

Food System Transformation Pathway for Jamaica

April 9-10, 2026

An Overview of Jamaica's Food System

Jamaica is the largest island in the English-Speaking Caribbean with a population of approximately 2.7M people. Owing to its geographic location as a Small Island Developing State, and its tropical climate, the island is vulnerable to numerous natural hazards such as, tropical storms, hurricanes, floods, landslides and droughts and has seen an increase in the worsening of these patterns over the past 20 years.

Jamaica has great potential for increasing its own food production, greater utilization of locally produced staples, creating more nutritious local varieties and the reintroduction of underutilized foods.

This potential for growth was evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, at which time, whilst there was a decline in performance experienced during this period, the agricultural systems were robust enough to resume growth, so soon as the pandemic pressures began to ease. Consequently, the agriculture sector experienced growth for all four (4) quarters of the 2022 calendar year.

As part of the process to transform the food systems for Jamaica, the following are the four (4) areas of focus under what we have dubbed the F.A.C.E of food and these together shape our pathway. They are namely:

- Food Security – Food and Nutrition Security
- Agribusiness Development – Inclusive and Viable Agribusiness and Agro-Industries
- Climate Resilience/Adaption - Climate Smart Technologies
- Export Expansion – Market Driven Agriculture and Fisheries

Food Security – Food and Nutrition Security

This involves the promotion of increased domestic food production and the regulating of food to ensure consistent supply of safe and nutritious food for the public. Over the years, productivity has been adversely impacted by several factors, such as low investment in agriculture, adverse weather conditions, lack of adequate technological solutions, and lack of adequate irrigation services. We aim to address these challenges with the view to replace by 15% food imports with local production by 2025; to increase by at least 40% the production of select food items domestic consumption and targeted exports markets within four years.

Progress Made

1. Which concrete policy, programme, or investment has delivered the most visible results so far, and why has it been effective?

The combined investment of approximately US\$98 million for the Essex Valley Agriculture Development Project (EVADP) and the Southern Plains Agricultural Development Project (SPADP) represents a major multi-billion Jamaican dollar initiative funded primarily by the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Partnership Fund (UKCIF) and administered by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB).

Through this project the Ministry is well advanced in providing approximately 1610 Ha lands with irrigation. 700Ha have already received water through the project with the remaining 56% expected to receive water through the pipelines within this financial year.

Through the EVADP, the country now has access to 3 cold storage units totaling 4,527 m³. In addition, the country received retrofitted cold storage of approximately 800m³ through the New-Zealand CARICOM BOOST

Project. The increased production will help the country to have produce in storage during periods of glut for periods of scarcity.

The projects are expected to contribute to food security and the agricultural sector's modernization by expanding the area under formal irrigation by 50 per cent, improve the social and economic prospects of farm families.

Bottle Necks

Despite measurable progress since UNFSS, Jamaica continues to face significant challenges that threaten the pace and sustainability of food systems transformation. Climate shocks remain the most immediate and disruptive risk, with hurricanes, floods, and droughts causing repeated damage to crops, infrastructure, and livelihoods.

Infrastructure and procurement delays, particularly in large-scale projects such as irrigation, slow the translation of policy into impact. Limited access to finance, technology, and insurance continues to constrain small farmers and agri-entrepreneurs, while rising input costs reduce profitability.

Additionally, high food import dependence exposes the country to external price shocks and foreign exchange pressures. Institutional capacity and coordination, while improving, still require strengthening to ensure efficient implementation and monitoring across agencies.

These challenges highlight that transformation is not linear and that gains can be quickly eroded without sustained investment and adaptive strategies. Recognizing and addressing these constraints is essential for maintaining momentum and ensuring that progress since UNFSS leads to long-term resilience rather than short-term recovery.

An additional bottle neck is the development of key policies such as:

- Youth in Agriculture Policy
- National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy
- Organic Agriculture Policy
- Food and Nutrition Policy

Priority Intervention

Looking ahead to 2030, Jamaica's food systems transformation agenda is focused on clear and measurable priorities. Key targets include reducing food imports by 15 percent through increased local production, boosting output of selected crops by at least 40 percent, and scaling up climate-smart technologies and irrigation.

Achieving these goals will require sustained public investment, stronger private sector engagement, and enhanced access to finance for farmers and agri-businesses.

Additionally, it is critical that we expand access to digital tools, extension services, and the utilization of data-driven decision-making in order to improve productivity and resilience. Jamaica could benefit from funding and Technical Corporations that will see to the implementation of these initiatives.

The effectiveness of these initiatives are policy guided and Jamaica. Jamaica could benefit from funding to assist in the development and revision of these policies.

Greater emphasis will also be placed on nutrition outcomes, ensuring that increased production translates into healthier diets for all Jamaicans. One approach is through the SDG Joint Programme on Digital Transformation for Education led by the UN Resident Coordinators. This programme

seeks to improve how schools track student attendance, behaviour, nutrition & academic progress.

Strengthening partnerships with development agencies and regional institutions will help mobilize technical and financial support. The experience since UNFSS shows that progress is possible even under difficult conditions, but it must be accelerated and protected against future shocks.

By maintaining focus on the F.A.C.E pathway and prioritizing resilience, inclusion, and sustainability, Jamaica can continue advancing toward a transformed food system that supports national development and food security goals.