Farming is risky business. For example, how much will get harvested will depend on whether the next season will see floods, droughts or blights. New technologies have been developed to cope with such threats, but these too might be viewed as uncertain by producers who have little experience with them. While they might have on average higher yields than traditional technologies, the likelihoods of those yields are more uncertain. For new technologies to improve yields, farmers must be willing to adopt them, and attitudes towards uncertainty have been shown to be an important driving force.
Within the CARICOM Farm to Fork Food Security Project, we ran economics experiments in Peru and Guyana to help us understand how farmers’ attitudes towards uncertainty influence adoption decisions. Specifically, we sought to understand farmers’ beliefs about the likelihoods of the yield distribution of new technologies and how these beliefs could be shaped by group discussions among peers.

We found that the education and gender composition of these groups are particularly influential in shaping these beliefs and that information sharing can be considered a public good.

In Peru as in Guyana, women tend to have stronger beliefs than men about the yield distributions. However, they are also more likely to take-up uncertain options as a result of new information.

Results suggest that technical assistance should target information to groups of farmers, encourage these farmers to openly discuss this information, and allow the information to disseminate within existing social networks. Furthermore, technical assistance would be especially effective if targeted to women.