

Dear Members, Stakeholders and Friends,

I am honoured to address you once again as the Chairperson of WIRSPA following my re-election at our Annual General Meeting in July 2024. I deeply appreciate the confidence my fellow directors have placed in me, and I remain committed to advancing the interests of our industry in these challenging times.



We entered 2025 amid growing uncertainty. The shifting global economic and political landscape, along with rapid policy changes from the new U.S. administration, has already begun to impact our industry. The announcement of new tariffs has created business uncertainty, particularly for us as export-focused producers, whose largest market remains the United States. Moreover, the weakening of the international trade framework suggests that we will see a growing reliance by our main export markets in North America and Europe on bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). This shift raises concerns about the potential erosion of our trade preferences in those markets relative to third countries, making it imperative that we remain vigilant and proactive in advocating for maintenance of current arrangements in support of our industry.

In this regard, WIRSPA members will also continue to urge regional governments to push for new trade deals that expand our non-traditional markets. As an industry, we cannot afford to be complacent; we must engage strategically and collectively to ensure that our interests are safeguarded in a rapidly evolving global trade environment.

Looking back at 2024, we made significant progress in strengthening the authenticity and provenance of our products within the European Union through the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). The ongoing review of the rules of origin of the EPA is a crucial step toward ensuring that our 'brand' remains protected and that we maintain a competitive edge in international markets. This effort aligns with our broader mission to enhance the reputation of Caribbean rum on the world stage.

Beyond trade and exports, another major focus in 2024 - one that will continue into 2025 - has been our commitment to promoting responsible drinking and reducing alcohol-related harm. Our industry recognizes its role in fostering a culture of moderation and responsibility. To this end, WIRSPA members have actively engaged in initiatives aimed at raising standards, advocating against excessive drinking, and protecting vulnerable populations, particularly children. From anti-drunk driving campaigns to educational programs about the risks of alcohol abuse, we have been steadfast in our efforts to effect meaningful change.

However, we acknowledge that this journey is far from over. Our industry alone cannot drive this transformation; we must enlist the

support of all businesses involved in the production and distribution of alcoholic beverages. Most importantly, success in this area hinges on close collaboration with governments, health organizations, and educational institutions. Together, we must continue to raise awareness about the dangers of excessive drinking and combat the normalization and glorification of such behaviours.

Parallel to our work on responsible consumption, WIRSPA and its members have also been at the forefront of sustainability initiatives. As stewards of our environment, we recognize the need to integrate sustainable practices into our operations. Companies across our network have invested in recycling programs, energy efficiency measures, transitioning to renewable energy sources, energy recovery from waste, and water reduction initiatives. All producers are committed to ensuring that we act as responsible stewards of our limited resources.

Great progress was made in 2024 in reviewing and updating the CARICOM Rum Standard. Rum producers have been integrally involved in this process, and we anticipate its completion in 2025. We take pride in being the only grouping of producers internationally with a common rum standard. Given that the Caribbean is seen as the home of rum, with rum being the region's largest and premier non-mineral export, it is vital that we get this right.

In 2025, we will continue to advance other industry-wide initiatives including building out our Caribbean Rum Trail, an important project that recognises rum and its heritage as of significant value to our tourism sector. Our Caribbean Distilling Seminar in Saint Lucia in

April 2024 was a great success, bringing together over 100 distillers and industry professionals from various countries. We anticipate that our next event in Jamaica in May will be equally impactful.

Last year also saw the culmination of our project to honour the 50th anniversary of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Thirteen producers developed bespoke blends in tribute to this milestone, and these products have now been handed over to national governments. It is our fervent hope that these unique blends will be used both at home and abroad to showcase the very best of our region.

As we move forward into 2025, WIRSPA remains steadfast in its commitment to championing the interests of our members, advocating for fair trade policies, promoting responsible consumption, and embracing sustainability. The challenges ahead are real, but so too are the opportunities. With collective action, strategic engagement, and a shared vision, we will continue to strengthen our industry and uphold the rich legacy of Caribbean spirits.

I thank each of my colleagues for their continued dedication and support. Together, we will navigate the uncertainties ahead and work toward a prosperous future for our industry and our communities.



Margaret P. Monplaisir – Chairperson, WIRSPA

March 2025