

Report on Participation at the Second DC Alfa Meeting – Bonaire, May 21–23, 2025

Prepared by: Diego Acevedo (President UFA)

From May 21 to 23, 2025, The UFA was invited to participate in the annual DC Alfa (Dutch Caribbean Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries Alliance) meeting, held in Bonaire. This network brings together *government departments and public sector representatives* from the six Dutch Kingdom islands, focusing on cooperation in agriculture, husbandry, and fisheries. Aruba currently holds the presidency through Nathaly Maduro of Santa Rosa, the DC Alfa platform seems to be in a consolidation stage in its role in supporting food security across the region.

The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) has committed support to DC Alfa and also supported participation from private sector actors like the UFA. From Aruba, the representation included myself as president of UFA, along with Sherman Libiee (representing husbandry) and Arthur Giel (Hadicurari). Different actors from other islands were also invited.

Key Highlights of the Conference

1. Launch of Regional Mechanism

A major announcement during the conference was the approval of a €24 million support instrument by the Dutch Parliament, dedicated to strengthening food security across the six islands. This fund will be managed through a new foundation led by Elwin Groeneveld, known for founding Qredits, and structured as a revolving fund. The fund is expected to be operational by the first quarter of 2026.

It aims to provide flexible financing (up to €1–2 million per initiative) for scaling up food production, while also offering knowledge vouchers, technical assistance, and access to co-financing from local banks and pension funds.

Timeline & process

The Council of Ministers has approved the framework.

In the coming months, further development will focus on:

- Defining conditions for public government projects
- Defining conditions for the fund:
 - Mandate
 - Interest rates
 - Governance
 - Advice from the Court of Audit/Algemene Rekenkamer
- Conducting a **baseline measurement per island** about food production, self-sufficiency rate, Food infrastructure, ecological sustainability, and more KPI's
- Developing **monitoring tool** based on KPI's

Objective: to launch the fund and open the application desk for public projects in Q1 of 2026.

Food-Academy

Knowledge & business development

Goal?

- Knowledge development, facilitating access to knowledge, and promoting knowledge sharing."

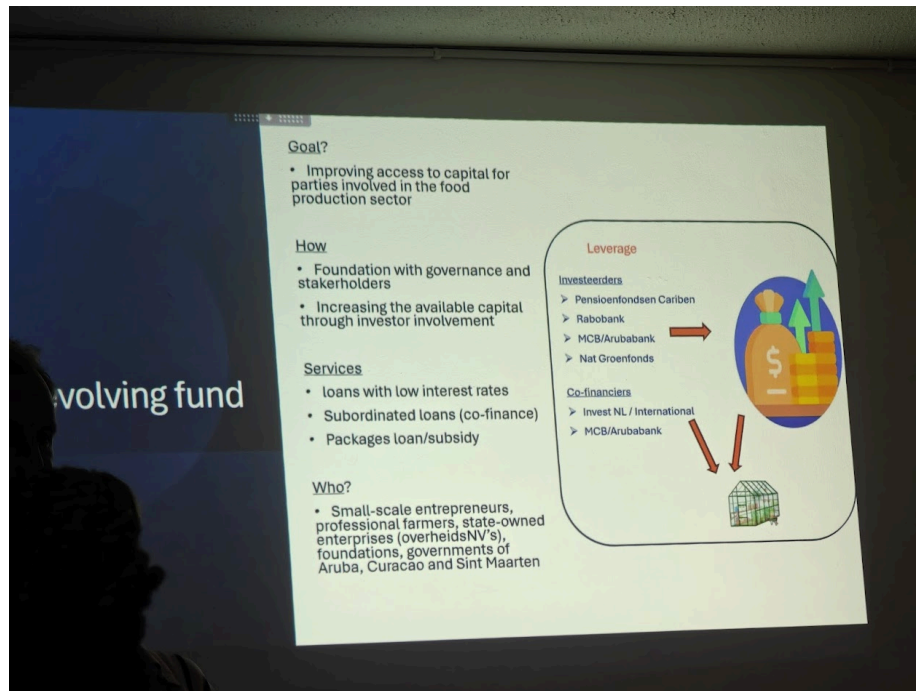
How?

- Training sessions and courses
- Business development
- Cooperation with knowledge institutions in the region and in the Netherlands (Priva, Wageningen, etc).

Who?

- Ex





2. Showcase

The program included a field visits to the LVV in Bonaire:

For agriculture, the visit included a tour of LVV which showcased how they have allowed local farmers to rent plots of land for agricultural activities (including soil and greenhouse based initiatives) and how the general infrastructure (water and machinery) is shared across the different farmers. The model used in Bonaire seems to be similar to the one being proposed by the Minister of Agriculture in Aruba and the plans showed for an Agri-innovation Park.

3. Progress Updates by Island

Aruba:

Aruba was represented not only by Santa Rosa but also by the Minister of Economic Affairs (Min. Geoffrey Wever) and the Director of the Economic Affairs department. Aruba formally presented data highlighting that efforts have led to "8%" of lettuce being produced locally and 15% of chicken needs are now met locally, the source of statistics was not shown. The proposed Agri-Innovation Park was presented, including a 60,000m² blueprint backed by the PRIVA report (also shared with the UFA) and which the government expects can generate 420 jobs. The park will rely on significant government investment, with technical and business case support coordinated by the new entity created to manage the total fund.

St. Maarten:

Reported strong momentum in hydroponics which also includes a Train-the-Trainer program (GO Hydroponics), involving 9 schools and 25 trained participants. They will host the next DC Alfa conference in 2026.

Bonaire:

LVV Bonaire presented initiatives such as the fruit tree park at Calbas Largo (intercropped with bananas), and a multi-use AgriPark combining agriculture, education, and tourism.

Curaçao:

While no formal presentation was made on agriculture, they presented highlights on the installation of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs). Informal updates highlighted hydroponics growth and private sector interest, following trends similar to Aruba.

Saba:

Showed their technical innovation in hydroponics (lettuce, tomatoes, pak choy) using NFT, bucket, and vertical systems, housed next to hurricane domes with systems that are mobile in case of storms. Their tree nursery includes species for reforestation such as avocado, guava, citrus, and breadfruit.

Statia:

Focused on fishing and husbandry, prioritizing goat, chicken, and syntropic farming methods. Also investing in hydroponics as part of a mixed strategy for food production.

Reflections

As a representative of the United Farmers Association of Aruba, I welcomed the opportunity to engage in conversations about the practical challenges and opportunities facing island agriculture. The inclusion of private sector voices like ours is essential as DC Alfa evolves into a more action-oriented alliance. It was interesting to note that the public sector engagement was strong and they are starting to learn best practices from each other, and are taking the concerns of our sector in their conversations (these include the concerns that were highlighted by UFA in our last member survey)

Several key takeaways:

Stakeholder inclusion is growing, but future meetings should further institutionalize participation from producer associations and civil society.

There is clear alignment across islands on the need for local food production to become a pillar of economic resilience, particularly post-COVID and in light of global geopolitical instability.

The difference in needs for food security and the sector from Saba and Statia to the rest of the larger islands is very strong and was voiced strongly by their local representatives.

Aruba's leadership in consolidating DC Alfa is commendable. As the network matures, it must formalize mechanisms for follow-up, including shared data platforms, regular reporting, and a better alignment of taxes, regulations, land, water and electricity best practices for farmers in the islands. .