is also a graduate of the University of the West Indies. Mr. Sennon Developed AGRIMAN and Photsynthesista, the world's 1<sup>st</sup> Food and Nutrition Security Superheroes.

**Mr. Jody White – Executive in Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Innovation (Sustainable Agriculture Representative) – Confirmed**

Jody White is a Value Chain Consultant in the field of Agriculture and Sustainability, with a focus on commercialization. He serves in many capacities in the sector, including, being the host of the region’s largest Agriculture and Innovation radio program on Freedom 106.5fm.

**Ms. Utica Alves – Project Officer Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) (AgrTech Representative)**

Utica Alves is an experienced Software Engineer with a passion for the development of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and a desire to contribute to its technological growth. After successfully managing numerous ICT projects within the Public Sector of Guyana, Ms. Alves has started working towards the implementation of the CARICOM Single ICT Space, transitioning into the world of ICT governance and policy development.

## DRAFT AGENDA

**Table One: Draft Agenda for Workshop**

<b>TIME</b>	<b>AGENDA</b>
<b>FIFTEEN MINUTES</b>	<b>WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS</b>
	Welcome/Opening Remarks and Objectives of the Workshop by Facilitator
<b>FIFTEEN MINUTES</b>	<b>GLOBAL OUTLOOK ON DIGITAL AGRICULTURE</b>
	The keynote will provide a broad perspective on global digital agriculture trends, with a specific focus on sustainability, inclusion, and resilience in agriculture. It will address the role of technology in enabling sustainable development and how digital tools are transforming traditional farming practices to improve food security, economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability.
<b>FORTY-FIVE MINUTES</b>	<b>FOCUS FORUM DIGITAL AGRICULTURE AND VULNERABLE GROUPS IN CARICOM AND QUESTION AND ANSWER AUDIENCE INTERACTION</b>
	This session will explore the challenges and opportunities for vulnerable groups, particularly women, youth, and small-scale farmers, in adopting digital agriculture. Panelists will share their insights, successful initiatives, and personal experiences in transforming agriculture through technology. Discussion points will include overcoming barriers such as limited digital literacy, financial constraints, and access to markets, and the panel will propose strategies for inclusion and policy recommendations.
<b>FIVE MINUTES</b>	<b>WRAP AND CLOSING REMARKS</b>
	CARICOM Secretariat or Partners give vote of thanks and closing remarks.

## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX ONE: QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL

The below questions will be asked to the panel during the presentation.

1. What are the key challenges and opportunities for promoting employment and entrepreneurship in digital agriculture for vulnerable groups such as women, youth, farmers, and Indigenous Peoples in the CARICOM region?
2. How can CARICOM Member States leverage digital technologies to drive sustainable agricultural practices and ensure food security? Possible follow-up - are there any best practices for data collection and management that can be implemented in the Caribbean to support digital agriculture?
3. How can stakeholders collaborate to address the barriers to digital agriculture adoption, particularly in low-income and rural areas?
4. What recommendations can be made to effectively integrate climate-smart technologies and data management strategies in digital agriculture, ensuring they are accessible and beneficial for vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and Indigenous farmers in the CARICOM region?

Page | 6

### APPENDIX TWO: QUESTION PREPARED BY THE MODERATOR MS BEVON CHADEL CHARLES

#### Questions for Mrs. Constentina Hamilton McKenzie (AgriTech Representative)

1. **Proserpina AgTech has been a pioneer in integrating green technology and renewable energy into agribusiness. Could you share a successful initiative where this integration significantly improved farming profitability?**  
*Follow-up:* What were the key challenges in implementing these technologies, and how did you overcome them?
2. **As an advocate for sustainable farming, what role do you see digital agriculture playing in transforming traditional farming methods in the Caribbean?**  
 *Follow-up:* How can smallholder farmers be encouraged to adopt these technologies?
3. **Based on your experience, what are the most promising opportunities for women and youth in the AgriTech sector?**  
 *Follow-up:* Can you provide examples of how Proserpina AgTech has created employment or entrepreneurship opportunities for these groups?
4. **What concrete recommendations would you offer to policymakers to better support the integration of green technology and digital agriculture in the Caribbean?**

#### Questions for Tania Liew-A-Soe (Indigenous Peoples Representative)

5. **Your Women's Cooperative in Suriname has achieved remarkable success by industrializing traditional crops. Can you share a specific story of how digital tools have enhanced your cooperative's productivity and market reach?**  
 *Follow-up:* What cultural considerations were essential in adopting these tools?

6. **As an Indigenous leader, what challenges have you faced in balancing the preservation of traditional agricultural practices with the introduction of modern technologies?**
  - *Follow-up:* How have you addressed these challenges while maintaining the cultural integrity of your community?
7. **Given your cooperative's success, what advice would you give to other Indigenous communities looking to leverage digital agriculture for economic empowerment?**
  - *Follow-up:* What role can regional organizations play in supporting these efforts?
8. **You have been recognized as a 'Leader of Rurality of the Americas.' In your view, how can digital agriculture contribute to food security and environmental sustainability in Indigenous communities across the Caribbean?**

#### Questions for Mrs. Natasha Beerjit-Deonarine (Youth Representative)

9. **In your role at the Ministry of Agriculture in Guyana, how have you seen digital agriculture influence the effectiveness of agricultural programs and initiatives?**
  - *Follow-up:* Can you share a specific example where digital tools have significantly improved program outcomes?
10. **Youth engagement in agriculture is critical for the future. What innovative strategies have you seen work in Guyana to attract young people to the agricultural sector?**
  - *Follow-up:* How can digital agriculture make this sector more appealing to the youth?
11. **What are the key challenges that you've observed in implementing digital agriculture in rural areas, and what solutions have been most effective?**
  - *Follow-up:* How can these solutions be scaled to benefit other parts of the Caribbean?
12. **As someone deeply involved in monitoring and evaluation, what are your top recommendations for integrating data-driven decision-making in the agricultural policies of CARICOM Member States?**