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Foundation for world agriculture and rurality

Agriculture in the Guianas: the challenge of food sovereignty



WHITE PAPER

White Paper

Agriculture in the Guianas: the challenge of food sovereignty

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PLATEAU DES GUYANES

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Foreword

THE GUIANA SHIELD: A CROSSROADS OF HERITAGE AND NEW AGRICULTURAL HORIZONS

The Amazon is a unique region, characterised by its history, its peoples, its ecosystems, and the dynamics at play within it. The Guiana Shield is a perfect illustration of this: French Guiana, Suriname and the Brazilian state of Amapá share agricultural, food, economic and environmental challenges that extend far beyond their borders.

Over the past two years, the FARM Foundation has been conducting a forward-looking study on the future of agriculture in this region, at the request of some of its partners. First, a mission was conducted to French Guiana in July 2025, followed by a seminar with local stakeholders to launch the Plateau de Guyane (Guiana Shield) project at the end of the year. Working alongside SAFER Guyane, Crédit Agricole Martinique Guyane, and the French Guiana Chamber of Agriculture, we sought to listen to local stakeholders and bring together different perspectives to identify pathways for the future.

This project addresses a two-fold imperative: to strengthen an agricultural sector that remains too fragile in the face of a rapidly growing population, and to reduce structural food dependency. It compels us to look beyond French Guiana, as the food and agricultural challenges of the Guiana Shield are, by their very nature, cross-border in scope. Food sovereignty is not to be confused with a quest for total self-sufficiency, which would be hardly compatible with an open world characterised by climate change, market volatility, and the interdependence of territories. Rather, it refers to the collective capacity to understand and manage one's dependencies, diversify supply sources, strengthen local supply chains, and maintain margins – a term that requires further clarification given its ambiguity in the context of future developments.

This White Paper represents the first step in this transformation. It highlights shared challenges such as stable food supply, the development and promotion of local production, value creation within supply chains, and the preservation of exceptional ecosystems. Above all, it raises questions that no single organisation can answer on its own: How can we reconcile population growth with agricultural development? How can we develop economic models that are compatible with the preservation of ecosystems? How can we strengthen cross-border cooperation?



FARM's mission is to help foster collective responses. By providing independent expertise, facilitating dialogue between stakeholders, and promoting the sharing of knowledge, **we aim to inform decision-making, disseminate experiences, and help develop solutions tailored to the realities on the ground.** This goal is based on a simple conviction: sustainable change can only be achieved in partnership with those who live and work in agriculture every day.

« This White Paper is therefore not a conclusion but rather an invitation to continue the dialogue and to move from knowledge to action. »

Pascal Lheureux
President of the FARM Foundation

Preface

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE IN AN AMAZONIAN REGION

This White Paper, translated to English as 'Agriculture in French Guiana: the challenge of food sovereignty,' is the result of ambitious and remarkable work.

It is ambitious because it aims to provide a cross-cutting analysis of a vast region, largely dominated by a forested area of exceptional biological richness shared by three countries. Owing to its geographical characteristics and natural landscapes, farming is practised in a limited portion of this vast area. It includes insular agricultural systems that lack agri-food processing facilities, and where the informal sector accounts for a considerable share of the economy. The fact that the region is shared between three countries—each with contrasting economies— has enabled this study to make insightful comparisons and to illustrate the specific characteristics of French Guiana in relation to its neighbours.

The ambition of this study is commensurate with the region's strategic importance, particularly French Guiana for France and Europe. The agricultural and food economy, together with the pursuit of greater self-sufficiency, form a pillar of social and geopolitical stability in the Guiana Shield and French Guiana, which is crucial to European independence in the aerospace sector. In fact, Kourou is a strategic site for European space launch capabilities due to its proximity to the equator.

This is an outstanding paper, marked by both its analytical rigour and the quality of its proposals. The research was based on an in-depth analysis of the literature and available databases, as well as on meetings with stakeholders on the ground, enabling the collection of information, the exchange of ideas and the consolidation of hypotheses. Finally, discussions with FARM's scientific advisory board allowed for a thorough debate on all aspects of this White Paper.

The detailed analysis explores several key drivers for French Guiana. The first of these is land. Faced with the paradox of a vast territory where land remains difficult to access, the priority must be to secure land that has already been cleared and to recognise the land rights and traditional uses of indigenous communities.



The paper then turns its attention to stakeholder training and support. Any technical education provided must be adapted to the realities of tropical soils and the equatorial climate, which differ significantly from those in metropolitan areas. This requires integrating agroecology, re-examined in the light of the challenges posed by the changing equatorial climate, and establishing stable local advisory teams.

The paper also proposes a shift in government support. The complex structure of aid must be simplified, redirecting funds to local food production and agri-food tools, while at the same time bolstering grassroots research and innovation.

Finally, the paper presents an interesting prospect: making agriculture a vehicle for cross-border cooperation. Shared challenges—such as the recent cassava disease or climate change—demonstrate that borders are no barrier to crises and that shared agricultural research constitutes an indispensable common good for the region.

In conclusion, this document serves as a valuable guide for decision-makers, elected representatives and agricultural organisations. It demonstrates that robust food sovereignty in the Guiana Shield region depends on the dual requirement of promoting the diversity of local family farming practices and building healthy, mutually agreed interdependencies with neighbouring territories.

Beyond the findings and proposals it sets out, this White Paper calls for continued dialogue between agricultural stakeholders, scientists, public decision-makers, and development partners, to translate the knowledge generated into courses of action tailored to the realities of the Guiana Shield.

Christian Huyghe
Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board, FARM Foundation

A rich yet highly-dependent territory

The Guiana Shield is often portrayed as a vast Amazonian expanse of rivers and forests, exceptionally rich in biodiversity and seemingly endowed with all the conditions needed to feed its populations in abundance. However, with population growth, the region's food supply has become increasingly dependent on imports. Shaped by its colonial history and distinct political and administrative statuses, this region has undergone profound economic transformations. The former plantation economies have given way to a mosaic of other activities: extractive industries (oil, gold, bauxite), an oversized service sector (both public and private), small-scale agricultural and industrial production outfits, and a multitude of so-called 'informal' activities which account for a considerable share of the region's economy. Farming plays a marginal role in national accounts, although it is still the heart of daily life for many rural communities.

This contradiction between considerable assets and a high degree of food dependency forms the starting point for this White Paper. This dependency is not simply a matter of agricultural backwardness: it is rooted in a history that has limited the development of solid and diversified local production foundations.

An emblematic area

The area covered by the Guiana Shield Project and by this White Paper (Suriname, French Guiana, and Amapá) does not encompass the entire Guiana Shield, but it does provide a representative picture. It features a varied geography, comprising densely populated coastlines and vast forested inland areas, as well as a mosaic of indigenous peoples, Maroon communities, and Creole, European and recent immigrant populations.

In these three territories, farming—predominantly family-run, whether subsistence-based or market-oriented—takes many different forms, reflecting a wide variety of situations, contexts, technical approaches, constraints, and environmental challenges. It faces recurring difficulties, with numerous factors hindering its development potential. These constraints include land that is difficult to access, insufficient training, support, and funding, inadequate or unsuitable infrastructure, and limited institutional recognition. Yet these farming systems also embody discreet but tangible dynamics of innovation and local and traditional practices that create genuine prospects.

This White Paper provides a structured and representative overview of farming and agri-food dynamics in the Guiana Shield. It highlights key situations and major trends, without seeking to provide an exhaustive review of all the realities of the region.

Food sovereignty: beyond self-sufficiency

In this White Paper, food sovereignty does not refer merely to a higher rate of meeting needs through local production. It refers first and foremost to the capacity of the people, communities and territories of Suriname, French Guiana and Amapá to define their own food systems: to decide what is produced, where, how and for whom, while respecting the environments, knowledge and cultures that shape them. It also refers to the capacity of governments, public institutions, and economic actors to shape their policies and strategies to reduce dependence on imports and vulnerability to external shocks by drawing on local agriculture and resources. **The paper does not aim to promote standalone systems, but rather building healthy relationships of interdependence and complementarity based on the comparative advantages of different regions and the recognition of diverse farming practices and dietary patterns.**

The aim is to make agriculture a pillar of inclusive and sustainable territorial development and a driver of regional cooperation, by giving farmers an active role in building regional food systems.

French Guiana has a special position as a strategic foothold for France and the European Union in South America. This position stems both from the global importance of Amazonian ecosystems to biodiversity and climate, and from the role of the Centre spatial guyanais (Guiana Space Centre) in ensuring Europe's autonomous access to space. Reducing French Guiana's food vulnerability is therefore not merely a sectoral objective; it is also a prerequisite for territorial stability and resilience,

and a component of France's strategic autonomy. This goal, however, calls for responses tailored to its specific social, economic and ecological characteristics, as well as to the diversity of its populations and agricultural practices. Although French Guiana is a European territory, its unique realities also place it squarely within the issues and challenges facing the Global South.

Approach and structure of the White Paper: a diagnostic framework for action

This White Paper is part of FARM's Guiana Shield project, the primary aim of which is to assess local agricultural systems with a view to developing an action plan. It aims to inform discussions among stakeholders and pursues four objectives, set out across five chapters.

- **Understanding how food dependency has developed** in relation to the agricultural and food systems and economic structures of the Guiana Shield. Chapter 1 describes the region and the area under study. Chapter 2 provides a statistical overview of agricultural production and offers an analytical characterisation of the diverse types of food dependency across the three territories.

- **Identifying the diverse agricultural practices, their main constraints, and opportunities for development.** Chapter 3 examines the main crop and livestock farming systems, and the technical, economic and environmental constraints they face.

- **Highlighting the drivers for reducing this dependence.** Chapter 4 refocuses the analysis on French Guiana and its institutional and political framework, examining land issues, training, guidance and government support, and identifying policy directions and courses of action.

- **Exploring how agriculture could become a vehicle for regional cooperation and territorial development.** Chapter 5 analyses trade, regulatory frameworks, and instruments of cooperation between French Guiana and its neighbours to shed light on the conditions for food sovereignty across the Guiana Shield.

We have combined two approaches to meet our objectives. First, an analysis of existing work (institutional reports, academic and scientific literature) and, second, direct discussions with public and private stakeholders in the agricultural sector.

There were three key moments in 2025 that shaped this work in French Guiana. The Foundation conducted both remote and in-person interviews with a diverse range of local stakeholders. On a field mission, we then explored different areas of French Guiana's coastline, observing the contrasts and similarities across the territory. This mission also provided an opportunity to engage in further discussions with local contacts. Finally, the project was officially launched at a seminar in Kourou at the end of the year. This served as a forum for sharing findings, comparing viewpoints, and formulating courses of action.

This assessment was developed with and for agricultural and rural development stakeholders. It is aimed at elected representatives, institutions responsible for public policy, agricultural organisations, producers, and agri-food processing companies.

Three multifaceted regions with shared strengths



Chapter

01

AN AMAZON MASSIF BETWEEN
WATER AND FORESTS

The Guiana Shield is like an enormous continental island in northern South America, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and bounded by the great Orinoco, Negro, and Amazon rivers. It stretches from the eastern Los Llanos region of Colombia to the Amazon delta in Brazil, encompassing a considerable portion of Venezuela, as well as the entire territories of Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. This ancient geological formation, criss-crossed by a dense network of rivers and creeks, shapes landscapes where water determines human settlements, production activities, and patterns of movement. On a global scale, this plateau is one of the last remaining large, virtually continuous tropical forest systems, and plays a key role in climate regulation and carbon storage (Europe en France 2025; FFEM 2013; WWF 2021).

The forest—which still covers the vast majority of the territory, right up to the edges of inhabited coastal areas—is home to exceptional biodiversity comprising a remarkable wealth of plant and animal species (WWF 2021). This biodiversity also constitutes a particularly rich reservoir of genetic diversity. It is found in both cultivated plants and their wild relatives and is a valuable resource for the population's nutrition and health.

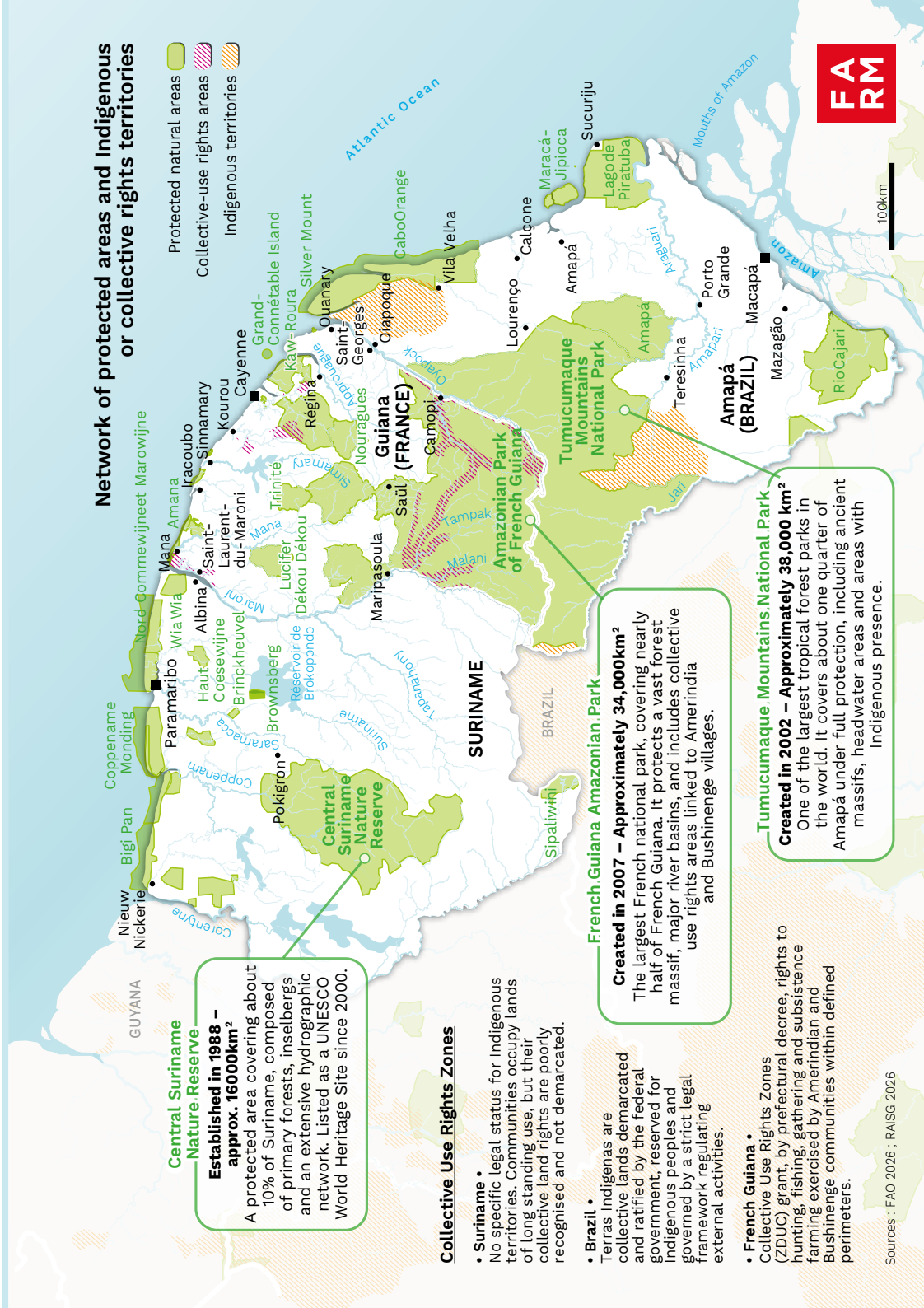
While the Guiana Shield may appear to be a coherent region from a physical geographical perspective, it is a vast mosaic in social, cultural, and historical terms. It highlights some similarities yet mainly striking contrasts that emerge as one moves through the region. Exchange and connection between the main towns remain limited, or even non-existent. A considerable proportion of the population lives in relative isolation within confined geographical areas, with limited mobility. Predominantly Amazonian in nature, the plateau falls mostly within Brazil's borders; nearly half of its area and around two-thirds of its population belong to that country.

The Guiana Shield is therefore characterised by great human diversity, the foundation of which is made up of the Amerindian peoples, the original inhabitants of these territories. For centuries, their ways of life and practices have shaped the landscapes and contributed to biodiversity management, far from the image of a natural world 'devoid of history' and challenging the notion of the 'virgin forest.'



The area addressed in this White Paper lies in the northeastern part of this region. It includes French Guiana and its two neighbours—Suriname and the Brazilian federal state of Amapá. **Although this area does not in itself encompass the entire Guiana Shield, it offers a striking illustration of it, shaped by Amazonian, Atlantic, and Caribbean influences.** The territory combines densely populated coastlines and vast forested areas, marked by a sharp contrast between coastal urban centres and inland riverside villages. Large protected areas, indigenous territories, and indigenous communities are particularly prominent. The study area represents one-fifth of the Guiana Shield's population and total surface area—estimated at 1.7 million km².

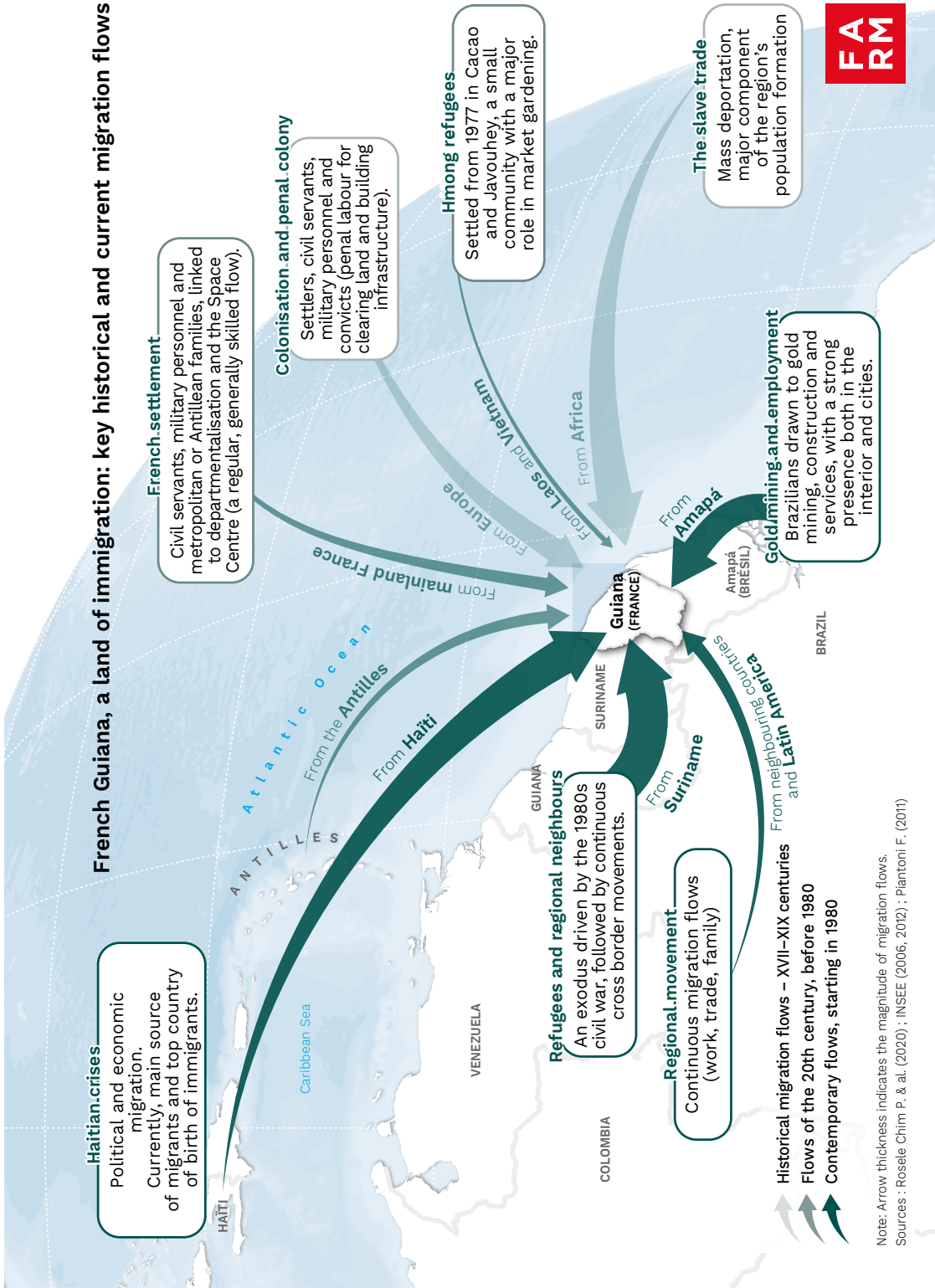
This area is unique in that it is reflective of the coexistence of two socio-cultural profiles. In the north, its Caribbean character is particularly pronounced. It stretches from the state of Delta Amacuro in Venezuela, at the mouth of the Orinoco and close to Trinidad and Tobago, and gradually fades as it crosses Guyana and then Suriname, giving way to increasingly Amazonian features, particularly pronounced in Amapá, bordered to the southeast by the Amazon River. French Guiana, situated between the two, illustrates the diversity and nuances.



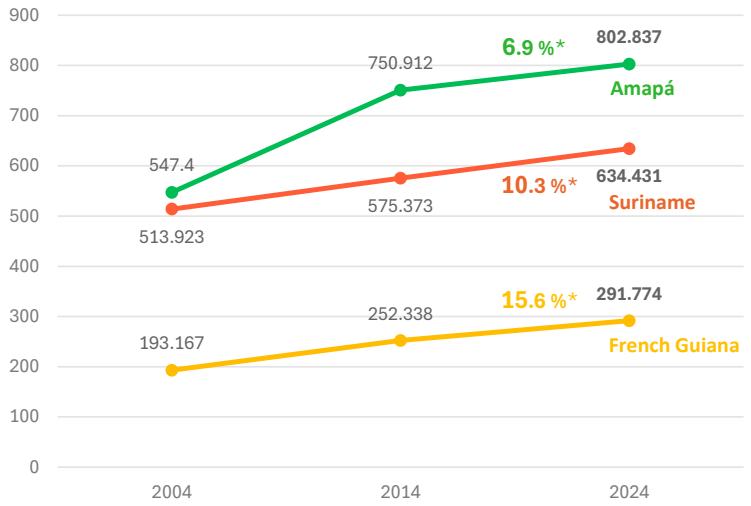
TERRITORIES SHAPED BY MIGRATION WITH **RAPIDLY GROWING POPULATIONS**

Building on this Amerindian foundation, the Guiana Shield has been shaped by successive waves of migration. The descendants of enslaved African populations who began arriving in the 17th century—some of whom went on to form Maroon communities that have long been established between Suriname and French Guiana—were joined during the 20th century by migrants from Brazil and other Latin American and Caribbean countries, notably Haiti, as well as by European nationals and Asian migrants. This wave of migration reflects a broader dynamic in which political instability, economic crises, major development projects and demand for labour have combined over decades to shape the demographics and social composition of these territories (Rosele Chim et al. 2020; Joseph 2015).

Today, the population of the area covered by this White Paper (Suriname, French Guiana, Amapá) stands at around 1.8 million, concentrated mainly in coastal areas. This is the result of sustained growth over recent decades: in the early 21st century, the three territories had a combined population of just over one million. This highlights both strong natural population growth and significant migration inflows.



SUSTAINED POPULATION GROWTH ACROSS THE THREE TERRITORIES (2004–2024)
POPULATION IN THOUSANDS AND GROWTH RATE (*) BETWEEN 2014 AND 2024



Source: *Calculations based on data from the World Bank, IGBE and INSEE*

Populations are distributed across the territory in a wide variety of ways. Alongside the coastal areas where urbanisation has taken hold, major rivers such as the Maroni and the Oyapock form corridors of movement and where socio-cultural dynamics and economic trade flourish. River boundaries and waterways facilitate mobility and trade, linking towns and villages rather than separating them.

THREE TERRITORIES WITH **DISTINCT POLITICAL STATUS**

Alongside this biophysical and socio-cultural diversity lies an equally contrasting political and administrative dimension. The Guiana Shield encompasses entities of different natures, each shaped by a recent colonial past. Suriname—a former Dutch colony—has been a sovereign state since 1975. French Guiana, long administered as a colony, became an overseas department in 1946, and subsequently a territorial collectivity of the French Republic. Amapá, a Brazilian federal state with roots in Portuguese colonisation, remained attached to other administrative entities for many years before attaining its current status in 1988.

These territories are all located on the periphery, which imposes numerous constraints. French Guiana and Amapá are situated thousands of kilometres from the main decision-making centres and economic hubs of their respective states (Paris, Brasilia, São Paulo). In Suriname, as in French Guiana and Amapá, the low population density also emphasises the peripheral nature of vast swathes of territory, characterised by isolation and poor connections to the urbanised coastlines and major cities (Paramaribo, Cayenne, Macapá) where economic activity and administrative and political decision-making are concentrated.

Differences in political and administrative status result in distinct modes of governance, which directly influence the way in which each territory addresses food dependency. Suriname enjoys, at least formally, full sovereignty to shape its agricultural policies and determine the terms of its participation in regional and international trade. French Guiana and the state of Amapá operate within national legal frameworks that place tighter restrictions on their room for manoeuvre.

Amapá, like French Guiana, is a sub-national entity, but its reality is vastly different. Despite its peripheral position within Brazil, Amapá is fully integrated into Amazonia and Latin American. Although it is the only Brazilian state without road links to the rest of the country, Amapá is highly influenced by several major Amazon centres such as Belém and Manaus, which exert their economic and demographic influence across the region. As an outermost region of the European Union, French Guiana is notable in that it is more isolated from the EU's political centre, being separated from mainland France by an ocean. This unique situation makes it hard to compare the country with other French regions or with its immediate neighbours on the continent.

The fact that French Guiana is a European territory has kept it isolated it from its regional environment thus far. Its different status and the fact that it does not belong to a South American state, complicate cross-border and international cooperation. Yet exchanges do exist and are developing daily, driven by proximity and local dynamics. French Guiana represents an opportunity for France and Europe to strengthen their relations with South America across a range of issues. Despite the inertia of institutional frameworks, changes are still possible to better address food security challenges by supporting sustainable production and economic dynamics rooted in the local areas.

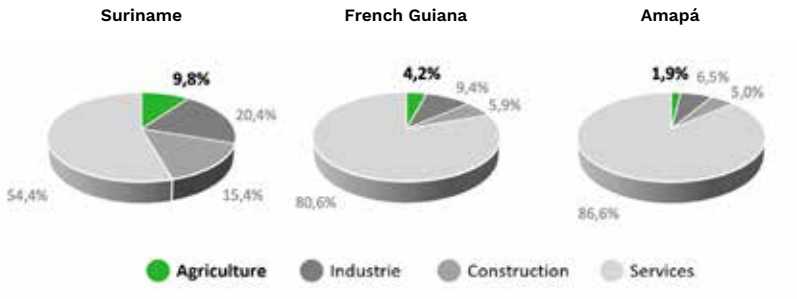


FRAGILE PRODUCTION STRUCTURES AND **RENT-BASED ECONOMIES**

Another defining feature of these territories is the stark contrast between economic realities. These range from highly capitalised and technologically advanced sectors (the space industry in French Guiana, offshore oil extraction in Suriname) to subsistence activities—often artisanal or even rudimentary—relying largely on the labour of communities living in the forest or along rivers.

A considerable proportion of these activities is reflected in official statistics as they form part of the informal economy, which is difficult to assess, regulate or support through public policy. While not always synonymous with precariousness, they often reflect situations of self-sufficiency, where people live from hand to mouth, on the fringes of formal economic circuits. Given their scale, these activities contribute significantly to the overall economy, although their contribution to value added and tax revenue remains limited. In these regions, as is often the case in the Global South, the formal economy can be perceived as complex, costly and restrictive due to the administrative procedures and tax obligations involved. These factors exclude a large chunk of the population and economic actors, particularly those with more limited technical or economic resources. This hinders the ability to establish sound and sustainable development pathways. Cette situation freine la possibilité de structurer des trajectoires de développement solides et durables.

SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL VALUE ADDED
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL VALUE ADDED, AVERAGE 2013–2022

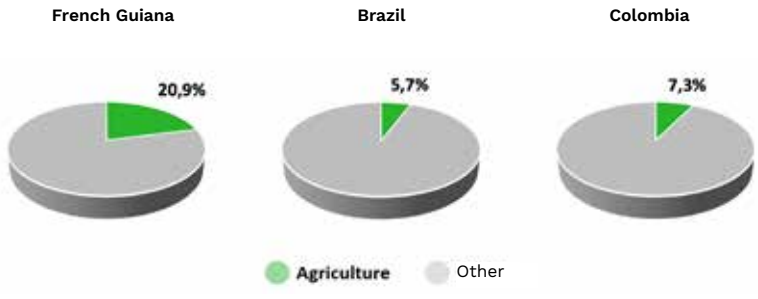


Source : *Calculations based on data from the World Bank (WDI), INSEE and IBGE*

The economies of Suriname, French Guiana, and Amapá, which are comparable in scale, remain modest. They are linked to populations that, though still relatively small, are expanding rapidly and confronting structural constraints that limit the diversification of their productive sectors. These include weak purchasing power, limited domestic markets, high production and transport costs, isolation, and a lack of infrastructure. Population growth has brought increased dependence on imports, without the corresponding development of production capacity. Agricultural enterprises, the vast majority of which are small-scale, lack the capacity to meet demand. Industrial activities are limited and often artisanal in nature, scattered, and poorly organised into sectors.

At the same time, the service sector plays a dominant role in value creation and employment. Market-based services rely predominantly on low-productivity activities—retail, transport, hotels and catering—rather than on high value-added sectors. Non-market services, particularly the public sector, play a vital role, with public sector employment and expenditure on health and education accounting for a significant share; in many municipalities, these constitute the main economic driver.

AGRICULTURE IN OTHER ECONOMIES ON THE CONTINENT
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL VALUE ADDED, AVERAGE 2013–2022



Source : *Calculations based on data from the World Bank (WDI), INSEE and IBGE*

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of French Guiana, estimated at around $5.5 billion in 2022 (INSEE), relies mainly on services, particularly the space industry and the public sector. The former, while bringing significant economic benefits, remains concentrated within a limited geographical area and has a minor impact on the rest of the economy. Beyond jobs and direct investment, it supports a range of related activities—such as technical services and logistics—with an estimated overall impact of around 15% of GDP. The public sector accounts for nearly a third of GDP, driven by government bodies, public operators, and financial transfers from mainland France (IEDOM 2024; IEDOM 2026).

The gold sector contributes significantly to exports, but coexists with large-scale illegal gold panning, a considerable proportion of which transits through Suriname. Gold's contribution to the formal economy remains limited, yet the environmental and security impacts associated with clandestine activities are significant. As for agriculture and industry, they continue to play a marginal role, with a productive sector comprising mainly small, undercapitalised units.

With the smallest population in the study area, French Guiana has a high GDP per capita of around $19,000 per annum (2022), significantly higher than the South American average (around $9,000 in 2022, according to the World Bank), but against a backdrop of high income inequality and high price levels, particularly for essential consumer goods, which are higher than those in mainland France.

The economy of Amapá (UNIFAP n.d.), with a GDP of around $4.5 billion in 2022 (IGBE), shares similarities with the economy of French Guiana, particularly in terms of the prominence of the service sector. Unlike French Guiana, however, the territory has neither a high-tech sector comparable to the space industry nor a source of revenue analogous to what Suriname derives from oil extraction, even though offshore exploration activities have recently been initiated. Value added stems primarily from the public sector, which accounts for just under half of the total and is, in many municipalities, the main formal employer.

The production sector remains limited and undiversified. Agriculture plays an even smaller role than in French Guiana, although certain forest-based extractive activities, notably those centred on açaí and other non-timber forest products, are important locally. Industry is concentrated in specific sectors, such as the primary processing of natural resources, construction, materials, and mining activities (iron, gold, and other ores), the performance of which depends largely on international prices and one-off projects. Therefore, the economy remains heavily dependent on public spending and a few export sectors, increasing its vulnerability to external shocks. With the largest population in the study area, Amapá has a per capita GDP of just over $6,000, significantly lower than the Brazilian average, estimated at nearly $9,300 in 2022 (World Bank).



Suriname, with a GDP of around $3.7 billion in 2022 (World Bank), presents a different picture due to its status as a sovereign state. The country's macroeconomic history has been volatile, marked by recent crises. Its economy relies heavily on the extraction of natural resources—gold, oil and, to a lesser extent, bauxite—which account for a significant share of GDP and exports. Periods of growth in recent decades have been driven by rising commodity prices, the commissioning of new extractive projects and public spending on infrastructure. While oil production remains modest (just over 10,000 barrels per day), the country's small population further enhances its relative macroeconomic importance. Recent offshore hydrocarbon discoveries and associated investments hold out the prospect of a significant expansion of this industry, bringing with it both high opportunity and high risks (Banerjee et al. 2024).

As in French Guiana and Amapá, the service sector plays a dominant role, with the public sector accounting for a significant share. State-owned enterprises contribute substantially to economic activity and employment. The country is distinguished, however, by a larger agricultural sector in terms of its contribution to overall economic value added, although it is largely export-oriented, particularly in rice production. The industrial sector also carries greater weight, intricately linked to the extractive industry. Suriname's GDP per capita is close to that of Amapá, slightly above $6,000 per year.

These three economies exemplify patterns similar to what the specialist literature refers to as 'Dutch disease' (Tabet 2016). Their economies are marked by capital inflows and rent based revenues that drive up specific consumer and investment segments, yet are not supported by endogenous productive dynamics or territorially grounded value creation. In Suriname, income comes mainly from the export-oriented extractive industry. In French Guiana, the phenomenon manifests itself in the form of 'administrative income' (Marzin et al., 2021) generated by public sector investment and operating expenditures, bolstered by the higher salaries paid to overseas civil servants. The space industry also plays a part, drawing on a highly skilled workforce from abroad and sophisticated technologies not produced locally. Remittances sent by French Guianese living abroad also contribute to this.

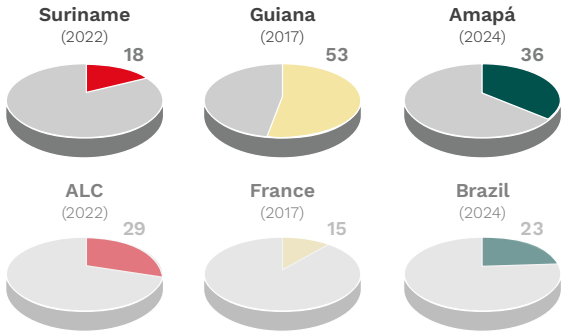
This externally driven momentum—rooted in the oil and mining industries, the space sector, and the public sector—generates similar macroeconomic effects across all three territories. Against a backdrop of weak productive development, a lack of diversification and high local production costs, imported goods often appear more attractive. This phenomenon is reinforced by population groups whose consumption capacity is underpinned by relatively high incomes and rent based revenues, generating demand for quantities, quality, and diversity that local production cannot provide. The agricultural and industrial sectors lack both adequate installed capacity and the necessary production conditions to meet this demand and capitalise on the dynamics it creates.

In these circumstances, both the labour force and local investment tend to shift permanently towards the service sector, which, unlike consumer goods, cannot be imported. The result is economies with unbalanced, 'rentier'-type production structures, far removed from a development model based on qualified local human capital, productive investment, and innovation. Although the phenomenon is less apparent in Amapá, where it manifests primarily through public sector funding, offshore oil exploration began in 2025. Should hydrocarbon production increase, this form of 'Dutch disease' could become more pronounced.

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE MARKED BY **INEQUALITY** AND **PRECARIOUSNESS**

These economic structures are matched by a complex socio-economic landscape. Living and working conditions expose several forms of precariousness affecting much of the population. Poverty, to a greater or lesser extent, is structural in nature in societies where the proportion of young people is exceptionally high: around a third of the population is under 15 years of age. At the same time, there is rampant inequality in income and wealth. On the one hand, highly skilled segments of the population in the most prosperous sectors enjoy living conditions similar to those in high-income countries. On the other hand, large sections of the population remain exposed to vulnerable situations. Inequalities are also evident between coastal areas and capital cities as well as between inland and rural areas, which are often described as poorer. This perception must, however, be put into perspective: ways of life in forest areas, particularly those of Maroon and indigenous communities, are vastly different from urban environments and cannot be assessed using the same criteria.

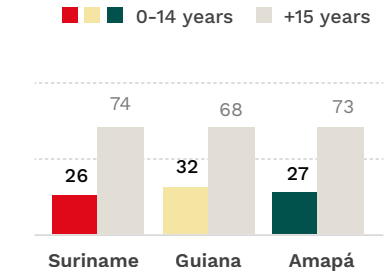
MONETARY POVERTY RATE
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION



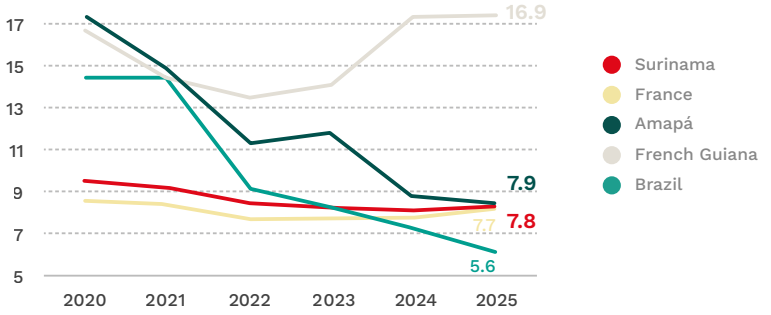
Source of graphics p.32, 33, et 34: *analysis based on data from INSEE, IBGE (PNAD), the World Bank (World Development Indicators, Poverty and Inequality Platform), UNDP (HDI), ILO (ILOEST, Modelled Estimates), IDB (2022), Global Data Lab (Subnational HDI, 2023) and IEDOM (2024, 2026).*

Note : *The indicators below are not strictly comparable across territories due to differences in scope, definitions, and calculation methods. Their purpose is to provide an overview of the situations observed in French Guiana, Suriname, and Amapá.*

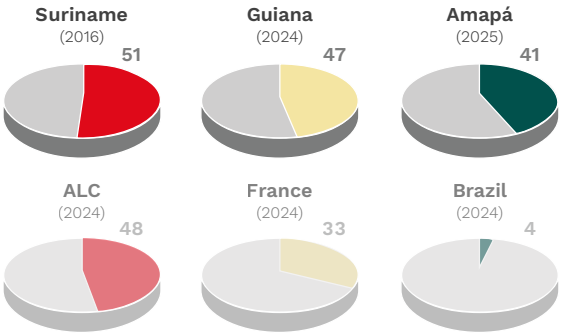
PROPORTION OF POPULATION UNDER AGE 15
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION, 2022

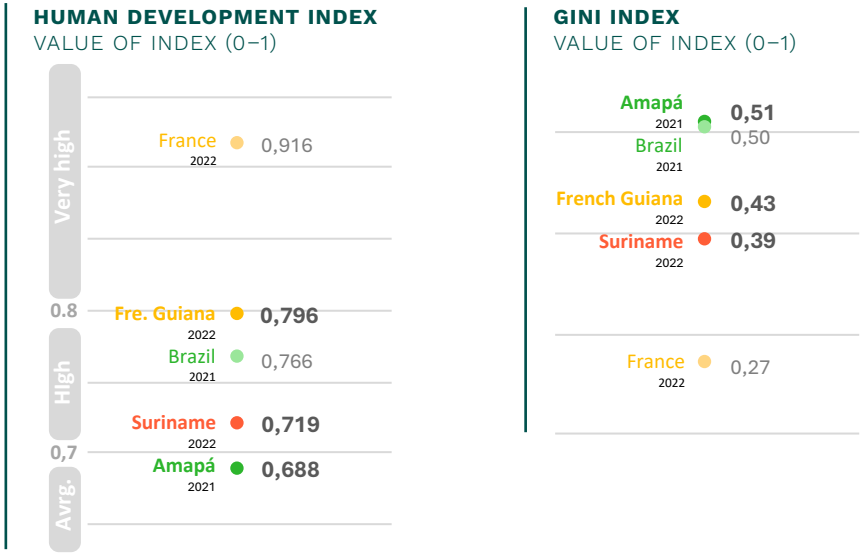


UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
PERCENTAGE OF WORKING POPULATION, 2020 TO 2025



INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT
PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYED POPULATION





Suriname is a unique case (Banerjee et al. 2024; Stampini et al. 2025). Monetary poverty (the indicator shown in the graph), which is measured solely based on income, appears to be much lower there than in French Guiana and Amapá. In contrast, multidimensional poverty—an indicator that takes a broader view of living conditions (health, education, housing, and access to essential services, among others)—reveals a significant level of poverty in the country. In other words, part of the population earns an income that places them above the monetary poverty line, yet their living conditions remain far from stable or satisfactory. This is partly due to revenues from extractive economies, which directly and indirectly benefit certain groups and also fund social transfers of varying degrees of exception. Nevertheless, vulnerability remains high, as does the risk of falling into poverty, coupled with limited human capital and infrastructure and high exposure to external economic shocks.

Compared with mainland France, French Guiana (Marie & Antoine, 2020) has an extremely high rate of monetary poverty: it is the second poorest department after Mayotte. However, its level of human development, which is relatively high compared with neighbouring territories, highlights the impact of its links with mainland France. This is reflected in better-quality infrastructure and social services coverage for a larger segment of the population, particularly in health and education.

Amapá, in line with national Brazilian trends, has experienced a significant decline in poverty in recent years (Flexa 2024). Nevertheless, it remains one of Brazil's poorest states, situated in the northern Amazon and characterised by persistent socio-economic underdevelopment. Its progress is due to the expansion of cash transfer and food aid programmes at both the state and federal levels. At the same time, it highlights how vulnerable these programmes are to political cycles and public funding, as well as their limited impact on the region's productive capacity and productivity—factors which determine sustainable, long-term growth (The Economist 2026).

In all three territories, the job market (UNIFAP n.d.; Government of Suriname 2022; IEDOM 2026) is narrow and polarised. Skilled jobs are concentrated in a few sectors, offering relatively high wages but employing a limited workforce that is often drawn from outside the region. A considerable proportion of the working population is employed in low-skilled, low-productivity jobs in agriculture, retail, catering, transport, construction, craft trades, and local services. These activities play a significant role in everyday economic life and local supply chains but generate modest and unstable incomes. They offer few prospects for career progression and remain largely overlooked by training and public support systems.

Alongside this, the informal economy encompasses a wide variety of situations: unreported work within formal companies, self-employment or jobs with employers who are themselves unregistered. It often accounts for all or part of a household's income and, for much of the population, constitutes the main or only pathway to work. This keeps most workers trapped in cycles of poverty or severe vulnerability: low and unstable wages, a lack of social rights and protection, and increased exposure to risks.

Mass unemployment and underemployment, which affect young people in particular, are not cyclical phenomena but rather, the manifestation of structural imbalances. The supply of stable jobs remains insufficient given the rapidly growing population, which fuels both unemployment and the expansion of the informal economy.



LINKING FOOD **SOVEREIGNTY** AND ECONOMIC **DEVELOPMENT**

The facts presented in this chapter show that the food dependency of French Guiana, Suriname, and Amapá is not simply a matter of agricultural backwardness. It is rooted in a history that has limited the development of solid and diversified local production foundations. In this context, food sovereignty cannot be reduced to a sectoral or technical approach centred on increasing yields or import substitution. It involves reconsidering the role of agriculture as a pillar of locally-driven development, less dependent on external revenues and more closely linked to demographic, social, and territorial dynamics.

Despite the constraints of the tropical environment, these territories possess assets that remain largely untapped, in an environment of exceptional biodiversity and an abundance of natural resources. The development of diversified agricultural systems adapted to their environments and local food crops can thus meet several objectives simultaneously: improving access to sufficient, high-quality food; creating jobs and income; structuring local markets; and strengthening resilience to external shocks.

Linking food sovereignty and economic development requires creating the conditions for value to be genuinely rooted in local communities. While the aim is to produce more, a larger share of the value added must actually remain within local communities. Agriculture has significant spillover potential (Corade et al. 2022): it directly impacts the production of inputs and supplies, agri-food processing, logistics and marketing, as well as employment and the resulting household consumption. This entire system can be organised into local agri-food systems, relying on local processing facilities, short supply chains, the restaurant industry, and rural tourism.

The manifestations of 'Dutch disease' in these economies—with factors that hinder the development of local productive sectors—are not inevitable. This effect can be gradually offset through better-coordinated synergies between the public and private sectors, while also mobilising development aid mechanisms more strategically. A strategic shift in investment toward physical infrastructure and social services that strengthen local and regional development — and toward financing and supporting productive initiatives, whether agricultural, artisanal, or industrial, led by private actors, entrepreneurs, and communities — is therefore essential. This can help make regional agri-food systems one of the driving forces behind more locally rooted, inclusive, and resilient development.

In these regions, the challenge is to ensure that no section of the population is left behind by these changes. Many households, particularly the most vulnerable, would benefit from schemes in which social policies explicitly incorporate productive and food-related dimensions. Better coordination of agricultural, food and social policies is a key lever for making agriculture a factor in social stability.

Guyana: an agricultural exception in an emerging oil-producing country

Guyana, a former British colony independent since 1966, is a country of about 800,000 people located in the heart of the Guiana Shield. Since offshore oil production began in 2019, it has undergone a significant economic transformation, to the extent that it is sometimes described as the future 'Qatar of Latin America' (Wehrmann 2024).

This country stands out for one remarkable fact: a recent study published in the journal Nature Food (Stehl et al. 2025), shows that Guyana is the only country—out of 186 analysed—whose domestic production would, in theory, be sufficient to meet the requirements of a healthy diet across the main staple food groups without resorting to imports. **This does not mean that the entire population actually has access to sufficient, varied and affordable food in practice, but it highlights an exceptional national productive capacity, which stands in stark contrast to the territories covered by the White Paper, which are marked by high food dependency.**

Agriculture continues to carry significant macroeconomic weight in Guyana, playing a key role in employment, rural incomes, and exports. This finding must, however, be qualified. Guyana benefits from substantial public aid to its agricultural sector (Gachot et al. 2022), combining tariff protections and budgetary support concentrated on a few traditional sectors, in particular rice, sugar, and poultry. This arrangement tends to drive up prices for consumers and may hinder the effective diversification of the agricultural production base. The FAO (Weber et al. 2022) also highlights that the country remains exposed to major vulnerabilities: concentration of exports, institutional fragility, coastal dependence in the face of climate change, and the risk of 'Dutch disease' linked to the oil boom.

For the territories covered in this study, the challenge is not to replicate the Guyana model, but to recognise that food sovereignty requires agricultural and agri-food production systems rooted in the territories, underpinned by stable infrastructure and policies, backed by substantial resources, and connected to local and regional markets that are structured enough to absorb these products and remunerate them sustainably.

Overview of food production and vulnerabilities



Chapter

02

This chapter provides a statistical overview of agricultural production in the territories studied. It helps to better determine the scale and nuances of local production shortfalls, the scope for improvement, and the various dependency relationships typical of each region. The data are still not exhaustive and are drawn from various official sources, compiled using a variety of methodologies. The aim is to provide orders of magnitude and to describe production profiles, distinguishing between export-oriented agriculture and that which primarily supplies domestic markets.

The farms that drive agricultural production are highly diverse. They include mainly small- to medium-scale commercial farming operations, geared towards selling modest volumes. The output of other forms of agriculture—primarily subsistence farming—is consumed or traded by the farming families or communities, often deep in the forest and largely invisible in official records. As the available information is more limited, the contribution of livestock production and the diverse types of livestock farming is addressed here in qualitative terms. However, as the discussion at the end of the chapter will show, this sector constitutes one of the main structural shortcomings of the areas studied.

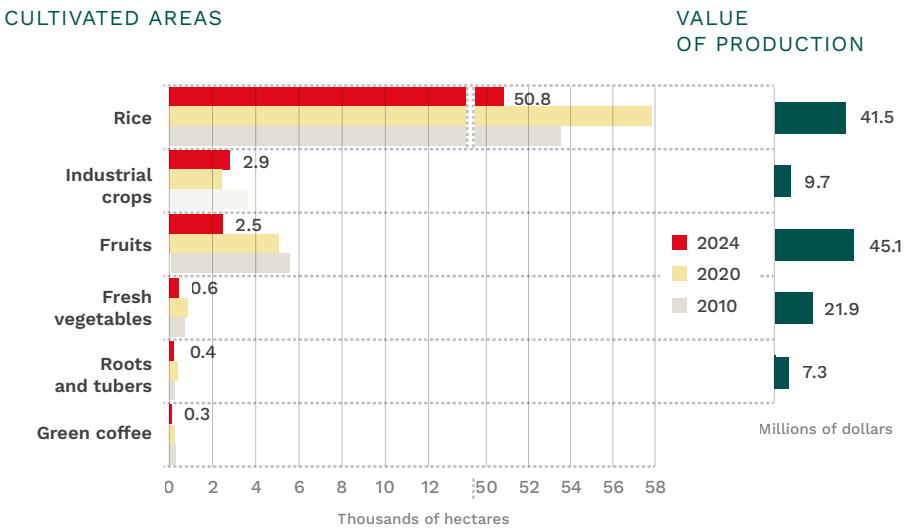




SURINAME:
AN EXPORT-ORIENTED AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Suriname has the largest agricultural sector of all the economies studied, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of national output. However, this does not mean that the country can satisfactorily meet domestic consumption needs through local production. On the one hand, its agricultural sector is concentrated on rice production—which has historically accounted for nearly 80% of the total cultivated area—intended primarily for export. On the other hand, the agricultural sector's share of national production is also due to the significance of livestock production (which is relatively low in other territories), accounting for around one-third of total agricultural value added, despite insufficient performance levels.

MAIN CROP PRODUCTION IN SURINAME



Source : *Compiled from FAO data: FAOSTAT (QCL) and World Food and Agriculture – Statistical Yearbook.*

Notes : *In this chart, as in the following two (for French Guiana and Amapá), the data shown on the left (cultivated land) do not correspond directly to those on the right (value of production). Drawn from separate sources, these figures are provided for information purposes only and should not be interpreted as establishing a direct relationship between a crop area and the value of production.*

Surinamese rice is grown mainly in the country's northwestern district of Nickerie, on the border with Guyana. Just over 50,000 hectares are cultivated there each year, yielding a production of nearly 200,000 tonnes. Over the last decade, rice has accounted for more than half the value of agricultural exports to the Caribbean region (Supreme Audit Institution of Suriname, 2024).

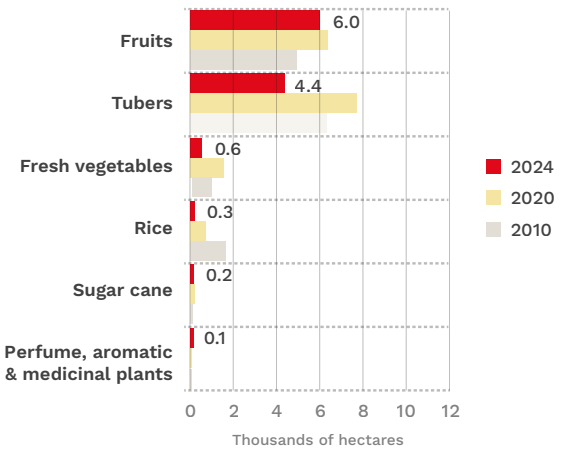
Complementing this export, sugar cane—a legacy of the country's colonial history—remains a significant crop, although the area under cultivation has fluctuated over time. The country also has a tradition of large-scale banana farming, but this sector has contracted significantly over recent decades. Today, bananas are grown on only a few hundred hectares due to difficulties in competitiveness in the export market, stricter phytosanitary requirements in Europe, and health-related pressures such as Moko disease.

Alongside these structured, export-oriented agro-industrial sectors, a multitude of fruit and vegetable farms—mainly small-scale, often family-run and with limited mechanisation—provide a sizeable proportion of the local supply, while also contributing small amounts to exports. The main perennial crops are citrus fruits (especially oranges), coconut palms (which have declined sharply in recent decades), plantains and a variety of tropical fruits. The produce-growing sector, although limited in terms of area, nevertheless plays a key role in supplying urban markets, relying on thousands of small-scale growers near the capital of Paramaribo.

FRENCH GUIANA:
DIVERSIFIED BUT INSUFFICIENT PRODUCTION

In French Guiana, where agricultural value added is lower, the production structure is more diversified. These include açaí, cacao, certain aromatic and medicinal plants, and tropical fruits, destined for mainland France and the French West Indies.

MAIN VEGETABLE CROPS IN FRENCH GUIANA
CULTIVATED AREAS



Source : *ECompiled from INSEE data.*

Vegetable and fruit production reaches significant levels. It is driven by small-scale producers practising mixed farming around Cayenne and along the western coast, and more particularly by the Hmong community, which is mainly concentrated in Cacao and Javouhey.

Fruit crops include banana, citrus fruit (limes, oranges, mandarins, grapefruit) and pineapple, with areas under cultivation remaining stable or showing slight growth. Added to this is a wide variety of tropical fruits including rambutan, mangoes and passion fruit. Tubers and roots (cassava, sweet potato) also account for a sizeable proportion of production volumes and cultivated areas. However, this type of production has been significantly reduced in recent years due to cassava disease, in turn threatening food security within the communities. Taken together, these crops form an essential basis of the local diet, supplying short supply chains and local markets.

An exceptional expansion of agricultural land in French Guiana

In French Guiana, the area under cultivation (AUC) has risen sharply over the last decade. The average farm size has risen from 4 to 6 ha (DAAF French Guiana 2022a). This trend stands in stark contrast to that in the other overseas departments. The AUC has remained virtually stable in Guadeloupe (around +1% between 2010 and 2020), has grown only moderately in Martinique (+13%) and Réunion (+17%), while it has surged in French Guiana (Ministry of Agriculture & Agreste 2022). In mainland France, the number of farm operations and the AUC are declining.

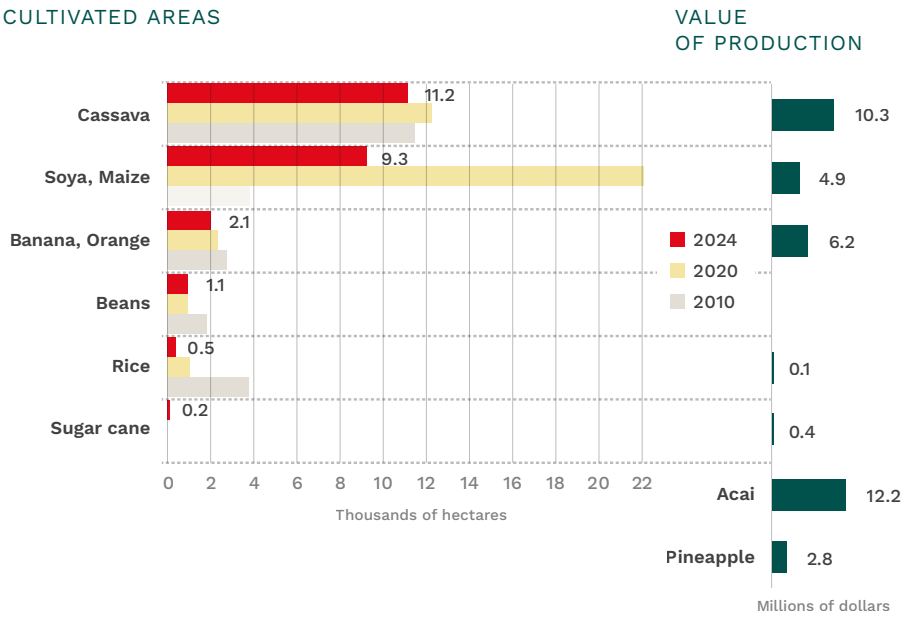
French Guiana appears to be one of the few French territories where the AUC continues to expand, driven by the allocation of new agricultural land, notably forest areas converted into concessions and small-scale livestock or permacrop farms (DAAF French Guiana 2021; IEDOM 2022).

However, this expansion remains severely constrained by the costs of accessing land, clearing it, and improving access to the concessions (INSEE 2016). Under these conditions, only a minority of the forest areas allocated since the early 2000s are actually being developed, with the rest abandoned or under-utilised due to a lack of resources to clear them and connect them to transport networks (INSEE 2016; IEDOM 2022).

AMAPÁ: A LIMITED AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AND GROWING EXPORTS

A considerable proportion of agricultural production in Amapá is exported. This comes from large-scale mechanised farms producing soya and, to a lesser extent, maize. These crops are traded between Brazilian states and on international markets via the port of Santana, at the mouth of the Amazon. Non-existent at the start of the previous decade, soya now covers thousands of hectares, while maize, grown on a fluctuating basis over modest areas (around 1,800 ha in 2024), remains a rotation crop alongside soya (Embrapa 2016). Maize is mainly used for the production of animal feed in the region. Rice, which served as a transitional crop in the frontier areas before the introduction of soya, continues to be grown by family farms to supply local markets with grain.

MAIN VEGETABLE CROPS IN AMAPÁ



Source : *ECompiled from IBGE data: Produção Agrícola Municipal (PAM), SIDRA.*

Açaí plays a central and growing role in the state's agricultural economy, with a yield of nearly 22,000 tonnes in 2024 (IBGE). This is the result of an ongoing transition from traditional gathering—the extractive harvesting of wild forest products by local communities, which continues to supply local markets today—towards increasingly managed and planted systems. This cultivated açaí is increasingly channelled into long-distance supply chains, to other Brazilian states and for export, particularly to the United States (Tabajara, 2025).

As in French Guiana, cassava is the dominant food crop, with a relatively stable area under cultivation, a sign of improved resilience to cassava disease, which also affects northern Brazil. Alongside this, beans—a traditional Brazilian crop widely grown in Amapá—and fruit, mainly bananas (around 1,600 ha in 2024), citrus and pineapples, are produced in mostly family-run, small-scale systems that support self-consumption and partially supply local markets.



Livestock farming still makes only a modest contribution to local food supply

Livestock production is one of the main weaknesses of the food systems on the Guiana Shield, as it makes a limited contribution to meeting food needs.

In Suriname, production is driven primarily by poultry (meat and eggs), which has become the country's main source of meat. This is supplemented by cattle, pig, and dairy farming on a much smaller scale, conducted by small mixed crop-livestock operations and by semi-intensive pig and poultry farms. Although this sector accounts for nearly one-third of agricultural value added and supplies local markets, it only partially meets domestic consumption needs of meat and dairy products.

The extensive cattle sector in French Guiana is centred on a few large farms covering several hundred hectares, located on the northern coastal savannahs. While this livestock production is the largest in terms of volume, beef accounts for only one-fifth of local consumption. In parallel, a range of medium-sized farms and small family-run units—where livestock is raised on a small scale within mixed operations combining cattle, poultry, pigs and small ruminants with crops that are often subsistence-oriented—produce very modest volumes, sold mainly through short supply chains, including on-farm slaughter and direct sales.

The state of Amapá is notable for the scale of its buffalo farming, home to Brazil's second-largest herd. Large-scale farms mainly supply the domestic market, extending beyond the state's own supply chains, while small to medium-sized family farms operating under mixed farming systems primarily provide for subsistence needs and local supply. In terms of volume, livestock production remains insufficient to meet the region's needs.

Livestock farming systems, their constraints and prospects for development are analysed in detail in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 (Livestock farming in French Guiana: diversity, constraints and prospects).

AGRICULTURAL SECTORS CONSTRAINED BY **STRUCTURAL LIMITATIONS**

Family-run farm operations provide a sizeable proportion of the local supply of tubers, roots, fruit, fresh vegetables, and animal products. However, they continue to face structural vulnerabilities and multiple risks.

The smallest farms oscillate between subsistence farming and selling their produce locally. For the most part, they are not technically advanced and have limited capital, resulting in low yields and productivity. The smallest farms use few to no external inputs due to their prohibitive cost. These systems therefore employ forms of agriculture that can be considered agroecological. However, these production methods often have limited efficiency and yields remain low.

Family farms with a more commercial focus are heavily dependent on farm inputs and equipment. They are therefore exposed to fluctuations in international prices, undermining their economic viability.

Technical, economic, land-use, demographic and regulatory factors are continually exerting pressure on the continuity and performance of these thousands of farms. Furthermore, climate change is affecting all farming systems. Droughts, torrential rain and flooding are becoming more frequent, while pressure from pests and diseases is intensifying in the Amazon region, where it is already quite severe.

Poorly equipped to adapt their practices to climate change and to maintain their yields, they struggle to envision sustainable growth for their businesses. Under these circumstances, it remains difficult to consolidate their contribution to regional food security in a more structured, resilient, and stable manner.

Cassava disease: a threat to food security

A staple crop in the food systems of the Amerindian and Bushinengue peoples, cassava is now widely grown on all farms across the Guiana Shield and the Amazon basin. It forms a cornerstone of the daily diet and is often referred to as 'local bread.' It can be found in markets, either fresh or processed, especially as cassava meal, known as 'couac' or cassava flour.

Since 2022, cassava has been affected by an emerging disease: Cassava Witches' Broom Disease. This fungal disease causes the stems to turn black, the leaves to wilt, and results in high yield losses. It has been identified in the northern Amazon, notably in Amapá (Fredon Guyane 2023; CIRAD 2026).

The disease causes production losses ranging from 30% to 100%, depending on location. It has led to a shortage of healthy cuttings and a sharp rise in prices. In some areas, the price of cassava meal has doubled in the span of a few months (Fredon Guyane 2023; CNEWS 2024). In French Guiana, this crisis directly affects food security, particularly within indigenous communities. The authorities have had to distribute food packages to several remote villages. These emergency measures have been implemented while awaiting the results of plant material decontamination programmes such as the 'SaniManioc' project (led by CIRAD, with financial support from the Territorial Collectivity of French Guiana), and research aimed at identifying tolerant varieties (Jamag 2024; CIRAD 2026).

The capacity of these farming systems to support a local agri-food processing sector, whether artisanal or industrial, also remains limited. The sector would require regular supplies at relatively stable prices, and raw materials of consistent quality. However, in the three territories studied, a large proportion of food products is imported and accounts for a significant share of the total value of imports. However, agri-food processing is a strategic activity that generates local value added and jobs and drives regional development. There are processing units that range from fairly artisanal to more technically equipped, but this fabric still falls well short of its potential.





REDUCING DEPENDENCIES AND ENSURING FOOD SECURITY: A STRATEGIC ISSUE FOR THE THREE REGIONS

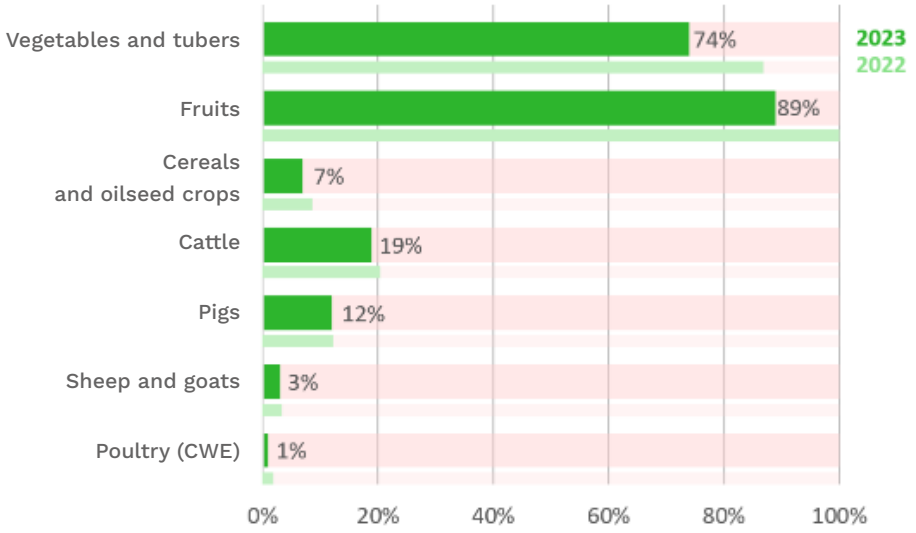
These regions exhibit multiple forms of food dependency, despite having substantial agricultural potential and a broad array of local products and know how. Although fresh produce—fruit, vegetables, and root crops—as well as certain livestock products is substantial across all three territories, it is not enough to guarantee a stable and secure supply. Against this backdrop, the three economies are particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in international food prices and supply chain disruptions—linked to logistical, climatic, or geopolitical uncertainties—which can abruptly affect availability and costs. Rising prices for imported goods hit low-income households particularly hard, as they spend a considerable proportion of their budget on food.

With a small population and an economy largely geared towards the export of raw materials (oil, gold and bauxite), Suriname generally manages to generate the necessary foreign exchange and does not face major balance of payments difficulties in importing cereals, meat, dairy products or processed foods, although its vulnerability to external shocks remains high. Its food supply is integrated into regional Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana) and Latin American (Brazil, Colombia) trade networks, while maintaining strong historical ties with Europe, particularly the Netherlands, which supplies a significant proportion of its food imports (World Bank, 2023).

In the state of Amapá, where agricultural production remains especially low, dependence on food from outside the state is pronounced. This dependency is, however, mitigated by the state's integration into national and inter-state supply chains, within a country with abundant food production. Massive quantities of goods arrive from the major production centres in southern and central-western Brazil, transported via rather long supply chains; their prices are affected by transport costs, given Amapá's relatively peripheral geographical location. This dependence is particularly pronounced for grains (rice, wheat), dairy products, industrially processed goods, and many vegetables.

In French Guiana, the situation appears critical as the territory has multiple dependencies resulting from insufficient local production as well as institutional and logistical factors that make imported products from Europe—particularly from mainland France—easier and sometimes less costly. Despite some 7,000 kilometres separating Paris from Cayenne, a dominant share of food imports comes from mainland France.

LOCAL PRODUCTION COVERAGE RATE IN FRENCH GUIANA (2022 AND 2023)
RATIO OF LOCAL PRODUCTION TO TOTAL CONSUMPTION

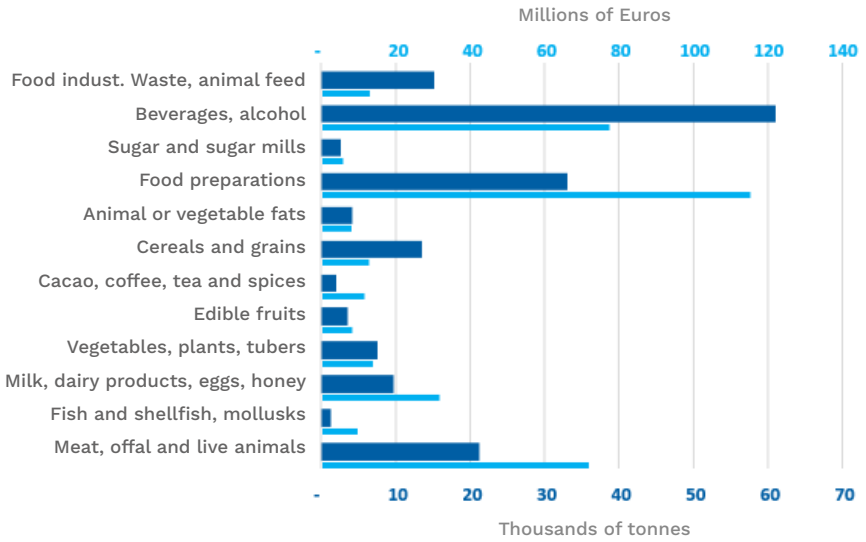


Source : *ODEADOM, 2024 (DEAAF French Guiana).*

For grains and cereal products, dairy products, processed meats, tinned goods, ready meals and a large proportion of beverages, French Guiana relies almost entirely on supplies from mainland France, as local production is minimal and unable to meet the volumes and standards required by large-scale retail and the catering sector. Local meat production covers only a limited proportion of consumption, with the remainder being met by imports. Mainland France also supplies the machinery and inputs required for local production and processing.

Additional supplies are also imported from other European countries, the United States, China, and the Caribbean region, notably the French Antilles. Added to this is a massive informal supply consisting of undeclared products from Suriname and Brazil, which accounts for a considerable proportion of consumption. These informal flows are driven both by insufficient local production and by price differentials between French Guiana and its neighbours. In French Guiana, high food prices and significant inflation make it particularly profitable to import products via parallel channels. These foodstuffs come from countries where production costs are generally lower, as they are subject to less stringent regulations than in French Guiana, which is required to adhere to European regulations.

IMPORTS OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS INTO FRENCH GUIANA (2024)
BY VALUE (LIGHT BLUE) AND BY VOLUME (DARK BLUE)



Source : *Mémento de la statistique agricole Edition 2025 (based on Customs, Sicia, MASA data)*

Agriculture on the Guiana Shield: harnessing diversity to boost food production



Chapter

03

Agriculture in French Guiana must be understood in all its diversity, not only through what official statistics show, but above all by observing the richness and variety of local produce and practices. Despite the region's strengths, production remains fragile and does not fully meet local needs. This great diversity calls for tailored support measures adapted to the specific trajectories, constraints, and functions of each type of agriculture, in order to strengthen local production. Recognising these differences and the specific contribution of each system—from subsistence farming to more structured commercial supply chains—is a prerequisite for a lasting expansion of local production. This recognition forms an essential foundation for designing truly effective food sovereignty policies.





LOCAL PRACTICES AS A DRIVER FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL INTENSIFICATION

While the biological diversity of the Amazon has been extensively studied and publicised, its socio-cultural diversity—and the historical relationship between societies and their environments—has long remained in the shadows. A long-standing tradition inherited from the colonial era has portrayed Indigenous peoples as entities without a history (Rostain 2023), reducing pre-Columbian societies to small, nomadic, starving and precarious groups incapable of transforming the Amazonian environment. Nevertheless, new research has brought to light a variety of ancient agricultural systems and agroecological complexes combining domesticated, semi-domesticated and wild plants with the use of animals. The high degree of diversification in practices and species reflects the region's great biodiversity.

Over the course of the Amazon's long history, this Indigenous foundation of agricultural systems and practices has been transformed, if not relegated to the margins. These practices extend beyond Indigenous communities: they underpin various contemporary forms of agriculture, often in subtle or little-recognised ways, contributing to adaptation to physical and climatic constraints and to food security. **If we are to intensify and increase local agricultural production while developing agri-food systems that are economically and environmentally viable, it is essential to better recognise, reflect upon and promote these local practices and forms of production.** This involves understanding the changes they have undergone and analysing the conditions under which they can be sustained.



Domestication, introduction, and hybridisation: a diverse agricultural heritage

Historically, the Amazon has been one of the major centres of plant domestication (Lombardo et al. 2020; Clement 1999; Levis et al. 2017). It is estimated that around 45% of the species cultivated in the Americas are of Amazonian origin and that by the time of colonisation at the end of the 15th century, more than one hundred local species had already been domesticated, including cassava, sweet potato, cacao, tobacco, pineapple, chillies, as well as numerous fruit trees and palms. This history of domestication unfolded over an extended period, co-evolving with managed landscapes, far from the image of a 'virgin forest' devoid of human history (Clement 1999; Rostain 2023).

Cassava (both bitter and sweet varieties) is now a staple food crop for Indigenous and rural communities on the Guiana Shield. Its cultivated genetic diversity represents a subset of the vast wild diversity that exists (Olsen & Schaal 2001; Mühlen et al. 2019). By the time the Europeans arrived, cassava was already widespread throughout the basin and beyond, with local communities maintaining and selecting an exceptionally diverse range of varieties.

Furthermore, many woody species that were domesticated or favoured by pre-Columbian societies are now common in Amazonian forests. Their highest concentration is found around archaeological sites, suggesting that current biodiversity and the forest bear the imprint of ancient management and domestication practices.

The Europeans' arrival brought with it an intense phase of biotic exchange during which many food plants of Asian and African origin were introduced in the Amazon, including Asian rice, sugarcane, banana and plantain trees, coffee trees, citrus fruits, coconut palms and yams (Carney 2001; Clement 1999; Ribeiro 1999). Rice was introduced and disseminated with the support of the agricultural expertise of enslaved African populations. Subsequently, rice—like bananas, sugarcane and different African pulses and oilseeds—was rapidly integrated into the plantations and food gardens of the Indigenous, enslaved and Creole populations. In Suriname, from the 19th century onwards, Asian rice became the basis for irrigated lowland rice cultivation, initially geared towards subsistence consumption, then developing into an export-oriented sector (Carney 2001; Bezançon 1995; Clement 1999).

Recent decades have seen the emergence of a third group of crops grown through a highly commercial, export-oriented approach: soy, maize, and oil palm, in particular. These systems often rely on external capital and a high degree of mechanisation. They are likely to increase dependence on global markets, with additional effects on soils and ecosystems that must be taken into account.

Amazonian ingenuity: drawing inspiration from local practices to enhance sustainability

In the challenging Amazon environment, farms on the Guiana Shield have developed and maintained a series of sophisticated practices that enable them to produce food while remaining tightly integrated with forest ecosystems. **The following pages provide an overview of these historical and current practices in an attempt to shed light on their potential role in pathways towards sustainable intensification.**

WATER MANAGEMENT: VÁRZEA AND RAISED FIELDS

Given the heavy rainfall, seasonal flooding and periodic droughts in the Amazon, the agronomic challenge often lies less in irrigation than in water drainage and management. These conditions led to the development, in pre-Columbian times, of sophisticated systems centred on floodplains, or várzeas—raised fields and terracing techniques that prevent crops from becoming waterlogged while taking advantage of the fertility of alluvial deposits (Rostain 2023; Iriarte et al. 2020). Várzea agriculture consists of growing crops on the sandbanks, islands, and exposed land along river corridors during the low-water season. According to some authors, it is one of the most fertile agricultural systems in the region. The raised fields of the floodplain savannahs offer dual agronomic benefits: enhanced soil fertility through the incorporation of organic matter, and crop survival under flood conditions (Rostain 2023; Iriarte et al. 2012; Lombardo et al. 2020).

Today, várzea agriculture is still practised across the Amazon (Junk et al. 2011; McGrath et al. 2015). On the Guiana Shield, floodplains are less common, but the existence of pre-colonial raised-field complexes in the coastal savannahs of Suriname and French Guiana has been documented, as has their potential for contemporary reinterpretation as a form of intensified agriculture adapted to flood-prone savannahs (Iriarte et al. 2012; Barret et al. 2020).

BUILDING FERTILITY: FROM TERRA PRETA TO BIOCHAR

The anthropogenic black soils (soils created and enriched by human activity) of the Amazon, known as terra preta, are a major response to the region's naturally low soil fertility. They result from dense and sustained human settlement during which charcoal, organic waste, pottery shards and other artifacts accumulated to such an extent that they transformed once poor soils into earth with an exceptional capacity for nutrient and water retention (Rostain 2023; Glaser & Birk 2012). These soils have enabled the cultivation of numerous useful species on land reputedly unsuitable for the sustainable settlement of large populations and societies (Rostain 2023; Woods et al. 2009).

Given current challenges, terra preta is seen less as a model to be replicated exactly and more as historical evidence of the possibility of building long-term fertility systems on soils that were initially not very fertile. Biochar is currently framed as a modern-day adaptation of these ancient practices. As a biomass charcoal produced by pyrolysis, it can improve water and nutrient retention in degraded tropical soils (Lehmann et al. 2003; Glaser & Birk 2012). **On the Guiana Shield, references to terra preta and biochar are gradually emerging in discussions on soil fertility, agroforestry, wildlands management and the use of imported fertilisers. However, for the time being, these initiatives are still experimental and scattered.** Their aim is primarily to build on this slow, long-term process of building soil fertility in order to develop small-scale agroecological intensification practices adapted to the soils of the French Guiana region.



SLASH-AND-BURN AGRICULTURE: MANAGING FERTILITY ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

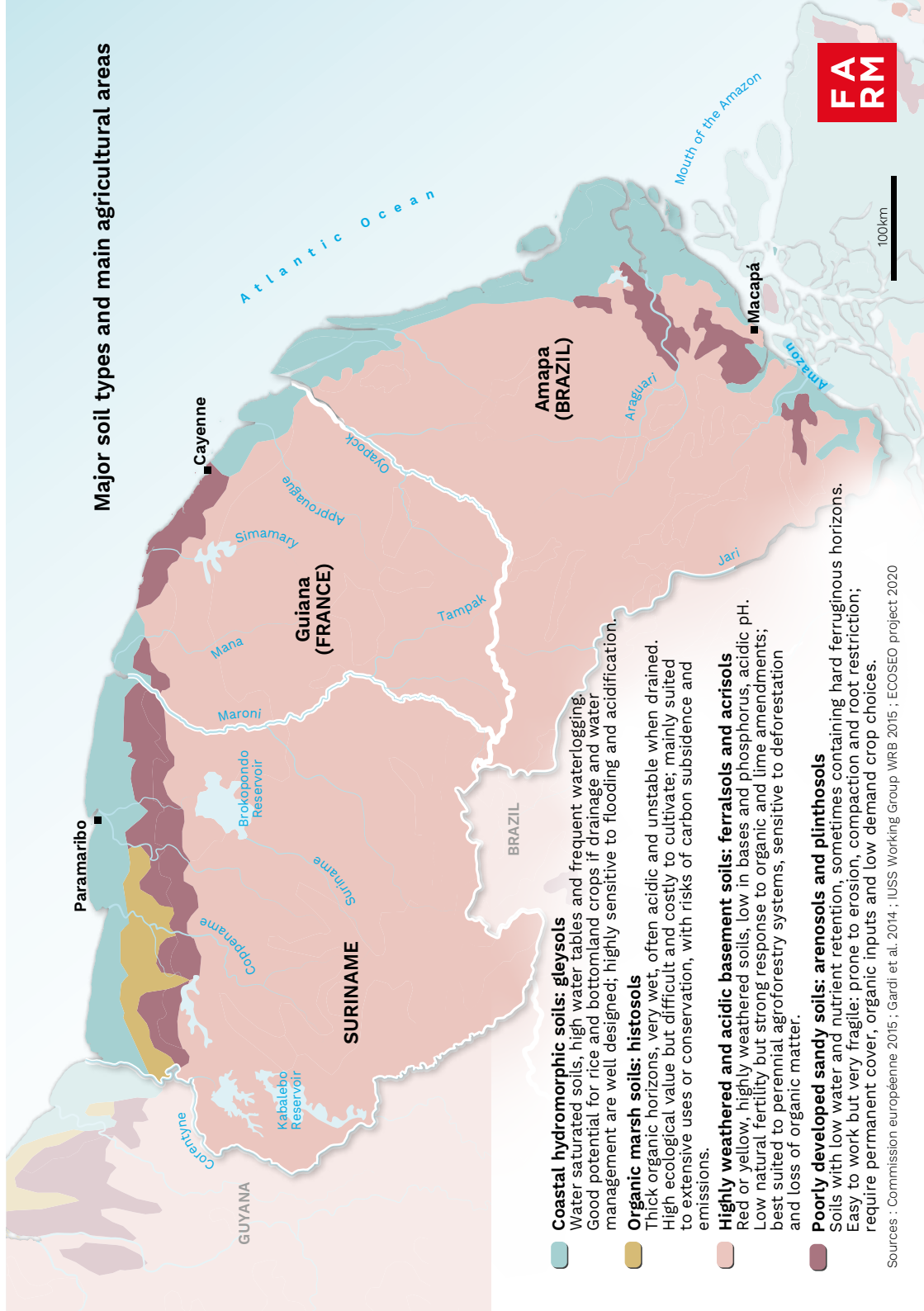
Historically, shifting cultivation involves clearing a plot of land by cutting and burning, cultivating it for years, and then leaving it in long fallow, sometimes for decades. The shifting nature of the practice stems from the spatial rotation of fields: while the plot regenerates, families redirect their efforts to other abattis (traditional slash-and-burn plots designed for cultivating starchy tubers and root crops). The system comprises variants, including forms of agroforestry or plant domestication, which all gradually restore forest cover (Rostain 2023; Denevan 2001). From this perspective, slash-and-burn agriculture appears less as simple deforestation and more as a system for managing soil fertility and the landscape: rapid transfer of nutrients through ash, a mosaic of plots of different ages, the preservation of useful trees and spontaneous regrowth, and a continual transition between fields, fallows and forest (Denevan 2001; Carneiro 1990; Parc amazonien de Guyane 2010). The current status of this production system is discussed later in this chapter (‘*Slash-and-burn agriculture: a staple subsistence pillar under pressure*’).

This type of agriculture is now widespread among Amerindian and rural communities on the Guiana Shield, but its antiquity and historical significance must be viewed in perspective. Contrary to the image of widespread nomadism, many studies highlight the importance of pre-Columbian populations living in large sedentary or semi-sedentary villages, particularly those along the Amazon River axis who combined alluvial-plain farming with raised-field cultivation capable of sustaining dense, hierarchical societies (Rostain 2023).

FARMING WITH THE FOREST: AGROFORESTRY AND SHADE-GROWN AGRICULTURE

Far from being a recent development, agroforestry in the Amazon and on the Guiana Shield is part of a long tradition of forest management. Indigenous societies have combined annual crops, fruit trees, and palm trees, bringing together domesticated, semi-domesticated and wild species in complex mosaics that have left a lasting mark on current forest composition (Rostain 2023; Iriarte et al. 2018; Denevan 2001). Plant use could be very subtle, essentially encouraging the spread of wild species, much like earlier hunter-gatherers who promoted the regrowth of useful plants along the routes they travelled (Rostain 2023). Today, these systems lie at the interface between slash-and-burn agriculture, village forest gardens, and the management of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Closely resembling the traditional Bushinengue and Amerindian practices of forest agriculture, these models are now being utilised as pathways to a regional bioeconomy: the utilisation of palm trees (such as the açaí) and NTFPs, a reduction in clear-cutting, income diversification and a contribution to climate change adaptation (Parc amazonien de Guyane 2010; SCEA L'Agro Forestière 2020; AFD 2023).

Cultivated biodiversity and agricultural production lie at the heart of the food system and rural identities of the Guiana Shield. This local know-how provides a strategic foundation for the sustainable intensification of production. Recognizing and promoting sustainable local practices appears less as a return to the past than as a prerequisite for building pathways toward food sovereignty and rural development that are genuinely grounded in Amazonian environments.



FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: INTEGRATING SUBSISTENCE FARMING, MARKET-ORIENTED FARMING, AND LIVESTOCK REARING

Subsistence farming: assets to be harnessed, production to be strengthened

Subsistence farming plays a key role in food provision on the Guiana Shield, in a context where local agricultural production remains insufficient to meet needs. Through slash-and-burn farming and Creole gardens, thousands of families continue to produce a considerable proportion of their food and diversify their diets. These practices, often subtle and largely absent from official statistics, also encompass technical know-how, family traditions and cultural identities that bind communities to their territories. It is within this fabric of subsistence farming systems—at once ancient, fragile, and undergoing transformation—that a decisive part of the territory's ability to better feed its population in the future, and to build its food sovereignty, is at stake.

SLASH-AND-BURN AGRICULTURE: A STAPLE SUBSISTENCE PILLAR UNDER PRESSURE

On the Guiana Shield, subsistence slash-and-burn farming is the main contemporary form of shifting cultivation and provides a sizeable proportion of the food consumed by many communities. Inherited from the Amerindian peoples, this technique—which has shaped the landscape over the centuries—has been adopted and adapted by the Brushingu communities. They have incorporated species from Africa such as rice, okra, sesame, cowpeas, and peanuts. Rural Creole families have incorporated cassava and other crops (PAG 2013).

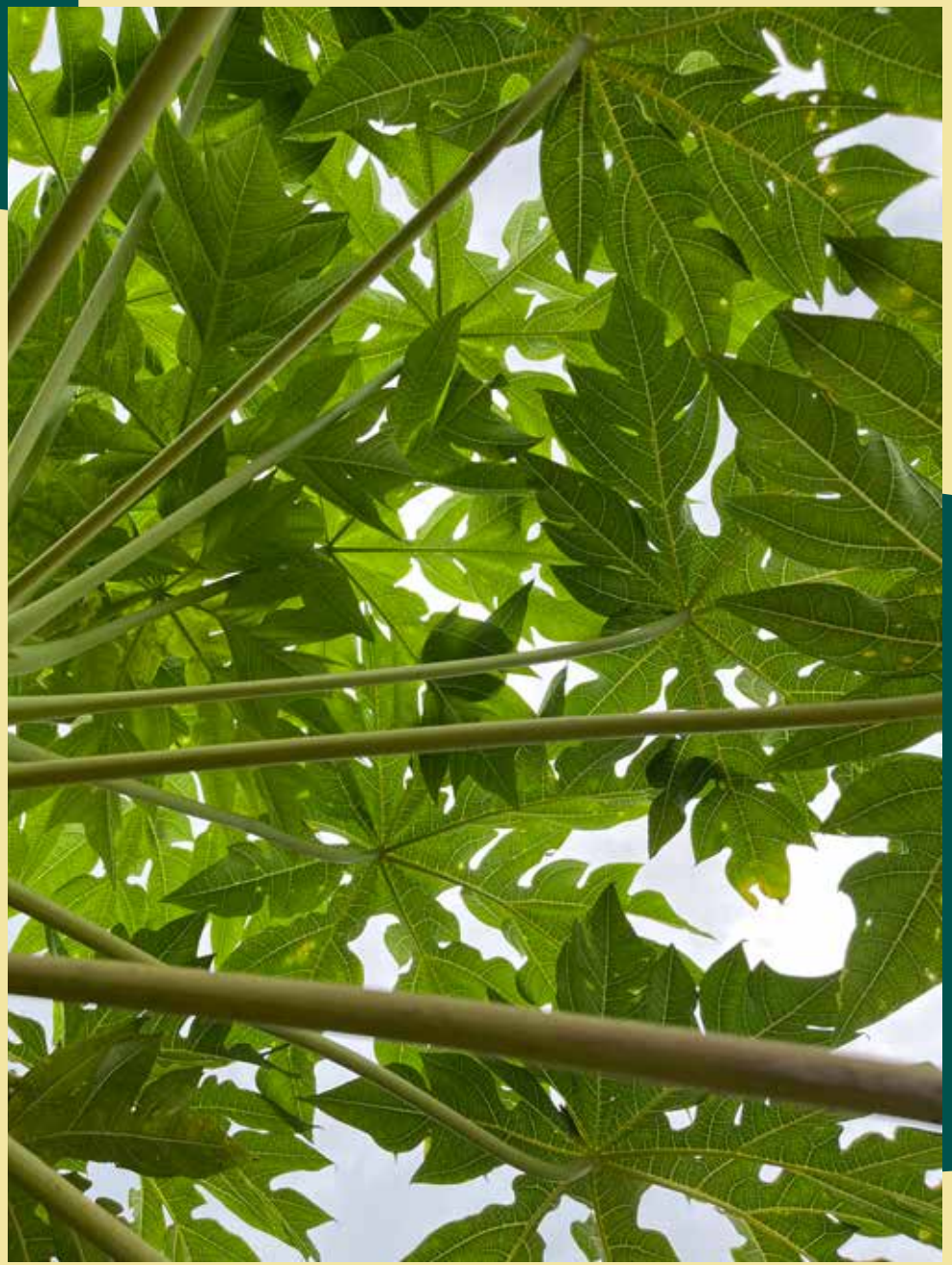
In southern French Guiana, these systems play a vital role along the Maroni and Oyapock rivers, around which villages are organised. On the Oyapock, these practices remain especially faithful to tradition, to the point that the area appears to function as a repository for slash-and-burn systems and traditional knowledge (Interviews 2025). In Suriname, similar approaches are found in forest and marshland areas where Maroon communities practise slash-and-burn farming along the major rivers (Maat 2016; Maat et al. 2024).

The practice of slash-and-burn farming follows a precise cycle (forest, slashing, burning, cultivation, fallow) and is primarily aimed at subsistence farming and processing (couac, cassava, cassava beer), with the sale of surplus produce being secondary (PAG 2013; Interviews 2025). Site choice takes into account soil type and access to water. Felling takes place at the end of the dry season, with some useful trees and palms left standing. Burn then takes place between the end of the dry season and the start of the rainy season, destroying a considerable proportion of weeds, loosening the soil, and creating ash that temporarily increases fertility and reduces acidity.

This marks the start of a cultivation period lasting up to three years, often on plots of between half and one hectare. The land is organised according to topography and moisture levels. Crop cycles follow one another over time: first, short-cycle crops to take advantage of peak fertility; then cassava and other root crops; and finally, banana and fruit trees to extend the harvest period (Interviews 2025; McKey et al. 2001). At the end of this cycle, the land is left fallow for several years (PAG 2013; McKey et al. 2001). Families tend multiple abattis simultaneously, introducing crops at various times so as to create complementarity and diversify production throughout the year.

These abattis support a wide variety of crops: cassava, bananas, maize, yams, dasheen, coudes, okra, cucumbers, sugarcane, pineapples, and various vegetables. The system is centred around cassava, often accounting for the majority of a cultivated area, with several varieties sometimes grown on the same abattis. Diversity is maintained through selection practices and the exchange of seeds and cuttings, which farmers test and then retain for their agronomic, flavour and heritage qualities (McKey et al. 2001).

In these systems, only a limited proportion of surplus production is sold at local markets or by the roadside. The remoteness of the abattis, transport difficulties, low and irregular volumes, and limited control over marketing channels all constrain supply to the market. The sale of cassava flour and by-products provides supplementary income but remains modest, despite significant urban demand (Interviews 2025). For brown rice, production fluctuates between household consumption and limited sales, with part of the crop reserved for domestic and ritual use, with the remainder circulating through local markets, celebrations, and intra-community trade. The value of this rice is as much about taste as it is about identity. .



Fallow land, an integral part of the traditional slash-and-burn system, plays a vital role. It replenishes biomass for the next burn cycle, contributes to forest regeneration, and helps restore soil fertility. It also maintains a reserve of foraged products and rights for the families who cleared the land. Where forest cover is abundant, deforestation remains temporary and reversible (Carrière et al. 2019; Bahuchet & Betsch 2012; Tsayem Demaze & Manusset 2008).

This fragile balance is now under pressure from population density, sedentarisation and the expansion of plots. These changes reduce the area available per household and encourage shorter fallow periods. Available biomass for slash-and-burn is declining, ash quality is deteriorating, weeds are spreading faster, and yields are falling. These pressures push farmers to increase the number of abattis and clear more land, risking a shift from a historically sustainable system toward environmentally harmful practices (Tsayem Demaze & Amelot 2020; Bahuchet & Betsch 2012; Carrière et al. 2019).

For farmers, preparing the abattis is a very arduous task that relies heavily on the mobilisation of family and community labour (Carrière et al. 2019). The strenuous nature of this work, combined with the appeal of more stable income in towns or other economic sectors, can deter some of the younger generations and undermine the transmission of the technical and ecological knowledge tied to slash-and-burn systems (Tsayem Demaze & Manusset 2008). In some areas, the government and local authorities have also sought to confine farming to allotments or designated areas. While these measures meet land-management objectives, they restrict farmers' mobility and the area available for slash-and-burn rotations. This makes it more difficult to maintain continuous forest regeneration, leading to greater exposure to soil degradation (Tsayem Demaze & Amelot 2020).

Added to these land-use pressures are new health risks. The recent cassava disease has highlighted the system's vulnerability. At the same time, the erosion of varietal diversity is hindering the spread of more resistant local varieties (Interviews 2025).

A twofold challenge emerges. First, slash and burn agriculture must be acknowledged as a complex farming system historically suited to the constraints of the tropical rainforest. Second, its current transformations need to be understood and accompanied to avoid a drift toward degraded forms that erode its ecological, economic, and social value (Bahuchet & Betsch 2012; Carrière et al. 2019; Tsayem Demaze & Amelot 2020).

THE CREOLE GARDEN: MEMORY, DIVERSITY, AND RESILIENCE

Creole gardens (or home gardens) are tree-lined spaces surrounding the house where fruit trees, food crops, medicinal plants, and ornamental species grow side by side. While commonly associated with Creole populations, they are in fact found more widely among rural and peri-urban households with Creole or mixed cultural identities. These systems are a legacy of the small tracts that slaves cultivated to feed their families and sell any surplus. Originally intended primarily for subsistence needs, they have developed over time, gradually taking on a recreational and ornamental dimension as well (PAG 2013; Ozier Lafontantine 2012).

The Creole garden supplies part of a household's daily fruit, tubers, vegetables, and condiments. It also supplies the plants needed for phytotherapy (herbal medicine). It operates on limited means: small plots adjoining the house, predominantly manual labour, no herbicides, and on-site recycling of organic waste, making it a low-input and largely self-sufficient system (PAG 2013; Ozier Lafontantine 2012). The highly diverse plant life (fruit trees, food crops, medicinal plants, ornamental plants, and protective plants) is organised into a mosaic that meets everyday needs. This is the result of a long history of plant selection and exchange (PAG 2013).

Each garden is the result of family choices rather than a single model, leading to a wide variety of layouts from one household to another (van Andel et al., 2016). Through the repeated gestures of gardening and the everyday transmission of recipes and uses, it remains a discreet yet central support for Creole memory and plant-related knowledge. (PAG 2013; Ozier Lafontantine 2012).

The place of the Creole kitchen garden within the agricultural landscape is changing: its role as a source of food is gradually declining in favour of store-bought produce and commercial market gardening. Its ornamental and recreational aspects are growing, particularly in peri-urban areas. It nevertheless continues to support food diversity and the transmission of plant knowledge. Thus, the Creole garden remains a key asset in households' resilience to economic and health-related uncertainties (PAG 2013; Ozier Lafontantine 2012).

This system is cited as a concrete illustration of agroecology in a tropical environment, owing to the diversity of species it harbours and its close integration into domestic organic matter cycles (PAG 2013; Ozier Lafontaine 2012). Its vulnerability lies more in social than technical factors. The long-term continuity of these gardens depends on the transfer of knowledge and the involvement of younger generations, at a time when urbanisation, wage employment, and the standardisation of consumption patterns may be driving some residents away from these practices (van Andel et al. 2016).



Market-oriented agriculture: developing value chains and structuring markets

Commercial agriculture on the Guiana Shield remains overwhelmingly family-run. It is supported by a multitude of small farms and, despite its vulnerabilities, plays an essential role in feeding local populations. It supplies a significant range of vegetables, fruit, root crops, and cereals. Within this commercial agriculture sector, more technically equipped farms operating on a different production scale are turning toward export markets.

Enhancing the complementarity between subsistence and commercial agriculture in Suriname, French Guiana and Amapá could be a key driver in building food sovereignty across these territories. However, several conditions need to be met. These include better structuring the various agricultural sectors by strengthening their integration into local supply chains, developing value-adding approaches to improve farmers' incomes, and mitigating the environmental impacts of production.

ROOTS, TUBERS, VEGETABLES, AND FRUIT: STRONG POTENTIAL, SIGNIFICANT CONSTRAINTS

In Suriname, vegetable production is concentrated along the coastal strip around Paramaribo and neighbouring districts, in market-gardening areas run by small farms. Many farmers work part time and cultivate leased land, which undermines their investment and development plans. Alongside this small-scale farming, export-oriented producers are evidence of the sector's partial integration into international trade networks (Wasudha et al. 2018; Malgie et al. 2015).

Market gardening relies predominantly on manual labour, partial mechanisation and heavy use of mineral fertilisers and poultry manure, on soils often with poor irrigation and drainage, which increases farms' vulnerability to both droughts and floods. Pesticide use is widespread and often poorly regulated, applied without prior diagnosis, at high doses, and with inadequate management of surplus products and packaging, which pose health risks and lead to water contamination (Malgie et al. 2015; Gooptar 2012; Wasudha et al. 2018).

The seed system is two-pronged: farmer-saved seeds, conserved and exchanged for low-input crops, and imported hybrid seeds—often insufficiently adapted to local environments—for crops like tomato, papaya, and cabbage. In the latter case, the use of plant protection products tends to be more frequent (Wasudha et al. 2018).

The vegetables and tubers market remains largely controlled by middlemen who buy produce from small-scale market gardeners at low prices and capture a significant share of the value by reselling it at urban markets in Paramaribo and Nickerie (Thijssen et al. 2024). Most producers target local markets first. Few producers turn to export, constrained by a lack of information, burdensome administrative procedures, and uncertainty about market outlets (Malgie et al. 2015), given that the end of stable contracts with the Netherlands has increased price volatility and undermined their incomes (Wasudha et al. 2018). Agri-processing remains limited, focused mainly on root crops and spices such as cassava, ginger, and turmeric. (Thijssen et al. 2024).

In French Guiana, commercial market gardening and fruit-growing operations are mainly located along the coast. Major production areas in the nearby interior—particularly in Cacao and Javouhey—also contribute to market supply. The Hmong farms in these two villages exemplify systems that are fully integrated into the market and geared towards maximising farming income. Established in the late 1970s as part of the Green Plan, these communities have benefited from close support in the form of developed land, technical assistance, and seed provision.

Thus, small-scale farms where labour remains a major factor coexist alongside more mechanised farms, some of which have off-season greenhouses, and diversified, high value-added orchard farmers (Slamani, 2018). In the most intensive forms of farming, the widespread use of fertilisers, soil amendments, and pesticides on acidic or sandy soils ensures high productivity, but at the cost of significant health and environmental risks. When this intensification encroaches onto forest land, it contributes to land-use changes, leading to carbon losses and greenhouse gas emissions (Courte 2019; Ozier Lafontan et al. 2018).

Other farms are trialling low-impact practices such as mulching, cover crops, crop rotations, agroforestry, or organic inputs, which will maintain yields while restoring—or even increasing—soil carbon stocks compared with forest. These findings reinforce the need to regulate land clearing and support the transition to these systems (Slamani 2018; Courte 2019; Ozier Lafontan et al. 2018; Pons et al. 2024).



Producers sell the bulk of their fruit and vegetables at markets in Saint-Laurent du Maroni, Cayenne, and Kourou, combining retail with wholesale sales to resellers, restaurants, processors, and retail chains. Few farms are integrated into a sector-wide supply chain; most remain dependent on poorly structured short supply chains that are exposed to significant price fluctuations. The best-capitalised farms try to stabilise their income through off-season greenhouse production or by specialising in high- value fruits, at a substantial investment (Slamani 2018). Large-scale retailers and the catering sector are increasingly seeking regular local supplies. However, irregular volumes, agronomic constraints, and the absence of structured producer organizations are preventing the development of contractual arrangements (Ozier Lafontaine et al. 2018; Courte 2020).

In Amapá, market-oriented family farms are found in both rural areas and the urban outskirts. Around Macapá, clusters of peri-urban production form a market-gardening belt where land tenure is often not recognised by the authorities, complicating efforts to secure the families' livelihoods. Commercial market gardening in the region has developed alongside migration patterns, primarily from north-eastern Brazil. These farms now supply part of the vegetables, fruit, fruit pulp, and cassava consumed in the cities, straddling the line between subsistence farming and commercial sale.

Generally speaking, farms practise mixed cropping, although cassava often accounts for the bulk of their income. These systems rely partly on mineral fertilisers and plant protection products to cope with the climate and heavy pest pressure (Vasconcelos et al. 2021). However, their excessive cost due to the remoteness of the area, limits their use (Orellana Segovia 2011; Belik 2020). Public campaigns promoting agroecological practices are gaining ground but are hampered by a lack of capital and the cost of alternatives, even though mixed cropping helps to maintain relatively diversified systems and moderate the use of inputs (Bazotti & Coelho 2017; Belik 2020). Marked by intensive labour requirements, these farms are frequently structured as producer associations.

Farmers mainly sell their produce at local markets, which offer direct sales channels with relatively favourable margins. They combine direct sales, occasional use of middlemen and partial integration into the urban retail sector. Large supermarket chains source their supplies mainly from wholesalers based in other Brazilian states. Public procurement (school nutrition programs and public food purchasing) remains difficult to access and has not yet resulted in a clear improvement in producer remuneration, which limits their investment capacity (Orellana Segovia 2011; Belik 2020; Chelala & Chelala 2023; Bazotti & Coelho 2017).



RICE CULTIVATION: CONTRASTING DEVELOPMENT PATHS IN SURINAME AND FRENCH GUIANA

In north-western Suriname, the Nickerie polders are home to a commercial rice-growing industry developed by former Indian, Javanese, and Creole indentured labourers who settled there following the abolition of slavery. the Nickerie polders are home to a commercial rice-growing industry developed by former Indian, Javanese, and Creole indentured labourers who settled there following the abolition of slavery. Today, these polders are mainly family-run operations (Verweij 2023). Production supplies both the domestic and export markets, with two harvests of irrigated rice per year. Some of the more recent polders are operated by large companies cultivating blocks ranging from hundreds to thousands of hectares. The main technical constraints relate to the quality of the hydraulic infrastructure—an incomplete and poorly maintained system of canals and dykes—and pressure from pests and diseases, which are responsible for significant yield losses (ADRON 2018; Verweij 2023).

Large companies engage in high-tech rice cultivation, supported by in-house milling capacity or preferential contracts with rice mills, combined with finely planned production calendars and strengthened phytosanitary management. These large companies, which are integrated into structured export networks to the European Union, the Caribbean and other markets, rely on their own storage and processing facilities or on partner mills. Their capital, access to credit and the diversity of their markets give them far greater room for manoeuvre than small-scale producers (Verweij 2023; El Masry 2005).

Small and medium-sized rice farmers mainly sell raw paddy rice to private rice mills at seasonal prices set by the mills, while drying, processing, packaging and export account for the bulk of the added value further down the supply chain, against a backdrop of significant fluctuations linked to harvest variabilities (Verweij 2023).

Across the border in French Guiana, rice cultivation—now virtually non-existent—was concentrated in the Mana polder, which was reclaimed from coastal marshes and covered approximately 5,500 hectares at its peak. This system relied on large agro-industrial enterprises: initially Surinamese and Dutch family-run groups who introduced their techniques there, and then, from 1995 onwards, a Spanish group (Clément et al. 2011; Blancodini 2025).

Rice cultivation in Mana was highly mechanised, organised into plots covering several dozen hectares, with fertiliser application and phytosanitary treatments conducted by aeroplane. Despite the use of selected seeds—initially partly local and later imported from Suriname—yields remained disappointing in relation to the investments made. These systems faced significant agronomic and physical constraints (flooding, coastal instability, saltwater intrusion) and high pest pressure, reinforcing dependence on plant protection products. From the late 1980s onwards, their intensive use raised concerns about water quality, declining fish and bird populations, and residues in the food chain. As a result of stricter European regulations in the late 2000s, the use of certain inputs from Suriname was banned. Rice farmers were forced to turn to products approved in Europe, but which proved ineffective in an equatorial climate. Cultivation finally ceased in 2011 (Blancodini 2025; Clément et al. 2011).

The Mana sector had been designed from the outset for export to Latin America and Europe, while also anticipating that part of the production would be sold locally. However, the model relied heavily on public support (marketing, transport, and investment subsidies), which largely determined the profitability of production.

SOYA: A NEW AGRICULTURAL FRONTIER IN AMAPÁ

In south-central Amapá, mechanised soybean farms are concentrated in the Cerrado savannahs (tropical savannah biome) of the Macacoari and Pedreira river basins, between the municipalities of Macapá, Itaubal do Piririm and Tartarugalzinho. Most farmers settled in the area between 2010 and 2021. Producers—mostly from southern Brazil and backed by capital—have been drawn to Amapá by its agri-climatic conditions and its strategic location within the northern arc, a major port and logistics zone in northern Brazil. Land records show strong concentration, with a majority of large estates covering thousands of hectares (Ferreira et al. 2025), often established on public savannah land that is the subject of disputes with older settlements (Quilombola communities, agrarian reform settlements), against a backdrop of conflicts over access, land grabbing and legal uncertainty (Lima et al. 2022; Chelala & Chelala 2022).

These farms operate as highly mechanised and capital-intensive units, built upon the previous practice of using rice as a crop to clear savannahs. Producers use standardised, input-intensive practices, relying heavily on phytosanitary products and rotations of forage crops, maize, and—more marginally—beans or cassava. (Ferreira et al. 2025; Castro et al. 2015). Average productivity remains reasonable at the state level, but the recent trend has been marked by significant volatility, linked to fluctuations in the regulatory framework.

Soya is grown in Amapá almost exclusively for export via the port of Santana and, to a lesser extent, via road transport to other northern states (Ferreira et al. 2025). Farmers sell their produce to a small number of traders and commercial firms that manage storage and loading, as part of a system of integration into global soya value chains (Castro et al. 2015). The absence of strong cooperatives or collective marketing mechanisms limits producers' ability to negotiate sales terms and increases their dependence on a handful of buyers (Chelala & Chelala 2022).

Soya has expanded largely through the direct conversion of native savannahs or degraded pastures into mechanised monoculture crops. This production has also replaced other activities (subsistence farming, livestock rearing, fishing) and has led to an intensification of land speculation. Although Amapá still accounts for only a small proportion of national soya production, it is quickly experiencing the land and environmental issues already documented in other regions of the country (Lima et al. 2022; Chelala & Chelala 2022; Ferreira et al. 2025).



Guyanese livestock farming: diversity, constraints, and prospects

On the Guiana Shield, the proportion of consumption met by local production is lower for animal products than for plant products. Nevertheless, livestock farming in French Guiana is a strategic component of local agriculture when considering pathways towards agroecological intensification. In French Guiana, the cattle sector—the only livestock sector discussed here—is the most structured, yet it meets only a limited portion of local demand, while other forms of livestock production remain underdeveloped or largely informal. In Suriname, where livestock farming is more substantial, the sector is confronted with major constraints linked to productivity, pasture management, and the vulnerability of small polyculture farms. In Amapá, the coexistence of low-intensity family-run systems and extensive buffalo farming on sensitive land highlights the tensions between land use, economic performance, and environmental impacts.

In these contexts, livestock farming must be considered in close conjunction with crop farming in order to explore more sustainable pathways to intensification, based on grassland management, the integration of trees, livestock and crops, and the provision of ecosystem services.

THE CATTLE SECTOR IN FRENCH GUIANA: A FRAGILE AND INCOMPLETE STRUC

Since the 1950s, public policy has steered the development of cattle farming towards the savannahs west of Cayenne and the newly cleared areas around Kourou, Sinnamary, Saint-Laurent and Matoury. Concessions and long leases have provided long-term stability for land allocated to livestock production. Starting in 1975, this strategy took shape with the 'Green Plan', a major agricultural and forestry development initiative (Coueron 2006). It has fostered the emergence of holdings with stronger capital, training, and technical support, progressively structuring the cattle sector around three profiles: multi-active landowners, large estates exceeding 200 hectares, and producers in a capitalisation phase with available land reserves (Vayssières et al. 2022).

These tropical pasture-based systems, oriented toward beef production, are built around suckler-cow herds whose calves are reared and finished on pasture, with Brahman zebu serving as the predominant genetic base. Feed comes almost exclusively from sown pastures made up of low-nutritional-value grasses, whose growth fluctuates markedly across seasons. This necessitates low livestock densities per hectare to limit the use of concentrated feed (Vayssières et al. 2022).

The production environment is particularly challenging. The equatorial climate is harsh on both the grasslands and the animals. Pressure from parasites is high, a number of bovine pathologies are specific to the region, and stabilising forage cover crops as well as managing reproduction remains a challenge. This results in high calf mortality rates, particularly during the rainy season. These conditions have historically weakened livestock systems (Vivier et al. 1995; Galan et al. 2008). The animals' reproductive performance is low and highly variable depending on breed and crossbreeding, reflecting limitations in genetic adaptation and herd management (Tillard et al. 2023).

These farms must also contend with economic and institutional constraints. The capitalisation phase—land clearing, planting pastures, and gradually building up the herd—is long and costly. Dependence on imported breeding stock undermines the economic stability of the farms, which, in this context, become particularly reliant on public subsidies (Vivier et al. 1995; Galan et al. 2008). Added to this are constraints specific to French Guiana: geographical isolation, low production volumes, high costs of imported inputs (feed, equipment, services), limited availability and dissemination of technical information, and a shortage of skilled labour. These factors hinder the adoption of innovations and make it more difficult to consolidate specialised cattle farming systems (Coueron 2006; Galan et al. 2008).

Since the multi-species slaughterhouse at Dégrad-des-Cannes was opened in 2002, the cattle sector has refocused around this facility, which offers improved hygiene standards and a capacity far greater than the volumes slaughtered locally. The old slaughterhouses were closed in 2005 (Coueron 2006). The new facility carries out the vast majority of controlled slaughtering of ruminants, but a significant share of animals from less formalised systems continue to be slaughtered on-farm or in small-scale facilities and then sold directly to butchers at markets, or to private individuals (Galan et al. 2008). The sector continues to be hampered by the remoteness of the farms, the relatively high collection costs for limited volumes, and European health and safety requirements, which drive up marketing costs.

SCEBOG (French Guiana Cattle Farmers' Cooperative Society) plays a significant role in organising sales channels. It acts as the link between specialist farms, the Dégrad-des-Cannes slaughterhouse, and the fresh meat market. It negotiates prices and coordinates marketing, provides its members with inputs and technical services at preferential rates, and offers training, advice, and support in preparing applications for public funding (SCEBOG 2022).

Given the limited supply, meat prices are generally high in French Guiana. Locally produced meat sells for significantly more than imported meat, with producers emphasising the freshness of their product and its local origin to compete with cheaper frozen meat from Brazil, Suriname, and other sources. This has a direct impact on farmers' incomes and their ability to maintain or expand their farms.

LAND USE AND THE CLIMATE IMPACT OF CATTLE FARMING

Cattle farming in French Guiana has a significant impact on the use of rural land, as it relies on large areas of grassland, often created through the gradual clearing of forest (Galan et al. 2008). The architects of the Green Plan initially viewed these grasslands as a means of restoring areas cleared by logging, stabilising the soil and putting the open clearings to productive use.

However, the frequent degradation of pastures due to weeds, poorly managed grazing practices (under- or overgrazing) and maintenance difficulties have shown that land development through livestock farming has not had the expected effects on the soil (Coueron 2006; Galan et al. 2008). On large cattle estates and farms in the capitalisation phase, sustainability depends on the ability to maintain these pastures, control overgrowth, organise grazing and maintain a stocking rate compatible with average-quality tropical forage (Galan et al. 2008).

Research on grassland systems resulting from deforestation (Blanfort et al. 2015) nevertheless shows that pastures can, after about 20 years, become carbon-storing ecosystems. Soil carbon stocks can reach, or even exceed, those of the original forest soils. Although the Amazon rainforest remains the ecosystem with the highest total carbon stocks, mature grasslands can achieve similar levels of below ground carbon storage by converting part of the forest's biomass carbon into soil organic matter. This outcome depends on decades of maintenance, the absence of fire, the establishment of grass–legume mixtures, and the use of appropriate grazing regimes (Klumpp et al. 2020; Blanfort et al. 2021).

Furthermore, meat production in French Guiana has a relatively high climate impact per kilogramme produced (Vayssières et al., 2022). Compared with mainland France, it requires around twice as much energy and generates nearly double the CO_2 emissions for the same quantity of meat. This is a reflection of the system's limited technical and environmental efficiency. The animals use forage resources less efficiently and require more inputs to reach market weight.

On the other hand, when considered on a per-hectare basis, livestock farms in French Guiana appear to be more resource-efficient. They consume less energy and emit less CO_2 than farms in mainland France (Vayssières et al., 2022). This finding highlights the potential of tropical grasslands and the benefits of sustainable intensification practices based on rigorous pasture management. These systems enable meat production with relatively low energy use and greenhouse-gas emissions that remain modest at the scale of the agricultural area.

These findings suggest that specialised cattle farming in French Guiana could follow pathways conducive to carbon sequestration and the provision of ecosystem services, provided that grazing and maintenance practices are adapted (Blanfort et al., 2015; 2021; Klumpp et al., 2020).

INTENSIFICATION WITHOUT DEGRADATION: DRIVERS FOR A SUSTAINABLE CATTLE SECTOR

Although the cattle sector is the most structured in the region, it currently accounts for only one-fifth of local meat consumption. To boost production and meet demand, intensification is necessary, but it must be approached within a sustainable framework: increasing volumes, diversifying production and reducing pressure on natural environments. In the context of French Guiana's Amazon region, characterised by rich and dense biodiversity as well as the history of its agricultural practices, agroecological approaches are of particular interest. They enable several objectives to be met simultaneously: soil fertility, reduced dependence on imported inputs, income diversification, farm resilience, animal welfare, and carbon sequestration.

- **Priority: making the most of land that has already been cleared**
  The first approach involves prioritising the restoration and revitalisation of degraded or under-utilised land and grassland, rather than clearing new areas of forest. This is essential given the land-use pressures and stringent environmental requirements.

- **Agroforestry and silvopastoralism: producing more, better, and differently**
  Variations of agroforestry that functionally integrate service trees into livestock grazing areas will enable several improvements simultaneously. These include animal welfare (shade, shelter), diversification of livestock feed (woody forage) and the production of complementary goods (fruit, timber, wood for energy). Furthermore, silvopastoralism incorporates wooded rangelands, undergrowth, or open woodland into the farm, where animals benefit from protection from adverse weather conditions and a diversity of forage resources, which is particularly valuable during dry periods. Finally, it is a way of making the most of areas that are difficult to mechanise or that lack direct agricultural value (Interviews 2025).

- **Dynamic rotational grazing: a proven tool for sustainable intensification**
  Dynamic rotational grazing optimises grassland management by rotating the herd between different plots on the farm and utilising the grass more efficiently. Each plot is given sufficient rest time to regenerate, which helps to increase pasture density and improve the nutritional value of the grass. This approach helps to maintain productive grassland over the long term (Couëron, 2006; Galan et al., 2008; Innov-Eco, PTD Technical Manual, 2014; Tillard, 2023).

- **Forage legumes: fertility and self-sufficiency**
  The systematic integration of nitrogen-fixing forage legumes into pastures, hedgerows or tree lines is a key strategy for improving soil fertility. These legumes diversify livestock feed, reduce dependence on mineral fertilisers and imported protein concentrates, and enhance farm self-sufficiency in a context where inputs are costly and difficult to access (Blanfort et al., 2021; Klumpp et al., 2020; Tillard, 2023).

- **Diversification of farm enterprises: building resilience**
  Combining cattle farming with other farm enterprises, such as food crops, small ruminants, pigs and poultry, helps to secure and diversify income, spread risks more effectively, optimise land use and improve overall farm resilience. This is achieved through improved manure management, the utilisation of by-products and the complementary nature of production cycles (Galan et al., 2008; Duflot et al., 2008; Vayssières et al., 2022).

Given the overall inferior quality of Amazonian soils, these approaches to intensification demonstrate their potential to improve soil fertility. Integrating trees and shrubs into livestock grazing areas increases the input of organic matter (leaves, roots), protects the soil from rain and sunlight, and limits erosion. Managing grazing in a way that respects grass recovery periods helps strengthen root systems and increase biomass returns. Together, these approaches enable fragile soils to better store carbon, water, and nutrients.



SURINAMESE LIVESTOCK FARMING UNDER SEVERE STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS[1]

Livestock farming systems rely mainly on small cattle farms focused on milk and meat production, as well as on a large number of pig and poultry farms. Located predominantly on the coastal plain, particularly in the districts of Wanica and Saramacca, near Paramaribo, these farms are often part of mixed crop-livestock systems.

In the cattle sector, only a few farms have more than 50 head of cattle. Most have two to three hectares, where livestock is reared alongside various crops. As for pig and poultry farms, they operate under semi-intensive to intensive systems, heavily reliant on feed purchased on the market.

These livestock farms face significant structural constraints. Cattle are mainly grazed on natural grasslands, which are only lightly improved and often poorly managed, while cultivated pastures remain scarce. The grasslands are utilised without sufficient crop rotation, which limits their regeneration.

Livestock density per hectare is particularly high, especially in peri-urban areas. This leads to overgrazing and degradation of vegetation cover, resulting in undernourishment of ruminants, high mortality rates, and low productivity per hectare.

Small mixed farming holdings have low levels of capitalisation and technical expertise, precarious incomes, and limited capacity for investment, particularly in infrastructure and animal feed. Compounding these difficulties is the exposure of coastal areas to erosion, flooding, droughts, and saltwater intrusion, which directly affect the quality and availability of pasture.

Cattle slaughter is essentially centred on a single slaughterhouse (Surebeef), supplemented by a few district slaughterhouses and home slaughtering. Pig slaughter is also concentrated within a single facility, while some small ruminants and poultry continue to be produced and processed in small, scattered units, which are largely excluded from official statistics.

[1] This sub-section is based on: FAO (2010), Derlagen, Shik & Moors (2017) and IICA & UNDP (2023).

Finally, collective organisation among producers remains limited. The cattle sector is highly fragmented and has only a small number of functioning cooperatives. At the same time, a few large companies account for the bulk of slaughtering, dairy processing, chick production, and feed manufacturing.

FROM FAMILY-RUN LIVESTOCK FARMS TO THE BUFFALO RANCHES OF THE ARAGUARI RIVER: THE CONTRASTS OF AMAPÁ[2]

Livestock farming in Amapá plays a significant role in land use yet makes only a limited contribution to the municipalities' GDP. **Within the Brazilian Amazon, the state remains a minor player in the cattle sector, far removed from the rapid expansion seen in Pará or Rondônia.** The various livestock operations — beef and dairy cattle, poultry, and occasionally pigs or buffalo — are generally combined with cultivated land intended for subsistence and the sale of surplus produce. Herds are mostly small to medium in size, and their feed consists primarily of pasture, supplemented by crops grown on the farm and a limited quantity of purchased feed.

Production constraints stem mainly from the low productivity of the systems, the small size of herds and limited technology use. A huge proportion of mixed crop-livestock farms do not regard livestock farming as their main source of income, which limits their willingness to invest in pasture management, genetic selection, or infrastructure.

From an environmental perspective, the small size of the farms and the integration of livestock farming into agroecological systems help to limit some of the degradation risks. The animals contribute to the recycling of biomass and the maintenance of soil fertility, albeit with relatively low yields.

Furthermore, extensive buffalo farming has developed in the east of the state, along the Araguari river. Large-scale farms there use naturally flood-prone land, with low stocking densities per hectare. This activity raises more sensitive environmental issues linked to drainage works, changes in hydrological regimes, salinisation and impacts on fragile ecosystems, all of which must be taken into account.

[2] This sub-section is based on: Lourenço Junior & Garcia (2006), Marini (2015), Grott & Leuzinger (2022), IICA & UNDP (2023), Castro (2025) and Lima Pedrada et al. (2025).

UNDERSTANDING AND RECOGNISING THE **UNIQUE NATURE OF FARMING SYSTEMS**

On the Guiana Shield, local farming systems form a rich and diverse whole, rooted in ancient practices and know-how adapted to Amazonian environments. **This diversity forms an essential technical, social, and cultural foundation for envisioning agroecological intensification of production.**

However, Suriname, French Guiana and Amapá are clear demonstrations that food sovereignty is not merely a matter of increasing production volumes. It rests on the ability to coordinate and strengthen all forms of agriculture:

- Subsistence farming, which is often overlooked in statistics but is crucial for daily food provision and household resilience.
- Market-oriented family farming, which is undermined by production costs, dependence on inputs and difficulties in marketing their products.
- More capitalised, export-oriented sectors, whose social and environmental impacts raise questions about their actual contribution to local development.

Understanding and recognising the diversity of these systems—their strengths, vulnerabilities and trajectories—is a key prerequisite for any food sovereignty strategy. It is on this foundation that three key levers can be aligned to strengthen agricultural production: coherent access to and management of land resources; training and support tailored to local realities; and support policies that promote sustainable practices and local production. These three levers are explored in the next chapter, which focuses on French Guiana.

Land, support, and public policy: the keys to a coherent agricultural strategy for French Guiana



Chapter

04

Having analysed agricultural systems on the Guiana Shield in Suriname, French Guiana and Amapá, this chapter focuses specifically on French Guiana. The analysis positions the country within a coherent regional context, highlights its specific dynamics, and identifies levers for action that form the conditions required to advance development at the regional scale.

French Guiana has a specific institutional, land tenure and administrative framework, which directly shapes local agricultural pathways. It has an explicit objective of food sovereignty. Shifting from the broader Guiana Shield to a political and institutional focus on French Guiana makes it possible to translate the regional analysis into operational levers tailored to the local institutional context and that can be mobilised to strengthen agricultural production.

Within this framework, three drivers emerge as decisive for aligning the strategies of private and public stakeholders around a common goal. The first concerns land, in a department that has vast forest areas as well as a scarcity of land that is truly accessible and stable for agricultural use. The second relates to training and support, which are still poorly aligned with the realities of French Guiana, and the recognition of the vital contribution that small-scale farming makes to the region. The third relates to policies supporting agriculture and food security, whose complex structure, budgetary imbalances and lack of technical expertise limit their scope. Rethinking these three levers makes it possible to shift from a patchwork of measures to a coherent strategy that serves local agriculture and advances food sovereignty[3].

[3] The guidelines proposed in this chapter are the synthesis of the findings and proposals drawn from the literature, institutional and public documents, as well as interviews conducted in 2025 with stakeholders on the ground (AUDeG 2020; French Guiana Chamber of Agriculture 2025; CGSS French Guiana 2025; COSDA 2023; Court of Auditors 2022, 2023; French Guiana Agriculture Roadmap 2023; IEDOM 2024; IFIVEG 2020; General Inspectorate of Finance 2023; Lopez & Mohamed Soilihi 2023; Marzin et al. 2021; French Guiana PPAS 2023–2028; Prefect of French Guiana 2021; interviews 2025).

LAND:
A KEY DRIVER OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The land paradox

The land issue in French Guiana is marked by a paradox: a vast territory covering some 8 million hectares, 97% of which is covered by forest, where land remains largely owned by the state and is difficult for farmers to access. The area under cultivation covers approximately 36,000 ha, mainly cultivated by small family-run and subsistence farms. These agricultural areas are concentrated along the coastline and in a few accessible valleys. The Regional Development Plan identifies nearly 200,000 ha classified as 'agricultural areas'. However, these areas face competition from urbanisation, infrastructure development, forest conservation and mining activities, turning every land-use decision into a trade-off between food sovereignty, economic development, and ecosystem protection (Lopez & Mohamed Soilih 2023; Marzin et al. 2021).

Access to farmland has largely been organised through state mechanisms, notably concessions and long-term leases. These mechanisms have granted rights of use or conditional ownership, imposing cumbersome procedures on farmers. This situation is changing with the involvement of new actors and the gradual transfer of land to communities. The challenge now is to consolidate a land governance framework that coordinates the various responsibilities and directs available land toward sustainable agricultural uses.



In this context, the priority should be a land-use approach based on restraint: improving, securing, and rehabilitating land that is already open before contemplating further clearing. The reclamation of fallow and under-utilised land can help to boost local production, provided that its agronomic, economic and legal feasibility is assessed.

A rural land market under pressure and marked by limited transparency

Agricultural land policy in French Guiana has long remained fragmented, lacking a genuine focus on the development and strengthening of local agriculture (Lopez & Mohamed Soilih 2023). The French Guiana Public Land and Development Authority (EPFA) has acted primarily as a land-use planner through the creation of land reserves, providing infrastructure or developing agricultural plots, without having access to the regulatory and land-use reorientation tools specific to the rural land development and settlement corporations (SAFER), such as market monitoring and analysis, pre-emption rights or set-up support.

SAFER French Guiana's preliminary analyses of sale notifications received from notaries in 2024 and 2025 indicate a rural land market dominated by the sale of very small plots, typically less than one hectare, at prices shaped less by agricultural value of the land than by anticipated housing opportunities or other non-agricultural activities. This situation reflects growing pressure on land, particularly along the coastline where agricultural land has faced competition from urbanisation, fragmentation or rezoning as building land. Reports by the French Guiana Urban Planning and Development Agency (AUDeG, 2020) and SAFER French Guiana (2023; 2025) highlight a land market that has not been sufficiently studied, with incomplete data, and which calls for greater transparency. **These dynamics drive up the cost of accessing land for agricultural projects and complicate the establishment of new producers, which may contribute to shifting the search for land toward new areas that need to be opened up or cleared.**

Regulation of the rural land market is essential to safeguard agricultural land use and curb fragmentation and speculative price inflation. This entails enhancing transparency in transactions and pricing, mobilising pre emption rights when appropriate, and prioritising land allocation for viable agricultural projects. Reinforcing these instruments would facilitate farm establishment, consolidation, and succession, while contributing to increased local production in support of food sovereignty.

Ill-conceived land allocations and unproductive land

Farmland continues to bear the hallmarks of ill-conceived land allocations, which continue to hinder the establishment of new farms. Large areas have been allocated without any real development, and therefore without alleviating the shortage of land actually available for viable projects (INSEE 2016; Lopez & Mohamed Soilih 2023). Designed within an extensive logic and taken from forested land, these allocations included a significant share of soils that were difficult to farm, creating a clear gap between the area granted on paper and the land that was actually cultivable (INSEE 2016).

The location of the allocated land is also a reflection of unbalanced planning decisions, with criteria often defined outside the agricultural sphere alone. For example, between 2013 and 2015, more than half of the land allocated by the land allocation commissions was concentrated in Roura and Mana (INSEE 2016). This distribution highlights a concentration of allocations in a few key areas during this period, even though the needs for agricultural establishment and development extend across various regions of the territory.

New allocations should identify land that is genuinely suitable for farming—accessible, well-located, and capable of supporting productive agricultural activity. They would benefit from being situated within developed areas, so that farmers can focus their resources on production rather than on the essential development work required for farming.

Insufficient knowledge of soils and water resources

The low level of land utilisation is also due to a lack of detailed knowledge regarding which soils are genuinely suitable for agriculture. Estimates of potential AUC remain rough, with zoning that fails to adequately account for soil-related constraints (Marzin et al. 2021; Lopez & Mohamed Soilih 2023). Soil maps are outdated, LiDAR data (airborne laser remote sensing enabling highly detailed measurement of terrain and vegetation) do not yet cover the entire territory, and agronomic assessments are incomplete. This complicates the sizing of farms and drives applicants to seek large areas of land to compensate for uncertain productivity (Lopez & Mohamed Soilih 2023). As a result, farmers are being settled on leached soils, steep slopes, or hydromorphic land, leading to failures, abandonment or a constant search for new land to clear (Interviews 2025).

Furthermore, understanding of hydrogeological processes, particularly regarding groundwater, remains inadequate. While French Guiana generally benefits from abundant water resources, their local availability, aquifer recharge capacity, and the volumes that can be sustainably mobilised for irrigation remain poorly understood. This uncertainty hampers the planning of equipment and may constrain the development of crops requiring a secure water supply, particularly when dry spells become longer or more severe (Comité de l'eau et de la biodiversité de Guyane, 2024).

Agricultural zoning should be based on up-to-date knowledge of soil potential and constraints, as well as the sustainable availability of water resources. This would help to direct agricultural projects and development toward land best suited to different production systems, anticipate irrigation needs, and reduce the risk of failed settlements and pressure on new areas of forest.

Small-scale subsistence farming: essential, but vulnerable in terms of land tenure

Small-scale subsistence farming plays a leading role in food security, but it remains largely invisible and precarious in terms of land tenure. The slash-and-burn farming practised by Amerindian and Bushinengue communities provides the bulk of household food supplies but does not appear in land tenure statistics (Lopez & Mohamed Soilih 2023). Many farmers have neither land titles nor a stable professional status, which limits secure access to land, technical support, and financing (CTG 2023). Looking at the number of titles issued, a sizeable proportion relates to forms of small-scale farming, often subsistence farming. Conversely, when considering the total area of land allocated, it is primarily farms that already have a more solid technical and financial foundation that benefit. This discrepancy fuels a sense of land injustice and exacerbates tensions within the agricultural sector (INSEE 2016).

Small-scale subsistence farming should be fully integrated into the land strategy. Securing usage rights and land titles, adapting the conditions for accessing support, and providing administrative and technical assistance are essential. This in turn must be accompanied by rural infrastructure to make the land genuinely accessible and viable for farming.



Indigenous land rights: a sensitive issue

Access to land for Indigenous peoples remains a key issue to be addressed. Under the French Guiana Agreement of April 21, 2017, also known as the 'Pou Lagwiyann dékolé' protocol ("so that French Guiana can take off"), the state committed to allocating 400,000 ha to Indigenous, Amerindian and Bushinengue peoples through a public institution placed under the authority of the Grand Conseil coutumier (Grand Customary Council). The measure aimed to free up land for development projects. Yet the claims largely concerned lands of belonging, meaning territories that communities regard as theirs due to long standing and uninterrupted occupation (Interviews 2025; Lopez & Mohamed Soilih 2023). The mechanisms introduced in 1987—concessions, collective transfers, and collective use rights zones (ZDUC)—partially recognise these rights, but without a transfer of ownership, and impose a dual obligation: to form associations under the 1901 Act and to relinquish the land in the event it is not used. These conditions perpetuate legal uncertainty and expose these territories to new land redistributions (simplified land allocation plans, mining projects, development works) (Stiefvater 2021; Palisse & Davy 2018).

This situation stems from a long-standing political choice. France does not recognise Indigenous peoples in French Guiana, invoking the principle of the indivisibility of the French people and refusing to ratify ILO Convention No. 169, while most of the countries in the Amazon region have established specific legal statuses and recognised Indigenous lands (Filoche et al. 2017). Along the coast, population density, the small size and fragmentation of concessions, as well as the reclassification of certain ZDUCs (collective use rights zones) as nature areas in local urban planning schemes, make shifting cultivation almost impossible and exacerbate tensions (Filoche et al. 2017).

The debates surrounding the creation of the French Guiana Amazonian Park in 2007 heightened the politicisation of land-use rights. Conceived with conservation in mind and established without prior recognition of territorial rights, the park was perceived by the Wayana as a tool of dispossession. The 2006 law on national parks granted no decision-making powers to customary authorities, confining them to an advisory role, which is perceived as the institutionalised marginalisation of indigenous communities in the governance of land and resources (Fleury & Karpe 2007).



A clearer and more stable recognition of Indigenous land rights, combined with management arrangements developed in consultation with the communities concerned, would help to reduce tensions and secure agricultural uses. This should also help to preserve the territorial conditions necessary for subsistence farming practices, in particular the movement of abattis, fallow land and access to cultivation areas.

Incomplete institutional restructuring

Recent developments in land tenure in French Guiana have been marked by a slow, and at times chaotic, institutional restructuring that is struggling to improve access to land. Nearly a decade after the 2017 French Guiana Agreement, only a few thousand hectares of the 250,000 promised have been transferred to local authorities. Furthermore, the public body that was supposed to manage the 400,000 ha earmarked for indigenous peoples has still not been established. At the same time, land speculation is on the rise along the coastline (Interviews 2025; French Guiana Agreement 2017).

SAFER Guyane was established in 2021 against a backdrop of intense pressure on agricultural land and already entrenched speculation, with limited means of land regulation (Lopez & Mohamed Soilih 2023). Its pre-emption right remains largely ineffective; it has yet to identify the areas to be managed (20,000 ha promised by the state, 50,000 ha by the local authorities) and operates on a budget insufficient to deploy a field team (PPAS Guyane 2024–2028). The debate is now centred on the type of public support: SAFER Guyane points out that the state had committed to funding its start-up through a multi-year seed grant intended to enable it to fulfil its public service missions (settlement, transfer of ownership, land regulation, land-use planning). Without structural funding to implement a genuine long-term land policy, SAFER's capacity for action risks being limited to one-off services focused on reallocating land that has already been allocated but never developed (France Guyane, January 8, 2026).

At the same time, local authorities are beginning to take over land from the French Guiana Public Land and Planning Authority (EPFAG, formerly EPFA) and are being called upon to play an increasing role in its management and direction. SAFER Guyane can support them in this responsibility by conducting agricultural and land assessments, helping to define land strategies and manage assets, and assisting with land-use planning (SAFER Guyane 2025; 2024a; 2024b). For its part, the French Guiana Chamber of Agriculture is seeking to strengthen its capacity to exert greater influence over the use of agricultural land and the transfer of farms (Interviews 2025).

Strengthening SAFER Guyane's resources and clarifying the state's commitments regarding land transfers are essential for consolidating land governance that serves local agriculture. Local authorities tasked with acquiring or managing land must adopt a long-term approach, guaranteeing resource protection, transparent and equitable allocation procedures, and the effective land development. A coherent land policy, built on principles of restraint, land restoration, and secure land use, constitutes a fundamental pillar of food sovereignty in French Guiana.



TRAINING AND SUPPORT TAILORED TO **STAKEHOLDER NEEDS**

Agricultural training and generational renewal: persistent challenges

Agricultural training in French Guiana is lacking in several respects. It still fails to adequately address the diverse needs of producers and the specific conditions under which farming is practised in the territory, which is hindering the transition to more sustainable systems. The shortage of agronomists and technicians working in the field is compounded by a curriculum that remains overly based on mainland France's standards, which are ill-suited to poor soils, the equatorial climate and the region's specific constraints. Agroecological and agroforestry models, despite being well-suited to these contexts, still play only a marginal role.

Existing mechanisms do not adequately consider the diversity of target groups (young people, small-scale farmers, salaried workers) or the challenges of climate transition. This results in a marked disconnect between the skills actually required and those acquired through initial training (Roadmap 2023; Prefect of French Guiana 2021).

The Matiti School of Agriculture — French Guiana's leading public agricultural education institution and a key player in training future farmers, technicians, and advisers — can provide a useful foundation in management, accounting, and administrative procedures. However, the technical curriculum is considered insufficient, and practical experience with agricultural machinery is limited due to safety constraints (Interviews 2025; Roadmap 2023).

Mandatory training associated with European instruments, such as that required for accessing or retaining certain EAFRD–CAP subsidies (set-up assistance, agri-environmental measures, or organic-farming conversion), leads only to sporadic skills enhancement However, the absence of post-training follow-up limits the assessment of changes in practices and slows the formation of relay farmer groups capable of disseminating innovation (Feuille de route territoriale de l'agriculture guyanaise 2023).

Despite good academic success rates, few young graduates are setting up their own farms or entering agricultural careers, even as a generation of farmers is reaching retirement. In a region with a generally young population, the average age of farm managers rose from 45 in 2010 to 48 in 2020, and 14% of farms were affected by the impending departure of at least one manager or co-manager over the age of 60 (Agreste 2021). Moreover, several thousand producers—particularly those engaged in small-scale agriculture in the western region—remain insufficiently covered by training, support, and installation schemes. **The lack of coordination between training, technical support and set-up opportunities in farming thus contributes to the underutilisation of human resources and productive potential (Feuille de route 2023; Préfet de Guyane 2021).**

Generational renewal is constrained by the prevailing conditions of agricultural work. On many farms, the work is still largely manual and physically demanding, while mechanisation and the available equipment are sometimes limited or inadequately adapted to local constraints. These conditions undermine the appeal of agricultural careers to young people and the ability of farms to ensure generational renewal (ODEADOM 2026).

Training should be more closely aligned with practical realities on the ground and better adapted to the diversity of farming systems and future farmers. It could combine initial training focused on priority sectors with continuing professional development modules on agroecological and agroforestry practices, reducing chemical inputs and adapting to climate change. It should also give greater recognition to skills acquired through practical experience. Greater coordination between agricultural education institutions, rural family centres, the Chamber of Agriculture, private training centres and professional organisations would help to tailor training to the needs of the production regions. Monitoring graduates and utilising employer groups would facilitate entry into the labour market and skills development.

Making agriculture more attractive to future farmers requires promoting more modern, better-equipped and less physically demanding production systems, while ensuring that this development is aligned with training, support, and project economic viability needs.

Maintaining technical support

Technical and technical-economic support is now seen as a crucial but fragile link in agricultural development. Farmers have access to only a limited number of technicians who are consistently present on the ground, which leaves them isolated when confronting production constraints and climate-related risks. In several production areas, the gradual withdrawal or high turn-over of advisers makes it difficult to build relationships of trust. Beyond the number of positions, it is the quality, continuity and local roots of the advisory service that are at stake (Interviews 2025; Préfet de Guyane 2021).

The lack of robust, up-to-date technical and economic guidelines specifically tailored to conditions in French Guiana limits the ability to propose well-managed technical pathways, to ensure the safety of facilities and to guide choices regarding crop or livestock farming systems. The available yield benchmarks are considered incomplete, unreliable or obsolete, while scenarios for adapting to climate change are still in their infancy. Finally, imported techniques perform poorly when they are not backed by local know-how and practices (Interviews 2025).

This vulnerability is also due to the advisory bodies, which are often perceived as being too closely modelled on the French system—which is ill-suited to local challenges—or as being weakened by excessive financial and organisational constraints. Key organisations, such as GERHOPA (Employers' Group for the Human Resources Development of French Guiana's Professional Agricultural Organisations), remain dependent on precarious public funding or annual agreements. (Interviews 2025; Feuille de route 2023).

Finally, farmers' limited ability to fund advisory services contributes to the region's lack of appeal to qualified agricultural advisers (Préfet de Guyane 2021; Interviews 2025).

The stabilisation of local advisory teams is a key challenge. Sector-specific technicians based in the production areas should provide regular support tailored to conditions in French Guiana. Multi-year programmes, combining assessment, progress plans and simple technical and economic benchmarks, would help to secure the establishment and future trajectories of farms.

Inadequate entrepreneurial support

LAdministrative, accounting, and entrepreneurial support is another weak link in the professionalisation of farms. Management centres, which provide support with accounting, taxation and securing funding, are themselves in a precarious position, reliant on uncertain public funding and unstable human resources. This fragility arises at a time when many farmers are struggling to control their production costs and the day-to-day management of their farms (Interviews 2025; CGSS Guyane 2025; Chambre d'agriculture de Guyane 2025).

Historically, schemes such as the flat-rate agricultural VAT refund and accounting support have helped to foster a certain accounting culture by facilitating access to the services of management centres. The gradual phasing out of this state support now requires the Chamber of Agriculture and the local authority to take over—notably through agreements with the General Social Security Fund (CGSS) and URSSAF — to identify farms in difficulty and propose solutions such as debt moratoriums or repayment plans, against a regional backdrop of land abandonment and economic vulnerability (gov. taxes 2016; CGSS Guyane 2025; Chambre d'agriculture de Guyane 2025; Interviews 2025).

Significant barriers remain at an individual level: some farmers are illiterate or have limited literacy skills, which complicates administrative procedures. The procedures for accessing European and national aid are perceived as a complicated process with complex criteria, processing times that do not align with project timetables, and difficulties in communicating with the relevant authorities (Feuille de route 2023; Interviews 2025).

Administrative, accounting and business support services (notably the Chamber of Agriculture and management centres) should be strengthened and tailored to small farms. They must be able to support farmers with their administrative procedures, day-to-day management, funding applications and preventing economic and social difficulties.

Such support should be sustained over time, available throughout the territory, and aligned with producer organisations. It should take into account difficulties in literacy and with digital tools, which still limit effective access to rights and support.

Funding mechanism difficult to access

For farmers, access to funding remains a major barrier, caught between cautious lending practices by banks and public mechanisms that are difficult to access. Because value chains are not yet structured enough to support collective projects, investment is largely driven by individual initiatives, financed mainly by local banks. The French Development Agency contributes principally through guarantee mechanisms—such as FOGAP (Guarantee Fund for Agriculture and Fisheries)—which help secure a portion of the banking risk. (Feuille de route 2023; 2025 Interviews).

In this context, the availability of credit for agriculture is often perceived as limited, and advisers as unresponsive. The use of tools such as subsidised loans and guarantees remains insufficient (Interviews 2025; Feuille de route 2023). Banks, subject to their own constraints, prioritise profitable projects and well-structured sectors. They rely on cooperatives and organisations within the sectors to assess the soundness of projects, thereby highlighting the key—though still fragile—role in French Guiana of these structures as technical and economic intermediaries for farmers who generally lack the skills to present and justify a funding application (Interviews 2025).

Agriculture in French Guiana is often perceived as being heavily dependent on public subsidies. In reality, existing schemes — such as European aid, tax exemptions and guarantees — remain inaccessible to the majority of farmers due to restrictive eligibility criteria, lengthy processing times and significant administrative complexity. This hinders productive investment and exacerbates the financial vulnerability of farms (Feuille de route 2023; Interviews 2025).

Access to credit should be simplified and better tailored to the realities of farms in French Guiana. Guarantee schemes and funding advances should be better coordinated with public subsidies to prevent farmers from having to make significant expenditures before receiving aid. This would help to preserve often fragile cash flows and secure investments, particularly for the smallest farms.

Cooperatives, producer organisations and sectoral bodies should be strengthened in their role of supporting project development. They can help farmers draw up clearer investment plans, prepare their credit applications, and thereby facilitate access to bank financing for family farms.

The link between research, advisory services and agricultural practices must be strengthened

The synergy between research, innovation and support remains too weak to drive a transformation in agricultural practices. Research and development initiatives—such as varietal trials, agroforestry and agropastoral systems, Ecophyto mechanisms, or glyphosate-free alternatives—are in place, yet their outcomes remain mostly contained within programme frameworks (demonstration plots, technical field visits, adapted synthetic materials, multilingual tools) and formal reports. Structured transfer mechanisms that effectively reach farms remain insufficient (Feuille de route territoriale de l'agriculture guyanaise 2023; 2025 Interviews).

This shortfall is part of a wider pattern of structural delays within a challenging soil and climate environment: limited local capacity for experimentation, a lack of laboratories for analysing plants, soils and animal diseases, and difficulties in accessing seeds and plant material. Additionally, research findings are not often integrated into technical guidelines and innovations tailored to local resources and constraints struggle to emerge.

Rapid changes to regulations on plant protection products and the ban on certain active substances are not always accompanied by viable and readily available alternatives. Therefore, farmers are exposed to the spread of invasive weeds, pests, and an increased risk of crop losses (Interviews 2025).

Applied research needs to serve farms more directly, notably through agroecology and agroforestry trial platforms, sentinel farms, pilot groups, technical days, and simple resources distributed to farmers. These mechanisms should be developed in collaboration with producers and address the specific constraints of the different regions of French Guiana, with a stronger transfer of results to farms.

Collaborating with pioneering farmers as demonstration relays—alongside advisers and professional organisations—can spur the adoption of innovations and bridge the gap between what is assessed and what is actually practised.

A developing but limited agri-processing sector

Agriculture in French Guiana suffers from a lack of essential infrastructure and shared facilities: farming tracks that are in poor condition or non-existent, a lack of or insufficient irrigation networks, and a shortage of slaughterhouses, meat-cutting plants, cold storage, packaging stations and processing facilities that meet standards. These shortcomings severely limit the capacity to produce, safeguard, store, and process products, particularly in inland areas where access to land and markets still relies on rudimentary infrastructure (Feuille de route territoriale 2023; IFIVEG 2020).

Agri-processing plays a limited role, despite being identified as a key driver for adding value to local production, securing market outlets, and meeting the needs of the eating-out industry or certain export markets. The productive sector consists of a few small, well-organised businesses and farm enterprises alongside numerous small, often artisanal units, particularly those producing abattis products (cassava, tubers, fruit). Processing capacity remains low and is quickly saturated. The lack of high-performance equipment, poorly structured stakeholders, and the irregularity or lack of a secure supply of local raw materials are obstacles to moving upmarket and meeting health and traceability requirements (Préfet de Guyane 2021; Feuille de route territoriale 2023; IFIVEG 2020).

The economic viability of these tools also depends on the size and regularity of market outlets. Given the limited and scattered consumer markets, high logistics costs and competition from imported products, volumes sold locally are often not enough to recoup the costs of processing equipment.

Strengthening infrastructure and public services is a prerequisite for agricultural development. Investment should be tailored to the differing realities of coastal areas and river-served riverine regions.

Agricultural processing facilities for fruit, vegetables and tubers could be supported where they are backed by producer organisations, regular technical and economic support, and sufficiently secure markets. Their viability depends on linking local markets, the catering sector and, where economic, logistical and health conditions permit, export markets, particularly at the regional level. They would thus help to stabilise volumes and prices and retain more added value locally.



THE NECESSARY IMPETUS FOR POLICIES THAT SUPPORT AGRICULTURE

A complex support framework

Public support for agriculture in French Guiana is based on a constellation of mechanisms, whose overall coherence and actual impact on the territory's agricultural development are the subject of debate. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is the main driver of agricultural policy through the French Guiana Rural Development Programme (PDRG), while the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) finances the programme of options specifically relating to remoteness and insularity (POSEI), which focuses on the specific characteristics of the overseas territories. These two funds are coordinated with other European instruments, for which the Territorial Collectivity of French Guiana acts as the managing authority: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for investment and land-use planning, the European Social Fund (ESF+) for employment and training, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and Interreg projects for regional cooperation.

In theory, this framework offers a wide range of tools to finance productive investment, sectoral development and rural development. In practice, however, it results in a proliferation of funding channels and rules, which complicates access to support for farmers and their organisations. In 2023, total resources amounted to 24.9 million euros, of which 10.7 million was allocated to the PDRG, supplemented by significant sums mobilised in the overseas territories, various national or specific programmes, and the 9 million euros from POSEI (excluding cross-cutting measures) (IEDOM, 2024).

POSEI: a key mechanism misaligned with the needs of French Guiana

Within this framework, POSEI is intended to adapt the CAP to the realities of the overseas territories by combining a specific supply scheme with measures to support local production. However, French Guiana receives only around 3% of the annual budget of 321 million euros allocated to France's outermost regions, even though it has the second-largest area under cultivation after Réunion.

The vast majority of funding goes to the livestock sector, which is growing, while crop diversification and support for agricultural supplies and inputs remain underfunded. The scheme thus remains primarily centred on compensation mechanisms within a framework criticised for focusing on cash crops (bananas, sugar cane, sugar and rum) at the expense of subsistence farming, even though the territory's dependence on food imports remains high (IEDOM, 2024; Cour des comptes, 2023).



The POSEI programme would need to be redirected toward local food supply chains, crop diversification and processing to better meet French Guiana's needs. This programme should support infrastructure investments (slaughterhouses, processing facilities, refrigeration equipment, and collection centres) as well as links between the coast and remote areas, in order to reduce dependence on imports.

The essential development of project engineering

Beyond the issue of schemes and funding levels, the operational implementation of support policies is hampered by a shortage of engineering human resources within institutions and support services. The teams responsible for reviewing applications, assisting project leaders and overseeing programme implementation are limited in number, with difficulties in retaining specialised skills in agricultural development and project design.

Stakeholders struggle to navigate the complexity of calls for proposals, timetables, eligibility criteria, and the supporting documentation required. Small farms, subsistence farming, and emerging collective initiatives are particularly disadvantaged due to the lack of structured support to formalise projects, provide long-term administrative support and secure business plans. A considerable proportion of the available funding remains underutilised or is concentrated among those stakeholders best equipped to meet procedural requirements.

This lack of project management expertise directly impacts French Guiana's ability to mobilise existing funding—whether European, national or regional—and to transform it into concrete investments that promote food sovereignty. This creates a marked disconnect between stated political priorities and the reality of the projects actually funded on the ground.



Reinforcing local project-engineering capacities is a necessary condition for broadening access to funding and for converting political priorities into tangible results. This effort should be based on retaining expertise, coordinating stakeholders, and providing local support for project development, administrative management and monitoring of funding, rather than solely on increasing workforce numbers. A joint assessment of available resources would help to identify priority needs in terms of skills, coordination, and support.

Tax relief: a fallback option

In French Guiana, tax exemptions have become a frequent recourse for some farmers to finance their investments, less out of strategic choice than due to a lack of more suitable and readily available solutions. (Interviews 2025; JL; Marzin et al., 2021). Under the tax aid scheme for productive investment (RAFIP), the Girardin mechanisms provide substantial tax benefits for agricultural investments. However, real access to these arrangements is limited to farms or companies that are sufficiently well-structured to design or commission complex legal and financial arrangements. A minority of better-resourced enterprises receives the bulk of the tax benefits (IEDOM 2024; Inspection générale des finances 2023).

Therefore, tax relief mechanisms tend to fill the gap left by structural aid that is difficult to access, without constituting a genuine agricultural policy instrument. In French Guiana, this preferential use of tax schemes that are quick to implement but poorly targeted tends to reinforce a development model based on rent-seeking, without providing a solution to the transformation and diversification of local production (Marzin et al. 2021; Inspection générale des finances 2023).

Tax exemptions should be better aligned with agricultural policy objectives and directed toward priority and structural investments for the development of local agriculture. They should target equipment useful for local production, diversification, and processing, and complement existing support mechanisms rather than replace them. Their use should be more closely monitored to ensure they align with regional priorities and to strengthen the state's oversight of the actual direction of the supported investments.

CONCLUSION

Taken in isolation, the findings on land tenure, training or public support could give the impression of a mounting pile of constraints and delays. **Viewed in conjunction, however, they provide an outline of an action plan for French Guiana: securing and making better use of land already cleared, bringing training and advisory services more closely into line with on-the-ground realities, and mobilising funding to support a genuine strategy for the territory's food sovereignty.** It is on this foundation that the stated goals can be translated into concrete pathways for diverse types of agriculture.

By putting small-scale farming back at the center, by consolidating engineering capabilities and by making food sovereignty an explicit criterion for land-use and budgetary decisions, French Guiana has real room to manoeuvre. There are already tools for action, though they are still too fragmented or under-utilised. Ensuring they are coordinated across the territory is now as much a political and collective imperative as it is a technical one. This will determine French Guiana's long-term ability to develop agricultural systems capable of withstanding shocks, creating jobs, and sustainably feeding its population.

THE KOUROU SEMINAR: CROSS-CUTTING COURSES OF ACTION FOR FRENCH GUIANA'S AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

The Guiana Shield project was officially launched in Kourou on December 11-12, 2025, as part of the seminar "French Guiana's agricultural sector: the challenge of food sovereignty," organised by the FARM Foundation in collaboration with Crédit Agricole Martinique-Guyane, SAFER Guyane and the French Guiana Chamber of Agriculture.

Workshops brought together a diverse range of stakeholders from the agricultural sector: government departments and local authorities, public institutions and research organisations, inter-professional bodies and cooperatives, producer organisations and rural associations, training providers and support organisations, financial institutions, as well as farmers actively involved in grassroots initiatives. **The proposals set out below summarise the main points of consensus identified collectively during these discussions.** Together, they form a set of courses of action to implement across the territory the levers discussed in this White Paper.

The courses of action discussed in Kourou converge on two cross-cutting priorities:

- Strengthening the agronomic sustainability of systems through agroecological support measures that reduce dependence on inputs.

- Embedding these actions within a genuine regional food strategy for French Guiana, based on initial assessments and trials, followed by the consolidation of sustainable legal and financial frameworks.

These courses of action will help to identify the territory's priorities in order to devise concrete pathways and action programmes that mobilise synergies between stakeholders.

Subsistence and traditional farming

- **Update assessments of abattis and subsistence farming systems through participatory surveys** involving farmers, young people, and local associations, to better understand practices, constraints, contributions to family food security and aspirations. This will provide evidence to support land and budgetary decisions.

- **Work toward establishing a 'grower' status tailored to subsistence farming,** guaranteeing effective rights to land security, a minimum income, funding, disaster protection, as well as market access within local supply chains and the catering sector.

- **Co-develop technical guidelines** for abattis that draw on Amerindian and Bushinengue knowledge and organise forums for intergenerational knowledge transfer. These guidelines should be integrated into agricultural advisory services, action research, and forest management policies, taking into account the constraints of shorter fallow periods and soil fertility.

- **Consolidate stable land-use rights and agricultural zoning** to maintain abattis and subsistence farming practices, by balancing legal security, agronomic soil quality, and management of pressure from other land uses (urbanisation, infrastructure, mining activities).

- **Develop collective transport and marketing solutions** suited to rivers and landlocked areas: shared canoes, collection points, and local distribution networks.

- **Strengthen the supply of abattis products** to school canteens and regulate the import of products of low nutritional value into communities.

- **Make growers' organisations (village associations, indigenous organisations, women's networks) the centre of priority-setting, implementation, and advocacy. M**obilise support institutions (Chamber of Agriculture, Amazonian Park, local authorities, government departments, research, and training bodies) to support these actions.

Market-oriented agriculture

• **Adapt agricultural training to the soil and climate conditions of French Guiana** and to climate change; make this training more visible and accessible; and strengthen the agroecology and agroforestry content.

• **Coordinate the provision of training** by production sector by fostering links between agricultural education, rural family-run centres, the Chamber of Agriculture and private training centres.

• **Recruit, train, and retain sufficient numbers of agricultural technicians within support structures;** make these positions attractive through sustainable funding; and reactivate coordination mechanisms among technicians to share technical and economic best practices.

• **Establish mentoring and sponsorship mechanisms** between experienced farmers and new project proponents (setting up or taking over a farm), drawing on producer organisations, cooperatives, and inter-professional bodies.

• **Strengthen production systems** that combine crop production and livestock farming, agroecological and agroforestry practices, and soil fertility management, ensuring appropriate mechanisation to reduce the physical strain of work and improve farm efficiency. This would help make these models attractive to younger generations.

• **Facilitate access to funding by simplifying guarantee and pre-financing mechanisms**, better aligning them with public aid while strengthening technical, economic and administrative support, in order to secure investment projects and limit the need for cash advances.

• **Support the diversification of activities** (agribusiness, agritourism, rural services) underpinned by a solid productive base, by supporting communal infrastructure: slaughterhouses, local cutting plants, cold storage, packaging facilities, and agribusiness equipment for fruit, vegetables, and tubers. Strengthen links with local markets.



Agriculture as a vehicle for cross-border cooperation: potential path toward regional integration



Chapter

05

French Guiana belongs to the French and European sphere; yet, at the same time it is embedded in the Amazonian, Caribbean and South American context due to its geography, history, and the daily practices of its people. In this White Paper, the concept of regional integration does not seek to redefine this framework of affiliations, let alone advocate the unconditional opening of borders and trade. It instead refers to the ability to build positive interdependencies and institutionalised cooperation with neighbouring territories, grounded in shared vulnerabilities, interests, and resources.

In the agricultural and food sector, cooperation can take various forms: the sharing of knowledge and technical guidelines, research and training, plant and animal health, market information, logistics, infrastructure, and regulated trade. Such practical forms of cooperation can contribute to regional integration when they produce lasting effects and form part of a gradual and participatory process. This process must be underpinned by strengthened local agriculture and agri-food systems, their resilience and their capacity to capture greater value. Cooperation and integration—their objectives, priorities, and arrangements—must be discussed with the people of the Guiana Shield and their representatives, without making assumptions about their expectations or their willingness to engage in them.

CLEARLY SETTING OUT THE **DIAGNOSIS: FRENCH GUIANA AS A TERRITORY ON THE MARGINS OF ITS REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

The report by the Senate Delegation for Overseas Territories (Cambon et al. 2025), which focuses on regional cooperation and integration, describes French Guiana as a 'continental territory on the margins of its own environment'. It is a European exception in the Amazon, more integrated into distant markets than oriented toward the neighbouring economies of Brazil, Suriname, or Guyana, despite their geographical proximity.

This situation is not due to a lack of relations with neighbouring territories. Rather, it is a reflection of the persistent disconnect between, on the one hand, the interdependencies and dynamics actually experienced in border areas at a regional level and, on the other hand, the institutional, regulatory and logistical frameworks intended to organise trade.

Incomplete regional relations and persistent isolation

In this context, bilateral ties are developing at contrasting rates. Relations between Brazil and France via French Guiana are deepening, driven by a long-standing border commission bringing together the two national governments and by cross-border cooperation led by a joint commission and initiatives such as the Interreg Amazonia programme. The joint commission regularly brings together representatives from France and Brazil, either in French Guiana or in the state of Amapá, to address cross-border issues such as security, migration, the environment, transport, operation of the bridge over the Oyapock River, etc. Conversely, closer ties with Suriname remain fragile and relations with Guyana—despite their strategic importance for the shield and the Caribbean—have yet to be fully established.

The region is therefore truly isolated. This is illustrated by the lack of regional air links, which complicates meetings and exchanges with producers, technicians, researchers, and decision-makers from neighbouring countries. At the end of the supply chain, the port of Dégrad-des-Cannes in French Guiana remains modest in size and is not suited to the new large-capacity container ships, which limits direct service by major shipping lines. Furthermore, most containers return empty due to a lack of structured export capacity. The main major cross-border infrastructure project, the bridge over the Oyapock River between Saint-Georges and Oiapoque, is a good illustration of this situation. Although open to traffic, it remains underused for freight transport due to cumbersome customs procedures, health restrictions, difficulties in obtaining vehicle insurance and high logistics costs. The countries and territories of the Guiana Shield still operate as separate entities, with limited cross-border transport routes and infrastructure.

Low levels of legal trade and widespread informal trade

Legal trade between French Guiana and its neighbours is limited (IEDOM 2024). In 2024, imported goods from Suriname and Brazil amounted to approximately 4.7 and 7 million Euros respectively, while trade with Guyana remained extremely low. In comparison, French Guiana imports goods worth 139.2 million Euros from Martinique and 84 million from Guadeloupe. In 2024, French Guiana's exports were equally modest: exports to Suriname peaked at around 1.3 million, while those to Brazil and Guyana each remained below one million, concentrated mainly on fishery products.

The volumes and values of informal trade flows across French Guiana's two borders are significant, though difficult to measure precisely. Seizures by the authorities provide an indication of the scale. These may involve consignments ranging from several hundred kilograms to over a tonne of fruit and vegetables crossing the border undeclared, destined for local markets, particularly in Cayenne. Such trafficking may also include plant protection products or other inputs that are generally banned within the European Union.

Although these exchanges are illegal, they cannot be assumed to systematically involve organised structures built around illicit activities. Some farmers are even becoming importers. Smuggling is, in fact, a common, everyday practice that benefits from a certain social acceptance, in a context of insufficient local production and particularly high food prices. This de facto opening of a commercial opportunity—combined with the significant price gap between French Guiana and its two neighbours—creates strong incentives for such practices.

Suriname and Brazil, which are subject to different import regulations, can serve as gateways for cheap products from the rest of the world. Furthermore, agricultural production methods in these two countries, as well as the fertilisers, plant protection products, and the inputs to which farmers have access, are subject to different, less stringent environmental and health regulations. Whenever a molecule is banned in Europe and local production fails to adapt its practices to maintain volumes, a market emerges in French Guiana that can potentially be supplied illegally. Therefore, illegal trade becomes more attractive and profitable, while legal imports remain, by their very nature, difficult, costly, and rare.

This dynamic further deepens French Guiana's dependence: legal supplies come mainly from mainland France and the Antilles, while informal and smuggled flows from its neighbours have become vital to filling the gaps. This takes place against a complex socio-economic backdrop marked by elevated levels of monetary poverty (Interviews 2025). The authorities have adopted a somewhat permissive stance, partly because these flows are difficult to control and partly because they could not claim to completely eradicate smuggling without simultaneously threatening the food security of many households.

Fiscal and regulatory measures with mixed effects

From a fiscal standpoint, the dock dues tax helps to encourage illegal trade. This specific tax applies in French Guiana to almost all imported goods, regardless of their country of origin, as well as to part of the deliveries of locally produced goods. The external rate averages around 15%, while the regional rate is around 2.5%, with variations by product (Loi 2004-639; Douanes Guyane).

The dock dues tax is presented as a means of protecting local production from competition from cheaper imported goods. In practice, local production suffers from structural weaknesses and does not operate in an environment conducive to meeting local demand and taking advantage of this tariff protection. The dock dues tax primarily serves to make legal, declared trade more expensive, which may contribute to making illegal imports more attractive. It increases production costs for local businesses by driving up the price of inputs and also places a burden on consumers, particularly those on low incomes.

The tax also occupies a delicate position: it is the main source of revenue for local authorities and contributes to the budget of the Territorial Collectivity of French Guiana (CTG). Any reform is therefore politically sensitive.



Furthermore, the POSEI's specific supply scheme (RSA) introduces another form of inconsistency. In theory, this European scheme aims to reduce the cost of supplies required for agricultural and agro-industrial production in the overseas departments. It prioritises the livestock sector, whose inputs are almost entirely imported, followed by local agri-food processing and, finally, food for human consumption. It provides import subsidies from the European Union or exemptions from customs duties on imports from third countries, in order to offset the additional costs associated with remoteness and the logistical constraints specific to French Guiana (ODEADOM 2016). **In reality, this scheme contributes to reinforcing dependence on long supply chains and discourages the development of regional trade, for which logistics and compliance costs remain particularly high.**

The attempt to import non-GMO animal feed from Brazil is a good illustration of this situation. While technically possible, it is considered unprofitable compared to European imports benefiting from the RSA (Interviews 2025; France-Guyane 2022). Stakeholders in the livestock sector regard the scheme as an indispensable tool for maintaining a certain level of competitiveness in local meat production. Others, who favour local animal feed production, argue for a reduction in subsidies for imported finished feed and an adjustment of quotas by product category. The aim is to distribute support more evenly between importers and local manufacturers (SCEBOG 2021; CTG 2020; France-Guyane 2022).

Debates on the 'high cost of living' in French Guiana and the relaxation of phytosanitary regulations add a further layer to the issue (Interviews 2025). Intended to reduce food costs, these potential exemptions would facilitate the entry of fruit and vegetables produced using seeds or practices that are banned in French Guiana. For local farmers, who are already facing high production costs, this fuels a sense of unfair competition. They question the actual priority given to French Guiana's agriculture in the trade-offs involved in tackling the 'high cost of living.'

EU–Mercosur: a high-risk agreement for French Guiana's agricultural sectors

Against this backdrop, the trade agreement between the EU and Mercosur ('Mercado Común del Sur,' a regional integration process that includes Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and, more recently, Bolivia) appears to be another factor undermining French Guiana's agricultural sector. Applied on a provisional basis since May 2026, this agreement provides for the gradual removal of customs duties and significant increases in import quotas for agricultural products, such as beef (DA&DA 2025; DGDDI 2026).

In French Guiana, there is tangible tension between the meat supply shortages reported by some independent butchers and the fear that local production will be overwhelmed by low-cost imports (Merlin & Léon 2026). The opening up of the market to additional volumes of beef or poultry from Mercosur is seen by some as a temporary solution to stabilise the supply and keep prices in check. Others emphasise the risks the agreement poses to the sustainability of fragile local sectors, which face high production costs and stricter standards than their South American competitors (Merlin & Léon 2026).

Several Guyanese production sectors are identified as being particularly vulnerable to a rise in South American imports under the agreement (Merlin & Léon 2026). The emerging beekeeping sector in French Guiana could be rapidly destabilised by low-cost honey from Argentina, threatening the economic viability of small local producers. Concerns also centre on iconic products such as cassava flour and açaí. More generally, if the Mercosur countries manage to comply fully with European standards on residues and traceability, the legal influx of cheaper products could intensify. This would place increased pressure on already fragile sectors in the absence of enhanced support and a clear strategy for local production.

The agreement could, in theory, help to diversify trading partners and reduce dependence on mainland France. However, in its current form, it does not include any specific provisions for French Guiana, even though this territory shares France's longest land border with a Mercosur member state (DA&DA 2025; Le West 2025). In the absence of safeguard clauses tailored to the outermost regions, greater openness to South American agricultural products is likely to increase the share of imports in French Guiana's supply chain, thereby diversifying and reinforcing its dependence.

From a sanitary detour through Europe to strained regional integration

Prior to the recent establishment of the community border post (PFC) in French Guiana, the sanitary control system forced goods to transit through Europe. Although virtually all products imported for local consumption arrive via the port of Dégrad-des-Cannes, until then this port had no EU-approved sanitary control facilities. Goods from third countries therefore had to be inspected upon their first entry into EU territory, via ports such as Algeciras (in Andalusia) or Le Havre (in Normandy) for animal products. Plant products were inspected within French Guiana at the recipients' premises, in particular in supermarkets. This caused delays in getting goods onto the shelves and losses for importers. The only existing local facility, a special-status checkpoint at Saint-Georges-sur-l'Oyapock, managed only a small volume of products from Brazil. Trade with neighbouring countries therefore remained largely dependent on health certification conducted in Europe, far from the Guiana Shield (AFD 2020).

The new border post was presented as a way to change this situation, combining two objectives: health inspections and regional trade integration. It brings together, on a single site, inspections for animal products, animal feed, and plant products, with dedicated loading bays, cold stores, and laboratories (AFD 2020; France-Guyane 2025). The scheme is explicitly tied to a regional coastal trading strategy intended to strengthen maritime links with Suriname, northern Brazil, and the Antilles. Now, products from non-European countries can be inspected directly in French Guiana, without first passing through ports on the European mainland.

This new infrastructure is sometimes presented as a way to make French Guiana the gateway to Europe for South American raw materials. These products could then be processed or packaged locally before being sent to Europe (AFD 2020; GPM Guyane 2025).

In theory, this vision of French Guiana becoming a regional hub could boost the local economy. However, it may remain disconnected from the territory's food needs, without having a positive impact on local agricultural production. The main risk is the emergence of enclave economies—that is, activities focused primarily on exports and poorly integrated into the local productive fabric, and therefore not conducive to genuine regional development.



A key tension is emerging: the need to develop local production capable of ensuring food sovereignty versus the temptation to address the social emergencies of the 'high cost of living' through exemptions, fiscal and customs arrangements, trade agreements, or infrastructure that facilitate regional trade rather than secure French Guiana's own supply chains.

In the short term, these measures help to contain or reduce prices and ensure a smoother supply. However, they may reinforce a long-term dependence on imports. They shift the core of the policy compromise toward managing flows rather than investing patiently in the production, organisational, and value-enhancement capacities of local agriculture.

LEVERAGING THE **INTERREG AMAZONIA PROGRAMME**: AN IMPORTANT BUT STILL UNDER-UTILISED TOOL

The Interreg Amazonia cooperation programme (2021–2027) appears to be a valuable tool available to French Guiana for structuring cross-border projects with Guyana, Suriname, and neighbouring Brazilian states (Amapá, Pará, Amazonas). Led by the Territorial Collectivity of French Guiana as the managing authority, it mobilises tens of millions of Euros from the ERDF over the period, including 19 million specifically earmarked for cooperation on the Guiana Shield, with objectives that cover the economy, the environment, mobility and training (CTG 2024). Against a backdrop of strained relations with Suriname, the CTG conducted an official mission in February 2025 to promote the programme, seek partners, and identify concrete projects.

Nevertheless, the programme's potential remains largely untapped. Although Interreg Amazonia is recognised as a key driver for funding agricultural, agri-food and environmental projects (agricultural research, agri-processing, logistics, training), the programme suffers from sluggishness and a lack of project management expertise on the French Guiana side. Consequently, European funds are under-utilised, which reduces French Guiana's capacity to lead transformative agricultural development projects with its neighbours, whether this involves strengthening the organisation of trade flows, pooling infrastructure or developing joint initiatives in the field of innovation (Cambon et al. 2025).

MAKING RESEARCH AND INNOVATION SHARED **REGIONAL ASSETS**

The region's characteristics allow for initiatives focused on shared challenges—emerging plant diseases, climate adaptation, and agricultural diversification—that extend beyond administrative boundaries. Cooperation in agricultural research and innovation can support the establishment of joint mechanisms for plant health monitoring, plant varietal selection, applied agroecology, and supply chain structuring. The fact that Suriname, French Guiana, and Amapá share the same soil and climate conditions creates a natural coherence between the challenges faced and the possible responses, facilitating the exchange of experiences from one territory to another. This also applies to the traceability of imported products, identified as a key priority area in a region where the food safety of goods crossing borders remains poorly managed.

Cassava disease: when a phytosanitary emergency accelerates regional cooperation

The emerging cassava disease (see inset in Chapter 2) clearly illustrates how agriculture can become a driving force for regional cooperation. With identical symptoms on both sides of the border, it suggests that the disease is spreading through the exchange of cuttings and varieties between farmers (CIRAD, 2024; FREDON Guyane 2024). **Researchers emphasise that this is both a phytosanitary risk and a regional governance issue: monitoring, early warning, diagnosis, and the development of solutions can only be addressed at the scale of the Guiana Shield (CIRAD, 2024).**

In response to this threat, cooperation has been established between French Guiana and Brazil, supported by the CTG and through a partnership between CIRAD, the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) and other institutions. This initiative aims primarily to strengthen regional monitoring and the sharing of diagnostic tools. It also seeks to gradually involve Suriname, which is now also affected by the disease. In the longer term, the challenge is to involve key stakeholders such as the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Colombia, whose genetic resources and databases on cassava are of paramount importance. However, as Colombia is not eligible for the Interreg Amazonia programme, cooperation remains difficult.

In this context, increasing the sharing of best practice between countries is crucial. The challenge is to capitalise on what is already working rather than seeking to reinvent solutions in isolation. French Guiana is not starting from scratch: it already possesses expertise, innovations, and technical know-how in the areas of soil fertility and biostimulation. **Much of the resistance stems less from technical or climatic constraints than from problems of organisation, coordination, and the under-utilisation of these local resources.** Yet these could form a solid foundation for more ambitious cooperation between countries.

A clear political consensus in favour of agricultural development across the Guiana Shield is essential. This should be translated into concrete decisions, resources and support policies that are clear and accessible to local stakeholders. At present, scientific and technical exchanges between French Guiana and its neighbours remain limited: agreements are in place and projects are underway, but cooperation remains insufficient (Interviews 2025; CTG 2024). Local resources are significant: Brazil has highly structured public research and development institutions. Furthermore, although capacities are more limited in French Guiana, France possesses leading-edge expertise and experience through INRAE, CIRAD, IRD and the CNRS (MESR 2023; CNRS 2025).

Beyond the southern axis linking French Guiana to Brazil, Colombia and other Amazon countries, a second avenue for cooperation is opening up to the north, towards the West Indies, the Caribbean and Central America, where CIRAD has greater resources and established networks (Interviews 2025; CIRAD 2025). This vision is consistent with the Senate's assessment, which calls for bringing together and coordinating the major overseas research organisations (INRAE, CIRAD, IRD) to pursue effective scientific diplomacy on food security and health issues, and to position French Guiana as a leading centre for agronomic research and innovation in the Amazon and the Caribbean, rather than as a peripheral region dependent on agendas set elsewhere (Cambon et al., 2025).

Furthermore, in 2024, a cooperation initiative between the French Guiana Amazonian Park and Brazil's Tumucumaque Mountains National Park was launched with the support of the AFD, with a view to establishing a cross-border cooperation network between contiguous protected natural areas. **This partnership presents a major opportunity to create the world's largest cross-border protected area, which could receive Interreg funding to support joint conservation and sustainable management objectives** (Cambon et al. 2025). An environmental platform such as this could serve as a foundation for cross-border agricultural and agroforestry projects, combining ecosystem protection with productive activities.

French experiences in agricultural and rural cooperation and development in Latin America

The development of cooperation in the agricultural and food sectors across the Guiana Shield could draw on existing experiences and networks in Latin America and the Caribbean. Some French stakeholders, active in scientific research, rural development support, international solidarity and development finance, have long-standing track records of action and partnerships in this region. Together with their local and regional partners, they have contributed to initiatives focusing on family farming, agroecological transitions, agroforestry, sustainable resource management, the structuring of supply chains and locally-based food systems.

These experiences, conducted notably in Brazil, the Andean countries, Central America and the Caribbean, cannot be directly replicated in the Guiana Shield. Nevertheless, they may serve as a useful resource: methods for supporting producer organisations, technical and economic guidelines, action research approaches, training programmes, tools for local consultation and lessons learnt on a variety of topics.

Organisations such as CIRAD and AFD, which are already active in the region, as well as French international solidarity organisations with networks in Latin America can help to facilitate the sharing of these experiences and establishing links between partners. Their role, however, cannot replace that of local or regional actors. The opportunity lies in building partnerships tailored to the ecological, social, and institutional realities of the Guiana Shield, which are capable of sustainably strengthening local capacity for action.

CHANGING SCALE: CONSIDERING **FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ACROSS THE GUIANA SHIELD**

At present, cooperation on agricultural matters between French Guiana, Suriname and Amapá remains sporadic, scattered and unevenly structured. It is still far from a shared regional strategy. The current challenge is neither to treat integration as an end in itself nor to offset territorial shortcomings in productive capacity through unchecked regional openness. Instead, the approach should focus on identifying areas where coordinated action can reduce shared vulnerabilities, strengthen local agriculture, and support inclusive territorial development.

Three principles emerge as essential to guiding this approach:

- **Cooperation rooted in territorial realities.** Regional cooperation must be based on the realities of local communities, existing dynamics, complementary production capacities, and the needs expressed by stakeholders. It includes institutional mechanisms and trade, as well as local knowledge, training, research, and plant and animal health.

- **Regulated and reciprocal trade.** Trade openness can have positive effects when it is supported by coherent and effective health, customs, tax, and environmental regulations, and when it does not exacerbate unfair competition, dependencies, or illicit activities. Trade must be viewed as a means of diversifying supplies and markets, without compromising the development of local agriculture.

- **Better-coordinated cooperation tools.** Existing programmes, notably Interreg, can become more effective drivers of change if they are aligned with shared priorities, structured for the long term and if they address the practical needs of farmers, professional organisations, local authorities, and processing sector stakeholders.

Thinking about food sovereignty at the scale of the Guiana Shield therefore means balancing two requirements: first, consolidating local capacities for production, processing and farmer organisation; then, building targeted and gradual forms of cooperation with neighbouring territories. This approach requires ongoing dialogue between all stakeholders, both public and private, in order to identify common priorities and arrangements tailored to diverse situations.

Conclusion



Chapter

06

A paradox to be resolved

Although rich in resources, water, biodiversity, and knowledge, this Amazonian territory still shows strong import dependence for essential products such as cereals, dairy, meat, and processed goods, while other foods are produced locally under restrictive conditions. By comparing Suriname, French Guiana and Amapá, **this White Paper shows that dependence takes different forms but points to the same fundamental challenge: making sustainable agriculture the foundation for the economic and social development of these regions.**

What does this mean in practical terms?

Food sovereignty does not imply self-isolation. It refers to the ability of the peoples of the Guiana Shield to rely on their own agricultural systems to feed their populations, to organise their rural areas differently, and to build positive interdependencies. Embracing the establishment of food sovereignty as an objective means making agriculture a collective choice, rather than a secondary concern.

Agricultural practices on the Guiana Shield are highly diverse and hold great promise for the future. From slash-and-burn farming and Creole gardens to market-oriented farms, this productive fabric already provides a decisive share of the food supply, far beyond what official statistics suggest. Local produce is abundant and varied, underpinned by inherited and reinvented farming practices that offer practical solutions to the challenges posed by naturally poor soils and the difficulties of the tropical climate. Failing to recognise this amounts to denying considerable potential and marginalising practices that are an integral part of these territories and the lives of their communities.

A window of opportunity, but also risks

Although these three territories are politically and administratively distinct, they face the same demographic and food security challenges. **Their agricultural and industrial production capacities fall below what is needed to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population. This dynamic creates an opportunity: to build inclusive and sustainable economies and virtuous agricultural value chains by structuring agricultural and territorial development policies with all public and private stakeholders.** But it also carries a major risk: if agricultural production fails to keep pace with demographic growth, food dependencies will increase, thereby exacerbating existing tensions, social inequalities, and vulnerabilities.

Inaction is not an option. Given the increased pressure on natural resources, climate crises, and social vulnerabilities, keeping local agriculture at the margins of public decision-making and private strategies amounts to prolonging and exacerbating current dependencies and intensifying social tensions.

Identified drivers, barriers to be removed

This White Paper identifies the main barriers slowing agricultural development. In French Guiana, access to land remains difficult, training, and technical support insufficient, and public support fragmented and poorly aligned with actual needs. These obstacles are not inevitable. **They highlight the need for a clear policy direction in favour of local agriculture.**

The guidelines presented throughout the chapters represent points of convergence drawn from visions shared by stakeholders in the agricultural sector. They centre on four key areas:

- **Land and resources:** make better use of and secure land that is already under cultivation; curb land speculation rather than encroaching ever further into the forest; and make food sovereignty the core of land-use policy.

- **Training and support:** bring training and advisory services closer to the field, stabilise support teams, value local knowledge, and disseminate agroecological practices.

- **Support and investment:** redirect existing instruments toward consolidating local food supply chains, develop infrastructure and strengthen robust producer organisations rather than maintaining a system based on compensation and rent-seeking.

- **Research and innovation:** in areas grappling with soil and climate constraints, emerging diseases and climate change, pooling research, experimentation, and knowledge transfer capacities becomes crucial both within each region and across the Guiana Shield as a whole, making knowledge a regional common good.

Adopting a Guiana Shield-wide perspective

It is precisely at this scale that food sovereignty takes on its full meaning. Suriname, French Guiana, and Amapá share similar environments, cultures, and constraints. Yet they remain largely disconnected in their agricultural policies and trade. French Guiana is oriented toward mainland France and Europe, even though it is surrounded by countries facing the same challenges.

Regional integration cannot be reduced to a few isolated projects. It requires a joint approach to the flow of goods, complementary production, knowledge circulation, health risk management, and investment in regional infrastructure. It also requires a reassessment of trade and health regulations to facilitate formal trade, rather than allowing informal channels to flourish.

Call to action

Making agriculture in the Guiana Shield a cornerstone of food sovereignty and development requires aligning the strategies of all stakeholders. This calls for clear commitments from public authorities, the mobilisation of civil society and professional organisations, and strengthened research. It also requires acknowledging the work of the thousands of farmers who, often out of sight, feed their families, their communities, and urban populations.

This White Paper is a tool to support such mobilisation: a platform for debate, a guide for prioritisation, and a basis for forging alliances around concrete objectives. The preceding pages provide a foundation for initiating this transformation. The urgent task now is to take action.



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