Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Global Gateway

Co-funded by the European Union

HARNESSING SARGASSUM SEAWEED IN THE CARIBBEAN

SEPTEMBER 2025

The Caribbean has recently seen massive recurrent influxes of sargassum seaweed (algae). Though a naturally occurring plant, the scale of blooms regularly washing up on shores each year is linked to warmer water temperatures caused by climate change, shifting ocean currents and nutrient-rich river runoff (from fertilizer use, deforestation and urbanization). Once viewed only as a nuisance – damaging coastal ecosystems, disrupting fisheries and affecting tourism – sargassum is now increasingly recognized as a resource with vast potential.

Caribbean countries have been adversely affected. Annual clean-up costs and economic losses are significant. In 2018–2019, Barbados and Mexico declared emergencies over severe sargassum accumulations. Regional costs – including clean-up, lost tourism revenue and damage to fisheries – estimated at more than USD 300 million. Clean-up alone accounted for USD 120 million in 2018. Despite these challenges, countries are also looking to turn the tide.

Given the negative impacts, the European Union has prioritized sargassum within its Global Gateway Strategy for the Caribbean, supporting efforts to transform this environmental challenge into an economic opportunity.

A NEW PATH FORWARD: FROM NUISANCE TO RESOURCE

With technical support from the FAO Investment Centre under **the Sustainable Agrifood Systems Intelligence (SASI/SASI+)** initiative, FAO and the European Union have helped launch structured, collaborative processes in Barbados and Grenada in 2024. The Dominican Republic joining in 2025. The initiative brings governments, the private sector and communities together to:

- Develop sustainable sargassum value chains.
- Build consensus for investment.
- Share lessons learned across countries.

This approach is paving the way for coordinated action and innovation in the region.

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF SARGASSUM

Sargassum offers opportunities across diverse industries, including:

- **Agriculture:** fertilizer and compost.
- **Bio-energy:** sustainable biofuels.
- **Bio-plastics:** sustainable alternatives to single-use plastics.
- **Cosmetics:** skin and haircare products.
- **Construction:** bricks, blocks and other eco-materials.
- **Environmental services:** water and air purification, and carbon sequestration.

By turning seaweed into soil enhancers, fuels, plastics or even building materials, sargassum can support sustainable agrifood systems, circular economies and climate action.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TOGETHER

Grenada and other Caribbean countries are developing strategies to manage sargassum sustainably and transform this environmental challenge into an economic opportunity. This calls for innovative solutions in monitoring, collection, processing and value addition — all of which need financing, especially private finance.

Because sargassum blooms are naturally occurring and highly unpredictable, it is not possible to determine which country's shorelines will be most affected. This raises questions of ownership and responsibility, making regional collaboration an essential part of the policy dialogue on sargassum. Regional and international collaboration – including with European Union companies and financial institutions – is essential.

The Grenada–European Union Task Force on Sargassum Valorization, led by the Prime Minister of Grenada, brings together government, private sector and development partners. With SASI support, Grenada issued a call for expressions of interest to develop the sargassum value chain, which attracted more than 30 proposals from national and international stakeholders eager to bring innovative solutions forward.

Through SASI, the FAO Investment Centre is providing European Union Delegations with technical expertise in pre-investment and value chain analysis, policy support, project design and innovative finance facilitation.

This brief draws on a forthcoming report developed under SASI with support from the European Commission (DG-INTPA).

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution - 4.0 International licence (CC BY 4.0).

© FAO, 2025
CD7022EN/1/10.25