



Caribbean Business & Travel

Caribbean Manufacturing Report



Investment Opportunities

Manufacturing Sector Poised for Significant Medium to Long-term Growth

The Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA) is confident that with an expansion in exports, lower electricity rates, major improvements in infrastructure, new investments and attractive incentives, the contribution of the manufacturing sector to the country's economic growth will grow steadily over the next few years.

"A realistic medium-term goal is to grow this contribution to 5-10% of GDP, and in the longer term, through sustained policy support and diversification effort, to achieve 10-20% of GDP," Ramsay Ali, GMSA's Immediate Past President and current President of the Caribbean Manufacturers Association (CMA) said. He noted the Guyanese economy's real GDP grew by 43.6% in 2024, while the non-oil GDP grew by 13.1%. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects the economy will grow by 10% in 2025 despite the unstable global environment.

Ali, the CEO of Sterling Products, said approximately 40,000 persons work in the manufacturing sector, which is critical to the nation's economic development and currently accounts for 5.5% of non-oil GDP. Because Guyana has a labour shortage, he expects manufacturing will increasingly be competing with other fast-growing sectors for skilled labour.

He identified a wide range of investment opportunities in manufacturing in Guyana, driven by rising local consumption, particularly in agro-processing. "Key opportunities exist in processing fruits, coconut, rice, and spices. While these sectors are competitive, there remains significant room for innovation in areas such as packaged and prepared foods, dehydrated snacks, and packaged fruits and vegetables, which is a priority given the region's drive to reduce food imports and strengthen food security."

He observed that the beverage sector has been experiencing growth in both alcoholic and non-alcoholic categories. The CMA President noted that the oil boom has sparked significant

infrastructure investment across roads, ports, and energy, which in turn has generated strong demand for modular fabrication, steelworks, cement, chemicals, paints, and the assembly of service equipment. "Guyana's manufacturing companies are positioning themselves to scale up and supply critical inputs to the country's expanding infrastructure, housing, and logistics sectors. This creates new opportunities for both local and foreign investors to partner in building out the industrial supply chain that supports national development."

The cost of electricity is expected to be significantly reduced due to the Gas to Energy project, from approximately U.S.\$0.24 per kilowatt-hour to between U.S.\$0.08 and U.S.\$0.10 per kilowatt-hour by late 2025 or early 2026.

"There is need for further investment in cold chain and storage infrastructure, including modern refrigeration facilities and warehousing, which are essential to ensuring that products can meet both domestic and export market standards." Guyana currently has four established industrial estates located at Coldingen, Eccles, Belvedere, and Lethem and, in addition to these estates, there are also dedicated agro-processing facilities, including fifteen small-scale agro-processing hubs that support the development of SMEs.

"Together, these facilities provide important infrastructure to foster the continued growth of manufacturing and value-added production across the country."

Major port infrastructure projects are also progressing, including upgrades at Port Georgetown and new deep-water port developments on the West Coast of Demerara at Vreed-en-Hoop. Additionally, Berbice is set to benefit from the development of its own deep-water port. These projects are intended to ease congestion, support containerization, and improve the overall efficiency of Guyana's trade logistics network.

The upcoming Linden-Lethem Road,



Ramsay Ali
CMA President
GMSA Immediate Past President

now under active development, will provide a direct link between Guyana's coast and the Brazilian border, greatly enhancing trade and freight movement with northern Brazil. "The new Deep-Water Port in Berbice will significantly expand shipping capacity and is expected to handle larger vessels, reducing the cost of imports and exports. Additionally, the proposed bridge across the Corentyne River to Suriname will create an overland trade corridor, improving connectivity between Guyana, Suriname, and Brazil, and opening access to new markets across all three countries."

Guyana has significantly improved customs processing times and enhanced transparency. In 2024, the Electronic Single Window (ESW) for Trade was launched to further streamline international trade and business processes by providing real-time access to key government services. Through this platform, users can submit applications and track permits, licenses, certificates, declarations, and approvals online.

Identifying some of the key incentives for new investors, Ali said manufacturers and agro-processors benefit from waivers on import duty and VAT for machinery and equipment that are used in production. Companies engaged in manufacturing and exporting products are also eligible for export allowances, which provide deductions from chargeable profits based on the percentage of export sales achieved.

Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association

New economic projects in Guyana can qualify for tax holidays, including exemptions under the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act, which supports developmental, risk-bearing ventures and new activities introduced in some administrative regions.

Ali said duty-free access within CARICOM is underutilized, but Guyanese exporters are now actively exploring new opportunities within the region. He stressed that reciprocity within the region still requires improvement to fully unlock trade potential.

Manufacturers are making inroads into neighboring markets such as Suriname and Brazil, with support from GMSA and the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) to facilitate cross-border partnerships and market entry.

“Utilization of existing trade agreements remains underdeveloped. At the national level, the President of Guyana has emphasized the importance of learning Spanish to improve market access in South America. Currently, sensitization sessions are being conducted to raise awareness among businesses, along with assessments of the ease of doing business in these markets.”

Guyanese manufacturers are also working on leveraging opportunities under the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which offers duty-free access to European markets for a range of manufactured goods.

Training efforts within the manufacturing sector include ISO management training, food safety management principles, and good agricultural practices. These programs are being supported by the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS).

The GMSA is continuing to host Uncapped Marketplace for agro-processors and participate in the AFRI - Caribbean Expo in Grenada and Agro Fest in Barbados. “These platforms provide valuable opportunities for local manufacturers to showcase their products, connect with new buyers, and explore regional and international markets.”

Ali said expositions like GuyExpo provide valuable opportunities for local

manufacturers to showcase their products, connect with new buyers, and explore regional and international markets. “Our vision for GuyExpo is for it to evolve into a multi-sectoral regional expo, combining agro-processing, light manufacturing and oil-services. GuyExpo should also emphasize our manufacturing capacity’s need to meet oil and gas infrastructure and logistics demands.”

Caribbean Export has sponsored GMSA’s participation in a recent Caribbean Investment Forum (CIF) and continues to invite its members to virtual training sessions as they become available. The International Trade Centre (ITC) is supporting GMSA through funding for the development of its e-commerce platform, the Uncapped Marketplace, to promote SME business development and expand market access for local manufacturers.

In addition, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is currently funding a feasibility study on the potential for expanding furniture manufacturing in Guyana. “The study will help identify opportunities for value addition, improve competitiveness, and guide future investments to strengthen this high-potential subsector.”

Ali reported that the CMA, which groups six manufacturers’ associations in the region, has consistently engaged CARICOM, working through the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO), on key issues such as the Common External Tariff (CET) reform, non-tariff barriers, and most recently, trade matters related to the United States. These include advocacy around U.S. port fees and the need for reciprocal tariff arrangements. The CMA, which was launched in 2020, is also coordinating the development of regional policy positions to support industrial competitiveness. “One recent example is the creation of a unified



From left are board member Orson Ferguson, current GMSA President Rafeek Khan, CMA President Ramsay Ali and board member Vasudeo Singh.

private sector stance on front-of-package labelling standards, aimed at ensuring that regional manufacturers can remain competitive and aligned with evolving international regulations.”

According to Ali, cross-country dialogues have strengthened regional collaboration by supporting a unified position on trade facilitation and the organisation of trade missions. “There has been a noticeable increase in the number of trade missions taking place across the region, helping manufacturers explore new markets and build stronger regional partnerships.”

He also pointed to plans being finalised to reintroduce a regional ferry service to improve maritime links between CARICOM states. “This service will play an important role in facilitating the movement of goods within the region and strengthening intra-regional trade networks. These combined investments in road, port, and ferry services will enable manufacturers to access new markets more efficiently and competitively.”

For potential investors considering a project in the region, Ali stressed that the Caribbean is no longer just a market for consumption, but is a strategic location for production. “We have the raw materials, access to duty-free trade through CARICOM, the EU, and beyond, and an increasingly skilled workforce.”

“As President of the CMA, I welcome investors to partner with our manufacturers, whether in agro-processing, construction inputs, light manufacturing, or renewable energy equipment. We’re ready and we’re open for business.”

Barbados Wants Capital and Expertise to Diversify and Increase Production

Increasing and diversifying production, capitalising on successful regional trade missions and significant improvements in logistics, are some of the strategies for expanding the Barbados manufacturing sector so it can increase the sector's contribution to the economy.

President of the Barbados Manufacturers Association (BMA) Rakeesh Bernard said the association wants to see the sector increase its contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from close to 6% to between 7 to 15%.

"This can be done by increasing the agro-processing aspect, improving value-added food and beverage manufacturing, as well as cosmetics and advancing export diversification by engaging and expanding into new markets, and adopting digital trade and technological platforms," said Bernard, Managing Director of Roberts Manufacturing.

"One of the biggest areas ripe for investment is the agro-processing sector. We are looking not just for capital but also technical expertise," the BMA President stated.

Bernard said there is an urgent need for better shipping links to support the movement of agricultural and processed food products, and to reduce significant losses due to spoilage and shipment delays.

The Barbadian business executive said the larger food and beverage manufacturers have the capacity to supply several products to cruise ships that call at the Bridgetown port. These include flour, oil, biscuits, chicken nuggets and tenders, water and juices.

Bernard said Barbados, which has 10,200 workers in the manufacturing sector, also welcomes investment to manufacture more pharmaceuticals, to expand the high fashion apparel sector, and to produce leather products.

The country is projected to record real

GDP growth of 2.7% in 2025, according to the Barbados Central Bank, which said domestic fundamentals remain solid and should continue to support moderate expansion.

The BMA has led delegations to Guyana and other CARICOM countries, which has opened new opportunities for Barbadian manufacturers. "In Guyana, particularly, there is a strong demand for processed foods, construction supplies, and technical expertise. These missions have helped establish new distribution networks, uncover joint venture possibilities, and assess market readiness for Barbadian products."

"As Managing Director of Roberts Manufacturing, I'm proud to say that we've built a strong regional footprint, currently supplying our products to over 15 countries. Our focus now is twofold: to deepen our presence and strengthen relationships within these established markets, and to ensure we continue to meet evolving customer needs with consistency and quality."

Bernard said potential investors can expect a solid and well-supported environment for manufacturing. Government incentives include duty-free imports on raw materials, components and production equipment, capital allowances on fixed assets and training grants to upskill workers during the crucial start-up phase. Moreover, exporters can take advantage of duty-free access within the CARICOM markets, preferential trade access to the European Union, Canada, and other markets internationally.

The BMA President, who believes the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) offers a unique platform for expansion within the Caribbean market, said the CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) also ensures an integrated, efficient, and supportive environment for businesses operating within the CSME.

"COTED plays a vital role in boosting



Rakeesh Bernard
BMA President

and advancing regional trade by coordinating CARICOM's trade policies, addressing issues, resolving disputes, and ensuring member states agree with standards and regulations."

There are several factories and industrial spaces across the island, and new facilities were recently constructed by Export Barbados (BIDC) at the International Food and Science Centre (IFSC) located in Christ Church, to support small and medium-sized food manufacturers.

"These facilities provide manufacturers with access to commercial kitchens, HACCP compliant facilities and resources, as well as food science lab services, in order to aid businesses upscale their production, to conform and to meet international standards, and also to enter into the export markets."

Bernard said the manufacturing sector in Barbados has strong linkages with the agriculture sector. "One of the most important connections is through agro-processing, where locally grown fruits, vegetables, herbs, and meats are transformed into products such as sauces, jams, juices, frozen meals, seasonings, and snacks. This process not only adds value to agricultural output but, also aids in reducing post-harvest losses."

Barbados Manufacturers Association

The Ration Pack Initiative of the BMA is another example of this linkage, using excess local produce to create pre-packaged meals for emergencies and institutional use, thereby providing a consistent market for farmers. Additionally, manufacturers work closely with farmers to ensure a steady supply of raw materials, whereby encouraging contract farming and other supply chain partnerships.

Moreover, regional trade initiatives, as well as cold-chain logistics investments, also strengthen this linkage by making it easier to transport perishable goods to processing facilities and to export markets. "Ultimately, the connection between manufacturing and agriculture fosters rural development, improves food security, and supports the growth of a more resilient and self-sufficient economy within Barbados."

On strengthening links with the tourism sector, Bernard said that by supplying locally made products such as toiletries, linens, furnishings, and decor to hotels and resorts, manufacturers help diminish reliance on imports while promoting Barbadian products and culture. As well, food and beverage producers improve the visitor experience by offering authentic local items such as rum, sauces, and baked goods, which are also sold as souvenirs in shops and duty-free outlets.

Various members of the BMA have successfully expanded their business footprint into Central and South American markets, with remarkable results in Panama and Guyana. "Looking ahead, we plan to expand our product portfolio into Panama over the next two years."

While the BMA is collaborating with the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO) on challenges in the U.S. market, including rising tariffs and rigorous compliance standards, alternative export routes and digital platforms are also being explored.

Regarding enhanced logistics, recent improvements to port facilities at Barbados Port Inc. have focused on increasing and improving efficiency, capacity, and sustainability.

Digital enhancements include the creation and rollout of a Port

Community System (PCS) as well as a Maritime Single Window, which improves cargo traceability, automates documentation, and facilitate smoother interactions among port users and government agencies.

There have also been cruise terminal improvements. "Subsequently these initiatives have aided in reducing delays and improved Barbados' standing as a regional logistics and cruise hub, while supporting environmental and economic resilience goals."

Bernard said there have also been considerable improvements in air transportation for Barbadian products because of new regional and international routes. Suriname Airways now operates a cargo-capable route from Suriname via Guyana into Barbados, which improves and strengthens South American trade ties. Also, Caribbean Airlines launched a new service linking Trinidad, Barbados, and Puerto Rico.

"The development of LIAT 2020 includes various proposals to expand routes to Miami and Panama, which would further integrate Barbados into prominent global air cargo corridors."

Barbados is in the process of positioning itself as a regional transshipment and logistics hub through the implementation of the Seaport Industry (Management, Operations and Development) Bill, which was passed in early 2025. The legislation supports pre-clearance systems, improved home-port provisioning, and motivates vessels to source local supplies.

Barbados is a vital player in the new regional ferry initiative, along with St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. This new ferry system, which is promoted and supported by CARICOM and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB),



BMA President Rakeesh Bernard at the Roberts Manufacturing booth at the 2025 Trade and Innovation Expo. At centre is Barbados President, Dame Sandra Mason.

aims to improve the movement of goods and people across the Eastern Caribbean.

"The ferry service is created to include roll-on/roll-off (RoRo) capacity for transporting commercial goods like containers and vehicles, whereby providing an affordable and reliable option for small manufacturers as well as traders."

Bernard said the BMA's June 2025 International Business Conference (IBC) positioned Barbados as a thought leader and innovation hub within the Caribbean. "The conference highlighted the role of manufacturing in addressing global issues such as food security, climate change, as well as logistics and global shipping disruptions. In addition, the launch of the Ration Pack Initiative (RPI) at the Trade and Innovation Expo (TIE) was an important milestone, whereby demonstrating private sector commitment to national development."

Bernard said the Caribbean Manufacturers' Association (CMA) has become a prominent and beneficial advocate for regional manufacturing and has significantly strengthened the capacity of the BMA to influence policy, expand markets, and build resilience in Barbados' manufacturing sector.

"Its role in uniting the region's manufacturers has helped to elevate Caribbean manufacturing as a cohesive and competitive bloc with the ability to respond to global trade shifts, and to seize emerging opportunities across various continents such as Latin America, North America, South America and beyond."

Guyana and Suriname Key Markets for Trinidadian Manufacturers

The Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association (TTMA) is aggressively pursuing trade missions, empowering SMEs and laying the groundwork for the production of a wide range of new products as part of its six-year Export Plan.

TTMA President Dale Parson said the association has outlined a bold, multi-pronged strategy to grow Trinidad and Tobago's non-energy exports from TT\$6.2 billion to TT\$10.6 billion by 2030.

"The non-energy sector remains the main engine of growth, up by 19% in 2024 with strong performances in trade and manufacturing. In 2024, the non-energy sector generated around TT\$6.2 billion in exports, reflecting significant growth and investment," said Parson, the CEO of Kaleidoscope Paints.

The TTMA believes that ideally, the manufacturing sector would aim for 25-30% GDP contribution in the medium term, especially with continued government incentives and regional trade expansion.

Parson said the TTMA is working closely with the newly elected UNC Government to ensure the policies set are conducive to non-energy growth locally and for export transformation as Trinidad and Tobago moves away from the energy dependency into non-energy growth.

The association has been focusing on trade missions especially to extra-CARICOM markets, targeting regions like Chile, New York, Canada, the European Union (EU), and Latin America.

The association is assisting smaller producers, SMEs, to overcome barriers like registration, barcoding, and export readiness planning. "One of TTMA's goals is to increase SME participation in exports to foster sustainable and new export growth, not just for local retail and wholesale. We have

engaged a number of legislative bodies to support this SME initiative and create special opportunities and considerations for this sector."

Other key elements of the Export Plan are Policy Advocacy and Incentives, pursuing new "low-hanging" opportunities, Export Classification Clarity, and the construction of a 200,000 square foot facility on 20 acres of land to position Trinidad as the Caribbean's hub for manufactured products, host regional trade shows, CARICOM networking, and investment promotion.

Parson said the "low-hanging" opportunities include an expansion of food and beverage processing sectors to include ready-to-eat meals, health-conscious snacks, and ethnic Caribbean cuisine for diaspora markets. There is also scope to expand pulp, paper and packaging products, cosmetics and personal care, construction materials, renewable energy components, alcoholic beverages and petrochemical derivatives such as the production of plastics and fertilizers.

"These are sectors where Trinidad already has a foothold or the raw materials, knowledge and experience, and logistics to scale quickly."

Parson said Technology (AI) is also central to Trinidad and Tobago's plan to boost non-energy exports by 2030, not just as a tool, but as a catalyst for the transformation across the manufacturing landscape in Trinidad. He noted that technology is driving the export agenda, specifically Digital Transformation of SMEs, Smart Manufacturing & Automation, Data-Driven Decision-Making Innovation and R&D, Digital Trade Infrastructure Initiatives and Cybersecurity & Compliance Technology.

Investment opportunities include food and beverage manufacturing,



Dale Parson
TTMA President

sustainable packaging and paper products, green manufacturing and renewable energy components. "Investors are eyeing solar panel frames, battery assembly and green energy production. These align with regional climate goals and offer long-term growth."

He reported rising interest in botanical-based skincare and wellness products, especially those branded with Caribbean authenticity for export markets.

Parson said Guyana's economic boom, driven by oil and gas, has also created demand and opportunities for construction materials, consumer goods, processed food & snacks and industrial services, areas where Trinidad excels.

"These TTMA Trade missions to Guyana are more than symbolic. They're about building long-term relationships and partnerships, establishing distribution hubs, and exploring joint ventures with Guyanese firms and providing a need to fill a gap in Guyana."

"These inroads aren't just about trade, they're about regional integration, and Guyana - Trinidad collaboration to fill voids needed in Guyana's revenue output," the TTMA President added.

He also pointed to initiatives that have proven to be fruitful. In particular, the Ministry of Trade and Industry,

Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association

in partnership with TTMA, has supported exploratory missions and diplomatic outreach to countries like Chile, Colombia, Panama, and Brazil. These efforts are aimed at building commercial linkages, distributor networks, and joint ventures.

“Trinidad and Tobago has placed Commercial Officers and Attachés in key Latin American markets to help manufacturers navigate local regulations, identify buyers, and promote trade opportunities.”

Parson said the Guyana and Suriname markets will remain top priorities due to economic growth and geographic proximity and there is also a focus on Colombia, Panama, and the Dominican Republic - Latin American markets with growing demand for processed foods, packaging, and chemicals.

Trinidadian manufacturers have also made “a bold move” into Ghana in West Africa, building on diplomatic ties and cultural connections, and recent trade missions to The Bahamas and Canada have explored opportunities in food and beverage, cosmetics, and logistics.

Parson described the TTMA's annual Trade and Investment Convention (TIC) as a powerhouse platform for regional and international companies and entrepreneurs because it transforms networking into tangible business growth and provides a gateway to over 35 countries.

“Because Trinidad and Tobago is at the crossroads of the Americas, TIC connects businesses from North, Central, and South America, the Caribbean, and beyond. It's a launchpad for companies looking to enter or expand in regional and extra-regional markets.

Parson, who stressed that Trinidad's strategic location, robust logistics, and trade agreements make it a compelling base for regional and international manufacturing, said construction and building materials, downstream petrochemical products and the recycling of steel, paper and tyres are other areas available for investment.

The TTMA President said strengthening the ties between agri-business and tourism in Trinidad and Tobago is gaining momentum as both sectors recognize the mutual benefits of collaboration, especially in boosting rural economies, enhancing food security, and enriching the visitor experience.”

Training and Capacity Building Programs are being developed to train farmers, tour operators, and hospitality workers in agrotourism best practices, customer service, and sustainable production to ensure quality experiences for visitors and viable income for locals.

According to the business leader, Trinidad and Tobago is an attractive destination for business and investment because it offers a compelling mix of strategic, economic, and human capital advantages that go well beyond its low energy costs.

He noted that there is access to over 700 million consumers through numerous trade agreements like CARICOM, the EU-CARIFORUM EPA, and partial scope agreements with Colombia, Venezuela, and others.

The twin-island's modern ports, road networks, and industrial parks, including eTeck's Tamana InTech Park, support manufacturing, logistics, and tech-based industries. As well, he noted, a well-established energy and petrochemical base provide raw materials and utilities for downstream manufacturing.

Investment incentives include tax holidays, capital allowances, and R&D grants, there is duty-free importation of raw materials and machinery for approved manufacturers and government support through agencies like InvestTT and ExportTT to help navigate the local landscape.

Parson said many TTMA members are actively leveraging the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) to expand their regional footprint, but there's still room to grow.

“The CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) is a game-changer



Dr. Colin Neil Gosine, Parliamentary Secretary; Dale Parson TTMA President and Satyakama Maharaj, Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism at a meeting at the Ministry.

for both regional and international investors because it transforms the Caribbean from a collection of small markets into a single, unified economic space, unlocking scale, efficiency, and opportunity.”

Parson emphasised that in light of all geopolitical issues going on globally, TTMA is wide open for business and ventures and is enthusiastic about making Trinidad and Tobago the long-term manufacturing capital of the Caribbean.

He said the CARICOM Manufacturers Association (CMA) plays a pivotal role in transforming the Caribbean manufacturing landscape from fragmented national efforts into a cohesive regional force.

“By promoting collaboration over competition, the CMA helps build integrated supply chains, allowing smaller states to specialize and contribute to larger regional production goals. The CMA is also fostering cooperation in research, training, and technology adoption, helping manufacturers across the region modernize and compete more effectively.”

Parson said, especially in the wake of global disruptions like COVID-19, the CMA emphasizes regional self-reliance, reducing dependence on extra-regional imports, and boosting food and product security.

“In essence, the CMA is about scaling up Caribbean manufacturing through unity, innovation, and shared purpose,” the TTMA President asserted.

Jamaica Focused on Import Substitution and Trade with Guyana

Jamaica's manufacturing industry stands poised for growth by addressing import substitution, leveraging trade agreements, and improving competitiveness through infrastructure and policy reforms.

Immediate Past President of the Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association (JMEA) Sydney Thwaites said investment opportunities in Jamaica's manufacturing sector continue to grow, particularly in areas that support import substitution.

Thwaites, the CEO of Jamaica Lubricating Specialties Inc., said there is strong potential in the production of goods that are currently heavily imported, from basic food items to packaging materials, cleaning agents, and household products.

"Sectors like chemicals and pharmaceuticals present promising opportunities for new investors, especially in the development of nutraceuticals, cosmetics, and industrial chemicals, where raw material sourcing and regional demand are aligned."

Thwaites said Jamaica's manufacturing sector is driven by the country's high import bill, which stood at approximately US\$7.3 billion in 2024. This highlighted a strong need for import substitution, particularly in agro-processing products like canned callaloo, ackees, hot peppers and herbs.

"The sector can capitalize on growing consumer preference for locally produced goods and leverage Jamaica's strategic geographic location to attract nearshoring investments, especially through Special Economic Zones (SEZs) that offer incentives for manufacturers targeting larger markets such as the USA and Canada." He said domestic exports increased by 11% in 2024, signaling rising competitiveness abroad.

Thwaites said efforts to reduce high energy costs and streamline bureaucracy are enhancing the business environment, encouraging an estimated J\$100 billion investment in manufacturing.

JMEA remains cautiously optimistic about the country's medium and short-term economic outlook. "In the short term, while GDP growth is expected to remain modest as the economy continues to recover from weather-related disruptions, the medium-term forecast of 1.0% to 3.0% growth for FY2025/26 is encouraging. Key productive sectors, particularly Agriculture, Electricity & Water, and Tourism are poised to drive this momentum."

He explained that this offers opportunities to strengthen linkages, increase domestic production, and expand into new markets. Just over 96,000 persons are employed in the manufacturing sector, which represents close to 7% of the total workforce.

The JMEA is advocating reform incentives and tax policy to drive competitiveness as a key element of its five-year Manufacturing Growth Strategy, developed in 2020 in partnership with JAMPRO, the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce, and other key stakeholders.

The Association is pushing for the modernization of the Productive Inputs Relief (IPR) regime, the Omnibus Incentive Framework and is also working to upgrade industrial infrastructure. The JMEA, which is also trying to secure more land for manufacturing, offers programmes to boost skills development and productivity.

JMEA continues to promote expanded access to affordable financing and is also focused on building export market intelligence by equipping members with real-time data, buyer insights, and trade updates to improve decision-making and market entry strategies.

The JMEA leader said the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) presents a powerful and largely untapped opportunity for Jamaican producers.

He noted that in 2024, the region welcomed approximately 34.2 million international overnight tourists. "Coupled with a resident population



Sydney Thwaites
JMEA Immediate Past President

of about 16 million, this positions the region as a high-potential, dual-demand market for Jamaican goods and services. The combination of local consumers and a steady influx of visitors creates consistent and growing demand across sectors, particularly for food, beverages, personal care, and lifestyle products."

He is disappointed that, despite these favourable conditions, Jamaican producers are not fully leveraging the CSME's potential. "While the framework facilitates the free movement of goods, services, capital, and skilled labour across member states, many businesses face knowledge gaps, particularly around the trade rules and mechanisms that govern the regional market."

"Strengthening our presence in the regional market is essential for driving export growth, boosting manufacturing output, and enhancing Jamaica's overall economic competitiveness within a rapidly evolving global trade landscape."

Thwaites said investors will benefit from tax holidays that provide exemption from corporate income tax for periods typically ranging from 5 to 15 years, depending on the investment and location. Investors also enjoy import duty exemptions on raw materials, machinery, and equipment essential to manufacturing, as well as accelerated

Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association

depreciation allowances that enable faster write-offs of capital investments, reducing taxable income. Additionally, there are tax credits available for investments in equipment and employee training programs, further lowering operating costs.

He said Guyana has emerged as the region's breakout growth story driven by the discovery of oil and significant infrastructure investments that are rapidly transforming its economic landscape. The JMEA sees Guyana not just as a high-growth market, but as a strategic partner in advancing the vision of a stronger, more self-reliant CARICOM.

"The three recent Jamaican trade missions to Georgetown were far from symbolic. They were designed to drive business outcomes, expand commercial networks, and position Jamaican companies to support and benefit from Guyana's rapid development," said Thwaites, a two-term JMEA President.

"The results have been both immediate and promising. Several Jamaican firms have already secured contracts, particularly in the construction and technology sectors, where Guyana's infrastructure boom is generating strong demand for materials and services," he added.

The JMEA official reported that in the ICT sector, Jamaican companies have begun forging connections with Guyanese financial institutions, helping to enhance their customer experience and accelerate digital transformation, areas in which Jamaican talent and innovation are well-regarded across the region.

Last year, the JMEA joined the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce (MIIC) JAMPRO and the Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA) on a strategic business mission to three key Latin American countries: Colombia, Mexico and El Salvador. "Colombia, in particular, has emerged as a promising destination. Jamaican companies are already exporting non-traditional products like lubricants to this market, signaling that there is a clear appetite for high-quality, niche Jamaican offerings."

Thwaites said given ongoing shifts in global supply chains, Latin American buyers are showing increased interest



Prime Minister of Jamaica, Hon. Andrew Holness (centre), cuts the ribbon to officially open Expo Jamaica 2025, alongside JMEA President Sydney Thwaites, (left) and Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Senator Aubyn Hill (right).

in nearshore sourcing options. Jamaica, with its geographic proximity, stable business environment, and strong logistics potential, is well-positioned to serve as a regional manufacturing and distribution hub. "These missions are therefore not just about promotion - they are strategic tools for building long-term commercial linkages, gathering market intelligence, and facilitating partnerships that support Jamaican exporters and contribute to national economic growth."

The JMEA is targeting several key markets in South and Central America, with Panama emerging as a primary focus due to its world-class logistics infrastructure, cultural alignment with Caribbean products, and strategic potential as a gateway for wider regional distribution.

"The response from regional buyers was overwhelmingly positive. Companies secured multiple high-potential leads and held meaningful discussions with distributors from Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Colombia. There was strong interest in products such as Jamaican sorrel beverages, jerk sauces, and herbal cosmetics."

The JMEA has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Dominican Republic's export agency, marking a step forward in formalizing trade cooperation and opening channels for deeper collaboration. Jamaica is targeting several international markets, with a strong

focus on the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, particularly in the food and beverage sector. There has also been notable success in Japan, particularly with Jamaica Blue Mountain Coffee, which remains a top export.

Thwaites said the 2025 Expo Jamaica sent a powerful message that Jamaica is truly an attractive and dynamic investment hub in the Caribbean. Over 250 businesses participated, representing a wide range of sectors, including food and beverages, agro-processing, fashion and textiles, chemicals, and technology. The Expo showcased the remarkable diversity and innovation of Jamaican manufacturing.

"We welcomed over 760 international and local buyers from more than 30 countries, which clearly demonstrates the global interest in our products and the confidence in Jamaica's manufacturing and export potential."

Thwaites said one of the key roles of the Caribbean Manufacturers Association (CMA) is to tackle shared issues such as shipping inefficiencies, which continue to hinder intra-regional trade.

"We are also working together to boost competitiveness by advocating for mechanisms like the Common External Tariff (CET) to support local production, reduce reliance on external markets, and encourage regional value chains. By sourcing inputs within the region and pushing for more integrated trade and production networks, the CMA is helping Caribbean manufacturers become more resilient and globally competitive."

Investment Needed for Agro-Processing and Niche Garment Production

Saint Lucia is looking to significantly ramp up agro-processing, particularly in the production of juices, jams, and jellies, and is also seeking investment to expand the production of a wide range of products, including soaps and niche garments.

“By investing in processing infrastructure to pulp and freeze seasonal fruits, Saint Lucia can ensure year-round supply for juice production. This is particularly important given the domestic demand for boxed juices for the school population,” Marguerite Desir, President of the Saint Lucia Manufacturers Association (SLMA) said.

Desir said there is also strong potential for natural soap manufacturing, leveraging the island’s rich supply of coconuts and other botanicals. “The global demand for organic and natural products continues to rise, positioning Saint Lucia to cater to both tourist-driven boutique markets and regional export channels. With relatively low barriers to entry, this subsector is well-suited for small and medium enterprises.”

The SLMA President, who is the Chief Operating Officer (COO) at Harris Paints International Limited, wants to see the manufacturing sector, which currently employs around 2500 persons, increase its contribution to GDP from around 6% currently to 10%.

Saint Lucia’s real GDP growth, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) grew by 3.7% in 2024 and is expected to record growth of 3% in 2025.

Desir said Saint Lucia has already laid the foundation to attract investment in light manufacturing and value-added tech products. Investment

opportunities also exist for chemicals, plastics, and rubber, where demand for packaging and construction materials is expanding, as well as for lumber and wood products, given the increasing need for furniture and construction materials locally and regionally.

She said traditional large-scale garment production is no longer feasible due to shifts in global manufacturing trends, such as increased competition from lower-cost producers in Asia and Central America, limited economies of scale and logistical challenges.

As a result, the focus has strategically shifted toward niche manufacturing opportunities within the garment and textile sector. “One promising area is the production of uniforms, including school uniforms, hospitality wear, and corporate attire. These product lines offer consistent demand within the domestic and regional markets and allow for customization, quality assurance, and shorter supply chains.”

Desir believes there is “significant opportunity” to develop clothing, handbags, and artisanal accessories tailored for the tourism market and the island’s thriving tourism industry creates a ready-made customer base interested in unique, locally-made products.

“Investment needed for this niche segment includes sewing and finishing equipment, design studios and shared production spaces, as well as a skills training program and support for marketing, e-commerce, and export-readiness initiatives.”

Desir said there is a real opportunity to build stronger connections between Saint Lucia’s tourism and agri-business sectors. Hotels and



Marguerite Desir
President
Saint Lucia Manufacturers Association

restaurants are looking for more locally made products, but many small producers don’t yet have the infrastructure or certification to supply them consistently.

“At the same time, tourists are eager to buy authentic Saint Lucian goods such as handmade soaps, condiments, and crafts. To meet this demand, investment is needed in things like small-scale processing facilities, cold storage, better packaging, and more polished market spaces. These upgrades wouldn’t just boost sales locally, they would also help producers get ready for export and grow their businesses beyond the island.”

Desir advised that Saint Lucia is well-positioned to support the growth of its manufacturing sector with seven industrial estates managed by Invest Saint Lucia. These estates offer factory shells ranging from 4,000 to 32,000 square feet, complete with refrigeration and warehouse facilities.

“They’re strategically located with easy access to distribution ports. Additionally, manufacturers operating within special economic zones can take advantage of tax breaks, duty-free

Saint Lucia Manufacturers Association

imports, and other government-backed incentives.”

Another encouraging development is new incentives introduced by the government tailored to support the Micro Manufacturing Sector, helping small businesses acquire equipment, packaging, and raw materials to scale production and meet export demands.

These recent measures, according to Desir, build on a long-standing foundation of support that includes land and infrastructure subsidies dating back to the 1970s, and tax and duty exemptions for companies operating within designated zones.

Key benefits for new investors include tax holidays of up to 15 years, import duty waivers on raw materials and machinery, income tax exemptions of up to 100%, waivers on property tax and stamp duties and export allowances that provide tax relief on export earnings for up to 15 years.

She noted several key infrastructure projects that will significantly benefit the manufacturing sector are currently advancing. “Simultaneously, the redevelopment of the Castries and Soufriere ports, under a 30-year PPP with Global Ports Holding, is underway to upgrade berths, expand vendor zones, and enhance logistics, thereby improving import-export capacity. The port redevelopment is targeted for completion by July 2026, with phased rollouts already begun.”

The SLMA envisions a vibrant, competitive, and export-ready manufacturing sector that plays a significantly greater role in the national economy.

The association is keen to increase exports beyond the current 27.3% threshold within the next 3 to 5 years. “This goal aligns with ongoing efforts to diversify away from traditional export routes and respond to U.S. market challenges such as higher tariffs and shifting consumer preferences.”



Marguerite Desir, Chief Operating Officer (third from right,) during a tour of Harris Paints' new manufacturing facility and flagship retail store at Beterverwagting, Guyana.

Desir said SLMA members have begun tapping into markets opened through CARICOM's trade agreements, particularly in South America. “We actively support businesses in using these agreements to trade with countries like Guyana, Suriname, as well as Latin American countries, through its CARICOM trade bloc membership.”

Priority products for these markets include alcohol, paint, agro-processing products like condiments, and roofing.

However, one of the key challenges is the availability and cost of shipping, which the regional shipping industry is currently working to address to improve trade flow and market access.

SLMA members have participated in several key regional trade shows, including Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados trade shows, and events in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada, with strong representation from micro enterprises.

Saint Lucian exporters are taking advantage of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), with a growing presence in regional markets such as Barbados, Dominica, Guyana, and Trinidad & Tobago. Key export products include rum, processed foods and beverages, and packaging material.

The Saint Lucian business leader said membership in the Caribbean Manufacturers Association (CMA) gives manufacturers a platform to address common regional challenges, such as shipping constraints and external trade pressure from countries such as the U.S. and China.

“Members benefit from access to regional advocacy, shared best practices, trade missions, and capacity-building initiatives. The CMA also helps harmonize standards across CARICOM and strengthens the region's collective negotiating power in international markets.”

Desir decided to return as SLMA President because of important work she feels still needs to be done. “In my previous term, we made strong progress, manufacturing was brought into sharper focus within national policy, and several of our members, like Baron Foods, achieved major milestones.”

“With growing interest in niche manufacturing, infrastructure improvements underway, and new trade opportunities opening up, I felt the need to continue. I want to help our members take full advantage of these developments, strengthen our voice across the region, and ensure Saint Lucia's manufacturing sector continues to grow in both size and global competitiveness.”

Dominica to get Assistance from Trinidadian Manufacturers to Grow Exports

The Dominica Manufacturers Association (DMA) is drawing on the extensive experience of Trinidadian manufacturers in its drive to significantly increase production, expand exports and strengthen the organisation.

“Having been inspired by the Trinidad trade mission that visited Dominica, our association has decided to work in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association to mentor us through our developmental phase. Towards this end, we have since completed our constitution and strategic plan,” said Robin, the Managing Director of Benjo’s Seamoss and Agro-Processing Ltd.

To further this initiative, a DMA team led by Robin attended the TTMA’s 2025 Trinidad Trade and Investment Convention (TIC), whose mandate is to foster intra-regional and extra-regional trade for regional businesses.

The Trinidad delegation that visited Dominica earlier this year expressed an interest in purchasing root vegetables and processed products, including fruit concentrates, soaps and raw materials.

“Trinidad continues to demonstrate to the CSME, through their annual trade and investment conference conducted globally, exactly what is possible when one thinks big. Moreover, they exemplify how we should operate as a region.”

Dominica’s Gross Domestic Product for 2025 is projected to increase to 4.25% in 2025, up from 3.5% in 2024. Contributing to the 2024 growth was the recovery in tourism, public investment, manufacturing, agriculture and mining.

Robin said several infrastructure projects will contribute to the growth of the manufacturing sector. These include the construction of

an international airport, which is scheduled for completion in 2027 and the expansion and rehabilitation of the Woodbridge Bay Deepwater Harbour to boost and facilitate tourism and cargo expansive related activities.

The construction of a new Marina at Cabrits Marina at Portsmouth, and development of two new main roads, as well as rehabilitation of existing road infrastructure around the island, will also significantly boost the island’s infrastructure.

The DMA President said there is substantial underutilized real estate infrastructure, administered by the government through the Agricultural Industrial and Development Bank in Portsmouth, Grandbay and the Canefield Industrial Estate.

He is advocating for more manufacturing production to be located in these facilities. In addition, there are several government and privately owned properties which are available, which he feels should be acquired to expand manufacturing.

The island’s main exports include soaps, seamoss beverages, sand, cigarettes, rum, furniture, water, herbal teas, coconut water and agricultural produce, including plantains, dasheen, cucumbers, mangoes, yams and pineapples.

Robin said investment is needed for the production of herbal teas, beverages, condiments and sauces, pharmaceuticals and hair and skin products.

There is also scope to increase furniture, craft items, and to produce packaging materials, including through joint ventures.

Robin said investment is also needed to expand the production of bottled water for both domestic consumption



John Robin
DMA President

and exports. “We also have an abundance of clean, fresh and salt water, coupled with a pristine all-encompassing natural environment. That’s why we are known as the nature island of the Caribbean.”

Robin said various packing houses have been constructed and are engaged to a limited extent in packaging fresh produce for export. “However, the management and marketing mandate, budget focus and strategy need to be revitalized. Similar proposals are being considered for the setting up of processing units to where various manufacturers can have their products processed according to international standards and thereafter exported to various markets – locally, regionally and internationally.”

The DMA President said there is a high level of food imports in Dominica and the rest of the region, which can be reduced through collaboration between governments and the private sector, and with the necessary incentives and infrastructure. He stressed that a new mindset on local versus foreign goods is needed.

Robin believes the island’s location in the center of the Caribbean, deep and secure port facilities, and a favourable government fiscal

Dominica Manufacturers Association

incentive programme are some of the reasons why potential investors should consider Dominica for new manufacturing projects.

Other advantages include regular shipping from Dominica to and from most Caribbean islands, North America and South America, as well as Europe and other international markets. Another asset is the educated and trainable workforce. The Dominican entrepreneur said there are numerous possibilities to expand exports to North and South America. To achieve this, the DMA is addressing issues such as economies of scale, supply chain logistics, compliance, certification, cost of production and innovation.

“Dominica is the ideal location for manufacturing and processing that would make use of its bountiful natural resources and skilled workforce,” Robin stated.

The Government offers duty-free concessions on imported machinery and equipment, packaging and manufacturing inputs through its fiscal incentive programme. Foreign investors are entitled to 100% repatriation of profits, no capital gains tax and tax holidays up to 10-20 years.

The Dominican entrepreneur said there is tremendous potential for backward and forward linkages between agriculture and manufacturing in the Dominica ecosystem. Robin said his company, Benjo’s Seamoss, which employs organic farming practices, is an example of this. The company is the largest drinks exporter from Dominica, with most of the product being shipped to 20 countries in the Caribbean and worldwide.

Robin said Dominica can take advantage of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) by scaling up its manufacturing to allow it to access the markets of all member states and benefit from the advantage of the duty-free access available.



Pictured during a Trinidad trade mission to Dominica are from left DMA President John Robin, Permanent Secretary Gloria Joseph of Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago Minister of Trade and Industry Senator Paula Gopee-Scoon.

“As one of the six current and founding members of the Caribbean Manufacturers Association, Dominica can channel its concerns to implement policy changes through the available channels of CMA, followed by the CARICOM Private Sector Organization and the CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development – COTED.”

The DMA will also be trying to use the provisions in the various trade agreements to secure funding through the European Development Fund (EDF) to retool and revitalize its manufacturing sector.

On linkages with the tourism industry, he said the DMA plans to reopen its one-stop shop, where practically all products manufactured in Dominica can be purchased by tourists as well as the general public. “Such products include local basketry from the indigenous Caribs known as carenagos, art and craft, paintings and a host of highly sought-after locally manufactured products.”

The DMA’s participation in the 2025 Barbados trade expo afforded the opportunity to showcase several of the products manufactured in Dominica. “Similarly, it simultaneously allowed Dominica to see the numerous offerings presented by the Bajan innovators. Most importantly, several invaluable connections were established, which will serve to significantly increase the volume of

trade between both of our countries,” Robin reported.

He feels the CMA is important because it encourages and promotes intra-OECS and CARICOM trade and its members collaborate on regional and international related trade-related issues.

“CMA is serving as a formidable voice to advocate on behalf of manufacturers in the region. The association will also empower CSME manufacturers and traders with knowledge and skills to enable them to adopt and adhere to sound global quality standard requirements.”

Robin said the regional association will also serve as an educational platform to educate manufacturers and the private sector on a whole, on emerging developments, laws and trade conventions, critical for effective operation in a highly competitive, globalized environment.

As DMA President, he was instrumental in registering the CMA with the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO) and establishing a manufacturing committee within the CPSO.

Robin said the CMA should assist the smaller manufacturing associations with securing funding, technical assistance, and training to help their secretariats to be more effective, increase their membership, and equip them to provide more assistance to manufacturers to increase their production and exports.

World Trade Centre Georgetown Forging Regional and Global Trade Alliances

The World Trade Centre Georgetown (WTCG) has been strengthening ties with a number of regional and international organisations in the lead up to its official launch in October.

The building that houses the Centre in downtown Georgetown was commissioned by Guyana's President, His Excellency Irfaan Ali, in June.

Discussions held in 2025 include talks in Barbados with Ambassador Wayne McCook, CARICOM Assistant Secretary-General, CARICOM Single Market and Trade, officials of the Shridath Ramphal Centre for International Trade Law, Policy and Services, and The West Indies Rum and Spirits Producers Association (WIRSPA).

Discussions were held recently with a 45-member group organized by Procolombia.

A WTCG delegation participated last year in Caribbean Legislative Week in Washington D.C., which included meetings with members of Congress and the U.S. State Department.

WTCG Executive Director Wesley Kirton said there have been several follow up discussions in 2025 with World Trade Centers in Miami, Florida, Santo Domingo and Bangalore, India. The meetings centred mainly on market access and the regulatory framework for exports from Guyana such as Phyto-sanitary measures.

Kirton noted that WTCG, with Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL), and its subsidiaries in the DDL Group, is connected with a network of World Trade Center Association's more



President Irfaan Ali speaking at the commissioning of the World Trade Centre Georgetown.

than one million members across more than 100 countries. The WTCG is chaired by DDL Executive Chairman Komal Samaroo.

Priorities for 2026 include sensitization seminars on current trade issues and training programmes designed to help Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) improve operations, standards, profitability, and sustainability.



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MANUFACTURING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Country	Opportunities Include:
Guyana https://www.guyanainvest.gov.gy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processing fruits, coconut, rice, and spices • Packaged and prepared foods, dehydrated snacks, and packaged fruits and vegetables • Cold chain and storage infrastructure, including modern refrigeration facilities and warehousing • Modular fabrication, steelworks, cement, chemicals, paints, and the assembly of service equipment
Trinidad and Tobago https://www.investt.co.tt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ready-to-eat meals, health-conscious snacks, and ethnic Caribbean cuisine for diaspora markets • Renewable energy components; alcoholic beverages • Pulp, paper and packaging products • Recycling Plastics; PET, HDPE into renewable plastic resins • Construction materials, petrochemical derivatives such as the production of fertilizers
Jamaica https://www.dobusinessjamaica.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agro-processing, specifically for ackee, breadfruit and coconut • Packaging materials • Cleaning agents and household products • Industrial chemicals • Nutraceuticals and cosmetics
Barbados https://www.investbarbados.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agro-processing products • Food and beverage manufacturing, including for cruise passengers • Cosmetics and pharmaceuticals • High fashion apparel • Leather products • Medical Devices
Saint Lucia https://www.investstlucia.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of juices, jams, and jellies; seamoss products • Natural Soaps from coconuts and other botanicals • Niche garments including school uniforms, hospitality and corporate attire • Packaging materials • Chemicals, plastics, and rubber • Lumber and wood products
Dominica https://www.investdominica.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Herbal Teas • Condiments and sauces • Beverages and bottled water • Pharmaceuticals • Furniture and Craft Items • Hair and skin products

Ambassador Wayne McCook is the Assistant Secretary-General, CARICOM Single Market and Trade. He heads the Directorate that is responsible for the CARICOM Single Market and Trade, including trade negotiations.

He is a former Jamaican Diplomat who served as Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, and as Permanent Representative to the United Nations' Offices at Geneva and the World Trade Organisation where he chaired the Rules Negotiating Group.

Caribbean Business and Travel (CBT) spoke with Ambassador McCook about the CSME, regional and international trade agreements, which were negotiated by CARICOM and other trade-related initiatives.



Ambassador Wayne McCook

CBT: Barbados Prime Minister Hon. Mia Mottley has stressed that the resumption of the full implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) is central to the region's mission to advance regional unity and development. Please explain the status and key benefits of the CSME.

WM: The goal of the CSME is to promote growth and development in the Caribbean Community through the creation of a single economic space that allows for the Free Movement of Goods, Capital, Services, CARICOM Nationals and the Right of Establishment. These are the five core regimes of the CSME. The four pillars of CARICOM regional integration are Economic Integration; Foreign Policy Coordination; Human and Social Development; and Security.

The CSME delivers benefits by providing a larger preferential market and economic space that facilitates integration of production, investment, movement of goods and services and establishment of businesses. The free movement of skills has supported the movement of talent within the region to meet the demands of regional businesses and provide expanded employment opportunities for Community Nationals.

Free Movement in the Community has

been given a significant push with the agreement by four Member States to implement full free movement among themselves from October 1, 2025. These Members are Barbados, Belize, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. At the same time, the Free Movement of Skills regime, which will continue for all Members for some time, has been expanded to include Aviation workers as a thirteenth category.

Significant steps to advance regional production integration are bearing fruit through the 25 by 25 plus 5 Initiative which will be complemented quite soon by the long-awaited CARICOM Industrial Policy 2030, which was presented to the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) in June.

CBT: Can you sum up how the CSME benefits the region's exporters and are they taking full advantage of it?

WM: The integration of production linking inputs from different Member States is taking place and delivering benefits for primary and intermediate producers in the region. There is significant room for the expansion of these arrangements through innovation and investments. These initiatives will benefit from the Free Movement of Skills and

Rights of Establishment that are well established under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, as well as the preferences and flexibilities in the preferential trade regime that underpins the CSME. The benefits are augmented by the network of trade arrangements such as the EU and U.K. EPAs, the DR and Costa Rica FTAs, and CARIBCAN and the CBI, which expand preferential market access to reach a combined market of over one billion people. The full activation of the CARICOM Interactive Market Place and Suspension Procedure (CimSuPro), a dedicated platform connecting regional producers, manufacturers and consumers, will support regional companies seeking to source and supply goods across all sectors more efficiently.

CBT: How is Trade in Services being addressed in both the Single Market and Bilateral Agreements?

WM: While services can be traded freely across the Community, there are regulatory requirements that have to be met in different jurisdictions within the Region. Work to harmonise requirements and facilitate mutual recognition, creating a single, seamless space for Services is a regional priority.

CARICOM's bilateral agreements established with the EU and the U.K.

CARICOM TRADE AGREEMENTS

have chapters addressing trade in services.

CARICOM and the U.S. have also established a Joint Work Programme on Trade in Services, which aims to identify opportunities for expanding services trade with the U.S. and to address barriers that limit growth in this area. CARICOM and Canada have recognized the importance of their services sectors in the ongoing bilateral discussions regarding deeper cooperation in trade and economic relations. CARICOM is preparing for future work that could add services trade to the scope of the Costa Rica and DR agreements.

CBT: Why is the Single Market important for potential investors who are looking to provide capital for projects in the productive sector in the Caribbean?

WM: An enlarged integrated market for goods and services within the CSME, further expanding market access to wider markets through bilateral trade agreements, provides investors with greater opportunities to enhance returns from investments. Opportunities for integration of production across the value chain are enhanced through the enabling environment provided by the single market.

The progressive harmonisation of standards and business practices across the CSME reduces the burdens and risks of cross-border business activities.

CBT: Can you update us on discussions to enhance energy security in the region?

WM: The Ministers responsible for Energy will meet later this year to address key strategic priorities relating to Regional Energy Security. The CARICOM Secretariat and



From left, Ambassador McCook, CARICOM Secretary-General Dr. Carla Barnett and the Barbados Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Hon. Kerrie Symmonds.

the Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CCREEE) are also developing the Regional Energy Security Roadmap and Strategy. This is part of a broader initiative to enhance energy security across the region by increasing energy production, lowering energy costs, and boosting resilience.

CBT: Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) have been a major impediment to increasing intra-regional trade. What action is being taken to reduce or eliminate these?

WM: The July 2025 CARICOM summit mandated a Ministerial team led by the Ministers responsible for Trade of Barbados, Jamaica, and St. Lucia to lead an expedited effort to identify NTBs on which urgent action will be taken by the Community. This will build on progress already made through the adoption of the agriculture food and health safety policy, now being implemented to facilitate enhanced preparation and marketing of products to ensure they are safe and in keeping with standards for public consumption. The regional electronic agriculture market information system is now being deployed to improve

information sharing regarding agriculture supplies across the region. The region is also moving to launch a pre-clearance mechanism that allows for improved efficiency in trading in October this year.

The CARICOM Regional Trade Facilitation Task Force, guided by the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA), is also advancing work to streamline trade and customs procedures, reduce barriers and improve efficiency across the regional trading system.

CBT: Why it is timely for producers and businesses in the region to be aware and take advantage of the various CARICOM accords?

WM: Of the seven trade agreements signed by the region, five are within the hemisphere. This probably reflects the region's interest in developing its trade relationships with its developing country neighbours. As many of these were negotiated some time ago, the scope of products is limited to those that were of priority interest at the time. CARICOM producers have not taken full advantage of the market access opportunities provided by these agreements and dedicated

consultations to address this are now underway.

An Expert Working Group will also be focusing on studies for key South-South potential partners, which could be engaged as part of this strategic move to diversify trade partnerships.

CBT: Regarding the uncertainties arising from the America First policy and changing tariffs, what advice can you give to regional producers exporting to that market?

WM: The Community, working closely with the CARICOM Private Sector Organisation (CPSO) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), has examined the impact of the current measures and concluded that while the baseline tariff does not place CARICOM producers automatically at a disadvantage to the Rest of the World, it will have a negative impact on some of our key exports in areas such as seafood, rum and sugar. CARICOM will seek to secure the best possible market access terms for entry into the U.S. market. This will begin with an effort to restore Caribbean Basin Initiatives (CBI) benefits recognizing, that the U.S. has formally requested a WTO waiver for its extension.

Also being addressed is the impact on the Caribbean of proposed measures to address Chinese Shipping and Shipbuilding, which led to exemptions and modifications that safeguarded the region's interests.

CARICOM's further engagement with the U.S., which maintains a significant trade surplus with the region, is being guided by the recommendations of the Prime Ministerial Subcommittee on External Trade Negotiations.

CBT: Now that a trade agreement with Canada that entails reciprocal duty-free access is no longer

on the table and a new dialogue has started, what can regional producers exporting to Canada and Canadian companies interested in starting new ventures in the region expect?

WM: Canada continues to provide the region with preferential access to its market for many products unilaterally, covered by a waiver from the World Trade Organisation. Under CARIBCAN, several important tariff lines are eligible for duty-free exports to Canada.

In response to recent geopolitical developments, Canada has moved to reduce intra-provincial barriers to trade within Canada and is actively seeking to diversify its trade relations. At the CARICOM Canada Summit in October 2023, and in the ongoing bilateral discussions in the framework of the CARICOM-Canada Strategic Partnership, CARICOM and Canada have stressed commitment to enhancing co-operation on trade and investment.

CBT: The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union was completed in 2008. What are some of the benefits exporters from the region can continue to enjoy and some of the issues being considered for the current review of this accord?

WM: Access to the European market for goods produced in the region is now fully duty-free and quota-free, except for Arms and Ammunition. The rules of origin that determine which products qualify for duty-free treatment, allow for cumulation with products from EU States (including the OCTs), CARIFORUM States, neighbouring States (Central American States, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Venezuela) and any ACP State with which the EU has an appropriate agreement. The European

Market is an important destination for rum, alumina, petroleum, cocoa, and condiments and seasonings.

Regional exporters have not been able to take full advantage of the benefits of the EPA. The ability to source quality inputs and products from neighbouring States, or from within the EU, at low cost, add value within the region and export duty-free into the EU is still a significant opportunity. In addition, the development cooperation and technology transfer provisions, and improved access for service providers in key sectors of interest, for example, the provision of business services, are waiting to be exploited.

The main issues of concern with the agreement are converting market access into a meaningful market presence, and the preference erosion for the region's traditional agricultural exports as a result of the European Union concluding trade agreements with third countries. There is also low awareness of EPA opportunities both in the EU and CARIFORUM.

CBT: Please provide some feedback on the CARIFORUM agreement with the United Kingdom.

WM: The CARIFORUM Agreement with the United Kingdom is a mirror of the Agreement with Europe, as it was in effect negotiated when the U.K. was still a part of Europe.

While regional producers have better transport arrangements with the U.K. than with continental Europe and are more familiar with the quality requirements of the U.K. market, we still have not seen the growth in the value of trade that we could potentially achieve. Many of the challenges and opportunities are the same as with our EPA with Europe.

CARICOM TRADE AGREEMENTS

CBT: CARICOM has agreements with South and Central American countries. Can you list the key elements of the trade accord with Colombia and how this is being utilised?

WM: Key provisions of the Agreement with Colombia address trade liberalization, rules of origin, technical standards, trade promotion and financing, services, transportation, and unfair trade practices. Additional articles cover economic and technical cooperation, private sector engagement, and dispute resolution. Colombia is the fourth-largest economy in Latin America, worth over a trillion U.S. dollars at purchasing power parity. There is significant room to grow our trade with that market.

CBT: Are we taking advantage of the CARICOM-Costa Rica Trade Agreement?

WM: The Free Trade Agreement between CARICOM and Costa Rica allows for free trade or preferential access for a wide range of products, excluding sensitive goods. Most tariffs have been eliminated or phased out. However, duties remain on certain items, including meat, dairy products, some fruits and vegetables, beer, rum, and a few manufactured goods such as Portland cement, candles, and some furniture.

CARICOM has consistently run a trade deficit with Costa Rica and has not fully capitalised on the agreement's potential.

CBT: What is the scope of the reciprocal Free Trade Agreement with the Dominican Republic?

WM: This accord aims to strengthen economic ties through the liberalization of trade in goods and services; the promotion and facilitation of investments; trade

financing and economic cooperation; agreements on double taxation and government procurement; the protection of intellectual property rights; and support for private sector development.

There are phased tariff reductions, and based on the terms of the agreement, some CARICOM States (LDCs), whose exports benefit from preferential treatment in the Dominican Republic market are not required to grant preferential access to products originating in the Dominican Republic on entry into their territory.

CBT: How is the CARICOM - Cuba Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement being utilized?

WM: The Agreement with Cuba addresses a wide range of subjects, including the promotion and expansion of trade in goods and services; the establishment of financial arrangements to support two-way trade; the progressive liberalization of trade in services; the encouragement and protection of investments; the facilitation of joint ventures and other economic cooperation activities.

Despite the broad scope of the Agreement, only the tariff liberalisation provisions are currently being implemented. Under these provisions, both CARICOM and Cuban exporters benefit from preferential access for specific products. Similar to the DR and Costa Rica Agreements, CARICOM's Less Developed Countries (LDCs) are not required to extend these preferences to Cuba.

CBT: For many years, efforts have been made to establish a CARICOM Investment Code to provide a level playing field when it comes to investors doing

business in the region. Is this still on cards and what are the anticipated benefits?

WM: Yes, we are working on an investment code to accompany an updated CARICOM Investment Policy. The Code will simplify and standardize the processes for approvals when investing across the Community, while at the same time safeguarding the rights of investors.

In the end, there should be measures in place that incentivize intraregional investment, promote foreign investment flows, and allow CARICOM businesses to pursue strategic alliances, grow and achieve the scale they need to eventually become internationally competitive.

CBT: In terms of significantly improving air and sea transportation of goods within and outside the region, what initiatives in this regard are being addressed in collaboration with the CPSO?

WM: Cooperation in regional air transport has been enhanced through the operationalization of the Multilateral Air Services Agreement (MASA). Twelve Member States have signed and ratified the Agreement. This Agreement provides the regulatory framework within which a CARICOM air carrier can provide air transport services between Member States.

At the moment, eight air carrier services and one helicopter service have been designated under the MASA.

On maritime transportation, work is continuing by a public-private sector team on the establishment of the Southern Caribbean Intra-Regional fast Ferry Service.