



UNWTO - IICA Webinar

Food Supply & Tourism in the Caribbean: Mitigating the Impacts of COVID 19 and Accelerating Recovery

Background / Justification

The outbreak of Coronavirus COVID-19 has presented both the Agriculture and Tourism sectors in the Caribbean with a major and evolving challenge. The closure of hotels, restaurants and other enterprises linked to these sectors, has led to a domino effect with massive loss of employment, and disruptions in food supply chains. The need to maintain agricultural production and adequate food supplies has underscored the critical need for strengthening linkages between agriculture and tourism in the largely tourism dependent island states in the Caribbean. Moreover, the restrictions on food exports from major suppliers in the USA call attention to the need for greater food security and strengthening of intra-regional production and trade to satisfy both domestic and tourism markets across the Region. It is imperative that the Caribbean uses this time of downturn to strategize and strengthen the regional food supply system so as to significantly improve food security, as well as to service the tourism and hospitality sectors through a sustainable supply of safe, locally-sourced food.

The Caribbean is the most tourism-dependent region in the world. The Tourism sector accounts for approximately 50% of GDP in Member States, and is the biggest contributor to the creation of jobs and the earning of foreign exchange for the Caribbean economy. In 2019 the Caribbean rebounded strongly from a decline in 2018 (-0.7%). An estimated 26.7 million tourist visits were recorded among Caribbean destinations in 2019, which was a new record for the region. For the seventh consecutive year, cruise business in the Caribbean region also grew. The total estimated number of cruise visitors descending upon the region during 2019 increased by 3.4% to approximately 30.2 million, a new record.

All of these gains in 2019 have now been severely derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic which is impacting the world with crippling and deleterious effects on Caribbean tourism and all of its primary source markets in the UK, Europe, Canada and the USA.

Across the Caribbean Region, levels of leakage of foreign exchange due to importation of inputs for tourism (*with food and beverage ranking 2nd after accommodation*) range as high as 90%. While this is due to a complexity of factors, the Agricultural sector still remains unable to meet tourism requirements of consistent high volumes, high quality produce & products, and simplified

distribution channels viz. minimum number of distributors/producers. Challenges on the Agricultural side include: inability to supply quality and quantity on a consistent and sustainable basis; Lengthy payment periods of 6-9 months from tourism buyers; Distribution of prices throughout the value chain; Distortions in prices due to imports; and Asymmetry of information. The situation has been exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic as suppliers of fresh and processed foods have been significantly impacted by the collapse of the tourism sector.

It is against this background that IICA and UNWTO, have agreed to collaborate to lend their support to the Caribbean region in shaping a holistic approach towards the recovery of the agriculture and tourism sectors in a more integrated manner. This decision is anchored in the mutual commitment of both entities towards heightened advocacy for sustainable tourism development in the Americas through agrotourism with a view to enhancing economic development and trade, as well as advancing the Sustainable Development Goals

Therefore, IICA and UNWTO, in collaboration with other key regional and international partners, will be hosting a Webinar to address the fundamental issues surrounding agrotourism linkages in the Caribbean in particular, and the LAC region in general.

Date and Theme

The Webinar will be hosted virtually on September 24th (day to be confirmed) under the theme **“Food Supply & Tourism in the Caribbean – Mitigating the Impacts of COVID 19 and Accelerating Recovery**

Objectives

- To analyze and share relevant information on the effects of the pandemic on the tourism and agriculture sector and regional food supply systems in the Caribbean Region
- To identify and exchange experiences on the main public sector policy responses, private sector and multilateral initiatives and best practices that would assist in building more resilient and sustainable agrotourism linkages in both a COVID and post-COVID era.

Expected Outcome

- A Re-imagining of the agriculture and tourism sectors in the Caribbean that is characterized by stronger alignment of both sectors towards a common goal of inclusive growth, environmental sustainability and economic gains.
- Recommendations for Governments and other key actors on how to strengthen such linkages and build resilience for the future.

Targeted audiences

The webinar aims the participation of high-level international and Caribbean authorities and experts from the private and public sectors, as well as from development partners involved in both sectors inclusive of the following:

- Ministers and Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of Agriculture and Tourism from the Caribbean region
- CARICOM, Caribbean Private Sector Organisation, Caribbean Agribusiness Association, OECS Commission, Association of Caribbean States
- Public and Private Sector Representatives of Agriculture and Tourism sectors in the 15 CARICOM Countries: Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association, Caribbean Tourism Organization, Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre,
- Caribbean Private sector Agro-Processing companies that supply food to the tourism sector
- Representatives of the Trade, Distribution and Retail Food Sector (Importers and Supermarkets)
- Representatives of donor and technical cooperation agencies and development partners (including UNECLAC, COMPETE Caribbean, World Bank, IDB; CDB)
- Selected Latin American countries (eg. Those sharing the trading platform)
- IICA offices in all 5 Regions and IICA HQ
- UNWTO Representatives and identified experts