



IICA-COLEAD Caribbean Agrifood Business Series

Session n°8:

Successes from Caribbean women-led businesses/SMEs in the agrifood sector

Thursday 23rd February 2023 – 10:00-12:00 (EST)

BIODATA OF THE SPEAKERS

Shondel Abby ALEXANDER – Abby's Exotic Blends, St. Lucia

Shondel Abiola Alexander – Abby – is from the island of Saint Lucia with heritage influence from the island of Guyana. A single mother of three, Abby's determination to grow her passion for creating beverages and treats led to the establishment in 2018 of her business, Abby's Exotic Blends. The company offers a wide range of vegetable chips made of plantain, banana, sweet potato, breadfruit and dasheen. Its product range also includes a number of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages such as coffee, banana, sea moss, peanut and rum punch. Since its creation, Abby's Exotic Blends has flourished into one of the best agro-processing companies that contributes to the local economy and to the marketing of Saint Lucia's product brands by exporting to neighbour islands. The company's engagement and contribution to the local commerce industry has been rewarded by several accolades, including in 2018 the Gold SMA (Saint Lucia Manufacturers Association) Quality Awards for Leadership, Product and Customer Service Quality and Implementations of Standards and Best Practices, and in 2019 the Saint Lucia Business Award.





Isolina BOTO – Head of Networks and Alliances, COLEAD



Isolina Boto is the Head of Networks and Alliances at COLEAD, a non-profit association of private sector operators in the agrifood sector active in the European Union (EU), Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) regions. Isolina has more than 25 years of experience in agricultural development. She started her career with the European Commission and has also worked with various ACP embassies and NGOs in areas related to food security, rural development and trade. Before joining COLEAD, she was the Manager of the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA) Brussels Office (2004-2020) implementing policy initiatives related to the ACP-EU cooperation in the field of the agrifood sector. She has led agribusiness projects in support of capacity development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), entrepreneurs and farmers organisations across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific and developed agrotourism aimed at linking agriculture and tourism sectors.

Tonni BRODBER – Representative of the UN Women Multi-Country Office- Caribbean



Tonni Brodber is the Representative of the United Nations (UN) Women Multi-Country Office (MCO) - Caribbean. Prior to her appointment in August 2020, she served as Deputy Representative from 2015 -2020 with the MCO Caribbean. Before this Ms. Brodber was the Team Leader for the Advancing Gender Justice in the Pacific programme with the UN Women Fiji MCO. Ms. Brodber served as the Gender Specialist for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in South Africa, as well as briefly with the UN Women South Africa MCO and established what is now the UN Women Country Office in Haiti. Ms. Brodber's work experience also includes lecturing in International Relations and Development Studies at Yanshan University, China, and directing and co-producing, a film on Haiti. Ms. Brodber received her first degree from the University of the West Indies, Jamaica, and has post graduate degrees in Development Studies and Business Administration from the London School of Economics, United Kingdom, and ESADE Business School in Barcelona, Spain.

Anastasha ELLIOT – Co-Founder and CEO, Sugar Town Organics, St. Kitts and Nevis



Born on the island of St. Kitts, Anastasha Elliott is a business woman, natural health advocate and champion of food and nutrition security. She promotes entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, agriculture innovation and green living, including as member of WINC Cohort (Women INnovators of the Caribbean), Vice President of the St. Kitts Agro Processors Cooperative Society, and founder of Made Market SKN Entrepreneurs Expo. She also founded Creative Immersion Summer Camp where she teaches entrepreneurship to children and teens. Anastasha had several careers to date from journalism, to graphic designing, customers service representative and chef - to name a few. In 2010, in co-founded Sugar Town Organics that merges the health and wellness with the agriculture sectors. The company creates alternatives to boost nutrition and minimize crop loss, while supporting the right to good and healthy food, and sustainability in the use of natural resources.



Anastaha is a trained administrative and personal assistant, holds an Associate Degree in culinary arts, as well as diplomas in organic haircare formulation and organic skincare business, and a certificate in botanical formulations. A Cherie Blair Foundation Mentee Alumni and successful participant of the Women in Export (We-Export) programme, she has participated in various business incubators and accelerator programmes. She has represented her country at various business related competitions, forums and trade missions from the Caribbean to Europe and Africa gaining knowledge, technical skills and assistance on various modern aspects of business building and operations.

Jeanette MARCELLE – Founder and CEO, Handmade by Jeanette Co., Trinidad and Tobago

Jeanette Marcelle, also known as Chef Marcelle, is from Trinidad and Tobago and has been in the culinary-hospitality industry for over two decades. She discovered her passion for cooking when she was studying to become a pre-school teacher and worked as a waitress in a Thai restaurant during holiday.



In 2020, Chef Marcelle's career as traveling chef was suspended due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. This marked the beginning of a new experience as an entrepreneur and agri-food processor. Jeanette launched Handmade by Jeanette Company to create employment for herself and others while reducing food waste in the community. The company produces creative granolas that are made with clean, superfood ingredients, as well as sauces and spice rubs from fresh indigenous ingredients, such as tamarind, cocoa, coconut, and scorpion pepper, that are directly supplied from local farmers. All products are formulated to help customers eat and feel awesome

according to the company's ethos *"You are what you eat"*.

Handmade by Jeanette Company operates according to a zero waste policy: the pepper seeds are returned to the farmers for further planting, the tamarind seeds and coconut shells are given to the small crafters for jewellery making and all other waste is turned into compost for the garden.

Carmen NURSE – President of the Caribbean Network of Rural Women Producers [CANROP]

Dr. Maxine PARRIS-AARON – Agricultural Health Specialist, IICA

Maxine Parris-Aaron is Agricultural Health Specialist at IICA. She has been employed by IICA in the Delegation of Guyana since 1996 and served as the acting Representative in Guyana in 2012.



Maxine is a Veterinarian by profession but has been instrumental in the formation and operationalization of the Women Agro-processors' Network in Guyana (WADN). This organisation serves to support and facilitate the development of Community-based Women's Group in Regions (five of Guyana's ten Regions). It began in 2010 with six groups and has since grown and now has 13 groups and about 150 Members. The Network has a fairly large local market share and enjoy small volumes of trade in the region. Maxine is responsible for facilitating the activities of the Network which includes sales, marketing, distribution,

capacity building etc.

Maxine is the recipient of a National Award for her work in Food Safety, work with WADN and contribution to Sports in Guyana.



Noella RUIZ – Founder and CEO, Empresas Noelia Ruiz Srl, Dominican Republic

Noella Ruiz is the Founder and Managing Director of Empresas Noelia Ruiz SRL, a company producing and marketing honey products under the brand Miel Noelia. The Dominican company was founded in 2014 and is dedicated to the conservation of the environment, as well as the production, collection and marketing of high quality honey.



Miel Noelia supports beekeeping producers in the provinces of Montecristi, Santiago Rodríguez and Dajabón with training and workshops. Its main objective is to meet the quality of the various products of the hive. The company add greater value to honeys, propolis, wax and royal jelly so that beekeepers can benefit from them and obtain greater sustainability.

Noella Ruiz studied industrial engineering at the Universidad Tecnológica de Santiago (UTESA) in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic. She has worked as a Production and Quality Engineer; and also as a Production and Quality Control Engineer. She has been a recipients of the Visa's 2022 *She's Next* Dominican Republic Grant Program.

Priscila ZÚÑIGA VILLALOBOS – Strategic Coordination and Gender and Youth Unit, IICA

Priscila Zúñiga Villalobos is the Manager of the Gender Equity and Rural Youth Program at the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). Prior to this position, during 2021-2022, she was Deputy Minister of the Interior and Police. She previously worked at IICA and at the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN) and was a consultant for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In addition, she has teaching experience developed at the American University (UAM).



Priscila is a sociologist and political scientist from the University of Costa Rica (UCR). She holds a Masters degree in Environmental Management and Local Development from the Central American Institute of Public Administration (ICAP), Costa Rica. Among her areas of study and experience are migration, territorial and community development, evaluation of public policies, gender, women and rural youth, citizen participation and economic and political development planning.