

Sustainable Development of Agriculture in the Caribbean

A Caribbean Farmers Network (CaFAN) Position Paper

About CaFAN

Formed in 2002 and legally registered in 2007, the Caribbean Farmers Network (CaFAN) is a regional network of farmers' associations and NGOs representing over 500,000 farmers in 15 countries. With a secretariat in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, CaFAN works to strengthen producer groups across the Caribbean.

CaFAN's mission is to enhance Caribbean food and nutrition security, foreign exchange earnings and foreign savings, by repositioning agriculture through the capacity building of farmers and the institutional strengthening of farmers' organizations.



Its members are directly involved in production and marketing for the domestic, regional and extra-regional markets. They are also involved in farmers training, promotion of nutritional Caribbean foods, market access, agro-processing and value addition, testing of agronomic practices and organic farming.

The CaFAN's Secretariat is mandated to speak on behalf of its membership and to develop programs and projects aimed at improving livelihoods. CaFAN also focuses on market led sustainable mechanisms and structures, working in collaboration with all stakeholders in the agriculture sector to the strategic advantage of its farmers.

CaFAN assists with policy advocacy with its national, regional and international partners, which results in better-crafted programs and projects to create sustainable opportunities for youth in agribusinesses. The focus on youth supports the regional policy thrust led by CARICOM through the Caribbean Community Common Agricultural Policy (CCAP). This policy is built on five key pillars, the fourth of which was advocated by the CaFAN Secretariat – Youth and Rural Modernization. Under this pillar, CaFAN has been advocating for modern amenities and infrastructure in rural communities that will stem the rural to urban drift.

CaFAN 's focus on Holistic Agriculture

CaFAN's focus on Agriculture is beyond just food security. CaFAN believes that Agriculture should be linked to providing solutions to the various other challenges including, unemployment, high national debts, foreign resource earning and overall economic growth and social growth and stability.

Why the focus on Small Farm Families?

- Small farm families represent a key platform for social and economic stability.
- Making them viable business will help to promote increased employment, curtailing rural urban migration, reduce poverty and create greater food and nutrition security.
- Access to market is key to promoting smallholders viability for sustainable business enterprise.
- Strengthening this key sector by supporting farmers / small holders groups and clusters is a key strategy for them to gain economies of scale and compete in the global environment.
- Large farmers will always have better access to financing and technical support.

Linkages

We have a tendency to focus on services within the regional plan without looking at strategic linkages. For example, since the decline in production of traditional commodities such as bananas, rice and sugar, the Caribbean region has been largely dependent on tourism and services. But this focus on tourism and services should not lead to the death of agriculture as a sector. Tourism provides an excellent opportunity to boost agriculture. Currently, agriculture is on the upward movement and this is largely as a result of the contribution of small-scale farmers, which more than half of them are women. Over the last 10 years or so, small-scale farmers have found solace in vegetable, fruit and root crop production. These farmers have refocused their efforts to supplying domestic markets and sending surplus to regional markets. In so doing, they have been playing a pivotal role in moving the Caribbean territories closer to achieving food security.

Other important linkages of agriculture includes:

- Export markets - tertiary exchange;
- Employment;
- Food nutrition security;
- Conservation and environmental preservation. Agriculture has a very positive or negative impact on the environment and as such we should be looking to promote environmentally sound practices in Agriculture.
- Foreign exchange earning to help reduce foreign debt;
- Poverty eradication;
- Rural modernization and focus on youth to prevent rural urban migration;
- Facilitate the strengthening of existing CAFAN farmers' groups and clusters and ensuring technical and financial assistance are available to farmers for disaster risk management mitigation.



Placing Agriculture at the center of social and economic development of the region would afford us the advantages of building sustainable growth models which will be under our control.

Actions towards Sustainable Development

Increased profitability: CaFAN continues to work to secure sustainable and profitable market access to ensure small farmers get a higher share of the products added value, ensure consumer satisfaction and fair price. Our members are engaged in production for the local, regional and extra regional markets, which are necessary to create profitable investments in agriculture. The closer CaFAN members get to the market/consumer by eliminating a lot of the middle persons, the more affordable the food will become.

One Strategy of CaFAN is to hold Buyer Grower Forums which is an action to stimulate local and regional markets, i.e. to bring together producers and buyers into a forum to discuss how best they can work together to meet each other in the selling and buying of produce. The forum has been a very successful tool held at the national and regional levels thus, linking agriculture to health, nutrition and tourism.



Climate Smart Agriculture: The Caribbean region is prone to heavy rainfall and drought conditions annually of which the impact is seen mostly in the rural communities. Flooding, for example, causes severe damages to roads preventing access to farm lands by farmers. Flooding also produces severe soil erosion, in which case, losses sustained are numerous. Since rural farm families are heavily dependent on agriculture as a main source of income CaFAN has developed a Concept note for funding to support the setting up Climate Smart Business Farms as demonstrations to show farmers examples of ecological practices that they can use to combat many of the conditions that arises due to the heavy rainfall and drought conditions experienced in the Caribbean. This project aims also to draw from experiences and best practices of farmers, extension and research officers and includes components of training and mentoring. These innovations and techniques when widely adapted will lead to reduced negative impact of climate change conditions thereby creating a more sustainable agriculture sector advancing towards Caribbean food security.

What CaFAN is lobbying and working towards

1. To set up Climate-smart business farms in each of our member countries.
2. Build a disaster risk and climate smart management plan with support from our partners.
3. Lobbying for Government policies to be more focused, inclusive and results oriented.
4. Encourage policies that strengthen the role of youth and women in agriculture.
5. Building capacity of farmer's organizations with special focus on small farmers.



In addition, CaFAN considers the following issues to be the significant areas of focus to strengthen small farmers and increase their likelihood of success in the Caribbean:

- Creation of a revolving or buffer fund to ensure farmers are paid within at least 7 days of selling their produce and thereby increasing farmers' cash flow;
- Training of farmers to be Global GAP certified;
- Training of farmers, especially the youth, in entrepreneurship;
- Increasing the participation of the youth in agriculture and rural modernization;
- Creation of a more enabling environment which provides farmers with greater access to credit for inputs; this includes the development of sustainable models of crop insurance.
- Development of farmer-operated packing facilities;
- Linking agriculture to health and nutrition with the involvement of schools and the general public to booster domestic trade in agriculture;
- Dismantling of non-tariff barriers to agricultural trade in the Caribbean region;
- Harmonization of regional standards for agriculture;
- Ensuring that farmers and farmers' organizations' own more of the value chain.

It is also important to take note of the ramifications if 500,000 – 1 million small farmers were to fall deep into poverty. Think of the rippling effect this would have on our Caribbean Region!

Contact us

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