



Visit to IICA Headquarters in Costa Rica Minister of Jamaica interested in reassessing contribution of agriculture

Christopher Tufton participated in the Forum for Leaders of Agriculture, organized by the Institute.

At the conclusion of three days of thoughtful conversations on the challenges of agriculture in the 21st century, held at the Headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Minister of Agriculture and Lands of Jamaica, Christopher Tufton, asked for IICA's support in determining the true contribution of agriculture to the economy of his country.

From February 19 to 23, the Minister and a small delegation of public officials and private-sector representatives participated in the Forum for Leaders of Agriculture, a novel initiative launched by IICA and designed especially for recently appointed ministers of agriculture or senior executives in the sector who wish to acquire an updated vision of agriculture and rural life in the 21st century.

The Minister and his host, the Director General of IICA, Chelston Brathwaite, signed an agreement calling for adjustments in the priorities of the technical cooperation agenda being implemented in that nation.

Under the agreement, priority will be assigned to topics such as technology exchanges between Costa Rica and Jamaica for the production of cassava in greenhouses, and to the modernization of the structure of the Ministry of Agriculture, with a view to upgrading its management, supervision and evaluation mechanisms.

Minister Tufton also met with his counterpart, Javier Flores, with whom he discussed the agricultural chain approach as it is applied in Costa Rica, and learned of a number of national programs such as the ones on tropical roots, pineapples and protected environments.

On the last day of their visit, the delegation went on a field trip which took them to Zarcero, Pital and La Fortuna de San Carlos, near the border with Nicaragua, to visit hydroponic, greenhouse and organic production projects.

True contribution of agriculture

The aim of the research the Minister requested of IICA is to determine the true contribution of the expanded agricultural sector to the gross domestic product of Jamaica, as it has done in other countries since 2002.

The methodology applied makes it possible to identify the forward and backward linkages of agriculture, which, when taken into consideration, reveal that the contribution of agriculture is as much as seven times greater than initially thought.

In his first conversations with the Jamaican delegation, Brathwaite underscored the fact that agriculture is a strategic sector whose contribution is much greater than that reported in official statistics.

“To be able to meet the challenges of the new century, a new minister of agriculture must have the tools required to negotiate with and convince the government and decision makers in the country of the importance, for example, of investing in rural areas. No tool will be more useful than information on the true contribution of agriculture to the national economy,” said Brathwaite.

He offered an overview of the challenges of the new millennium, which go beyond simple production and affect a variety of sectors, including the social sector, where the war on poverty is waged; the energy sector, in which agriculture is called upon to play a key role; and the environmental sector, where, among other things, it is necessary to seek solutions to the impact of climate change on food production.

The challenges, he explained, are multisectoral and will require cooperation between the Minister of Agriculture and the rest of the Cabinet, and support at the highest level, from the President of the country.

He also recommended the adoption of national policies on agriculture because they provide long-term guidelines for the sector, are defined jointly by the public and private sectors, and, being endorsed by the legislature, have the force of law.

Jamaica 2009

Minister Tufton's visit to IICA also served to begin the lead up to two key meetings to be held in Jamaica in 2009: the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life within the context of the Summit of the Americas process, and the Fifteenth Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA).

The IICA Representative in Jamaica, Cynthia Currie, and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry Agriculture of that country, Donovan Stanberry, met with the Technical Secretaries of both meetings, Bernardo Badani and Fernando del Risco, respectively, to go over what is needed to make both meetings a success.

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Costa Rican producers share their experiences with the Minister of Agriculture of Jamaica

The minister visited the operations of small-scale producers of vegetables, fruits and tubers.

“We have dreams and we want to share them” said the President of the Association of Organic Producers of Alfaro Ruiz (APODAR), Henry Guerrero, in welcoming the Minister of Agriculture and Lands of Jamaica, Christopher Tufton, and IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite to Noelia Farm, the site of a project involving the growing and marketing of organic vegetables.

Guerrero is one of a group of 18 Costa Rican small producers who between them have 13 certified farms. His association benefits around 160 people directly and indirectly, small family enterprises that have worked with organic products in Zarcero de Alfaro Ruiz for nearly 20 years.

This was one of the projects that the delegation from Jamaica and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture visited on 22 February. In addition to Zarcero, they toured Pital and La Fortuna de San Carlos, in northern Costa Rica, close to the border with Nicaragua, to observe fruit- and tuber-growing operations.

The visit by Minister Tufton and his delegation formed part of the activities of the Forum for Leaders of Agriculture, an innovative IICA effort designed to permit recently appointed ministers of agriculture and other senior agricultural sector officials to gain an understanding of the latest developments and the global approach to agriculture and rural life in the 21st century.

Minister Tufton is keen to promote the diversification of agricultural production in his native country. Traditionally, Jamaica's main crops were sugarcane and bananas but production has fallen dramatically since 1960. The production of sugar has fallen from 300,000 tons per year to 164,000 last year. Banana production was down from a peak of 100,000 tons to only 33,000 last year.

“As a result of this visit, IICA and the Government of Jamaica we will be holding a workshop in Costa Rica for 12 Jamaican specialists, who will receive training in the techniques used with the crops we saw during this tour,” said the Coordinator of IICA’s Center for Leadership in Agriculture, Hernan Chiriboga.

One of the Jamaican minister’s objectives is to develop the production of crops in greenhouses and the use of hydroponics to promote plantations of fruit trees and cacao. He is also seeking to stimulate milk production, fishing and the use of manioc to produce biofuels.

Direct contact with farmers

On the first stop on their tour, the delegations visited a greenhouse where Dutch cucumber is grown for export to Miami, New York and Detroit. Farmer Walter Barquero, a partner in the greenhouse operation, explained how it uses microclimates and demonstrated the results: cucumbers 11-18 inches long. The Jamaican delegation expressed great interest, since projects of this kind are only just getting off the ground in that country.

At Noelia Farm the visitors learned about organic vegetable growing and sampled fresh produce such as carrots, sweet peppers, tomatoes and coriander. Farmer Enrique Paniagua presented a selection of vegetables that - by coincidence - were exported to Jamaica less than a year ago, with great success.

Ninety minutes later, the delegation arrived at Del Huerto, in Veracruz de Pital, San Carlos, a firm that exports pineapple. The fruit is packaged and stored for shipment to markets in northern Europe, the United States and Great Britain.

British firm TESCO, one of the world’s five largest supermarket chains, is one of the main buyers of the Del Huerto’s production. Last year, as partner Cristian Herrera explained, the company exported 30 containers of fresh fruit every week, benefiting the more than 75 small producers associated with Del Huerto.

Finally, at B&C Exportadores, in La Fortuna de San Carlos, the delegations saw first hand an initiative involving manioc growing and processing. The company concerned produces, packages and exports fresh and frozen agricultural products and snacks.

In 2004, it was singled out by the Chamber of Exporters of Costa Rica for its efforts and has sold its products to markets such as Miami, New York, Houston and Los Angeles. Recently the firm began exporting to Toronto, Canada, and European markets such as England, the Netherlands and Spain.

Both Minister Tufton and Director General Brathwaite expressed satisfaction with the field trip, the first activity organized by the Forum for Leaders of Agriculture.

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Experienced professional takes over as Deputy Director General of IICA

Christopher Hansen has extensive knowledge of conditions in the nations of the hemisphere.

Christopher A. Hansen, a professional with over 25 years’ experience in the financial and business sector, mainly in Latin America, has taken up his new post as Deputy Director General of IICA.

Hansen was appointed by the Director General of IICA, Chelston Brathwaite, and took up his position in January of this year.

Hansen has spearheaded innovative initiatives for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Latin America under projects implemented by institutions such as the World Bank’s

International Finance Corporation, the Foundation for Sustainable Development in Latin America (FUNDES) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

A U.S. citizen, Hansen has a masters' degree in international finance and a political science degree from the University of California, Berkeley.

He has held several positions at IICA: Assistant Deputy Director General, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Director of Regional Operations and Integration for the Northern Region, and IICA Representative in Washington.

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New IICA Representatives in Mexico and Barbados

Highly qualified agricultural professionals took up their posts in February

At the beginning of February, two renowned agricultural experts, Chilean Gino Buzzetti and Dominican Joseph Peltier, took up their posts as IICA Representatives in Mexico and Barbados, respectively.

Buzzetti, an agronomist and sociologist who studied at the Catholic University of Chile, replaced Christopher Hansen, IICA's new Deputy Director General. He assumed his duties at the Office in Mexico on 4 February.

The new Representative has broad experience in formulating, providing follow-up to and negotiating agricultural development plans and projects, and has served as a consultant in Latin America and the Caribbean to institutions such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) and the World Bank.

He was an advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture in his native Chile, and the coordinator and planner of projects related to family agriculture, agricultural insurance and poverty alleviation.

He produces crops under plastic and has contributed to numerous publications and technical reports.

On 1 February, economist Joseph Peltier took up his duties as the new Representative in Barbados.

A graduate of the University of Massachusetts and Boston College, Peltier has enjoyed a long professional career during which has worked in different capacities for institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment of Dominica. He also taught at the University of Guyana.

With extensive knowledge of organic agriculture, rural development and the marketing of agricultural products, Peltier previously served as an IICA Regional Specialist in Sustainable Rural Development (for the Caribbean Region).

IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite welcomed both Representatives and wished them every success in their new positions.

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New Minister of Agriculture of Belize visits IICA

IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite congratulated the new minister on his appointment.

On 18 February, the local IICA Office had the honor of hosting the first official visit carried out by the new Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries of Belize, René Montero.

Prime Minister Dean Barrow, whose party won the elections on 7 February, asked Montero to take responsibility for the sector in his government. The delegation that visited IICA also included Deputy Agriculture Minister Gabino Canto and Director of Agriculture Eugene Waight.

The Belizean minister is also active in the business sector, is an animal production specialist, has been involved in university teaching for most of his professional life and worked for the Ministry of Agriculture of Belize for over 20 years.

“I would like IICA’s support with the products that generate income for the country, such as basic grains, tropical fruits and meat,” said Montero, who also expressed interest in key areas such as biofuels, agribusiness and agricultural research and extension.

The IICA Representative in Belize, Salvador Monge, thanked the new officials for their confidence in the Institute. “This is an excellent opportunity to promote further cooperation between IICA and the Government of Belize,” he said.

Monge took advantage of the opportunity to discuss with the representatives of Belizean agriculture matters such as the 2003-2015 Agro Plan, the 2008-2017 Central American Agricultural Policy, the National Agenda and the 2008 Work Plan.

IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite sent a letter to Minister Montero congratulating him on his appointment and inviting him to take part in the Forum for Leaders of Agriculture at the Institute’s Headquarters in Costa Rica, the key objective of which is to analyze the challenges of agriculture in the 21st century from a global perspective.

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WTO Counsellor leads training activity in Costa Rica

Gretchen Stanton was the main facilitator of the workshop on sanitary and phytosanitary standards held at IICA for representatives of the public and private sectors

Gretchen Stanton, a Senior Counsellor of the World Trade Organization (WTO), was the main facilitator of a workshop held in Costa Rica to study the context, scope and implementation of the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS), and the sanctions provided for under the international accord.

The two-day workshop was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Trade (COMEX) of Costa Rica with support from the local IICA Office. The participants included over 30 officials from the ministries of foreign trade and agriculture and livestock (MAG), plus representatives of business chambers and firms.

The most important aspects of the WTO SPS Agreement concern the protection of human, animal and plant health. Under the accord, exporters are guaranteed access to information about current standards, to ensure their products are not rejected for failing to comply with them. The agreement also helps ensure that trade in livestock products is not impeded by overregulation, since there is an international standard in place that all WTO members are bound to honor.

The WTO Senior Counsellor said that the Costa Rican authorities were quite familiar with the contents of the SPS agreement. As a result, the workshop focused on two ambitious objectives: first, a review of the different interpretations given to the agreement and the cases that have already been presented; and, second, an analysis of the importance of information management and transparency.

The participants studied cases that the WTO has already resolved and discussed their country's main concerns with regard to the agreement.

In addition to the sessions led by Ms. Stanton, IICA officials presented the Institute's hemispheric and national technical cooperation projects related to SPS.

On behalf of COMEX, Alejandra Aguilar gave an overview of Costa Rica's experiences and the difficulties it has encountered in implementing the standards established in the WTO document.

As it was the first time Stanton had visited Costa Rica, she took advantage of the opportunity to make courtesy calls on several IICA officials to discuss issues of interest to IICA and the WTO.

The informal meeting involved, among others, the Director of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management, James French; the Director of Agricultural Health and Food Safety, Ricardo Molins; the Director of Trade and Policies, Julio Paz; the Director of Horizontal Technical Cooperation, Guillermo Toro; and the Director of Institutional Modernization, Rafael Trejos.

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IICA helps update prestigious agricultural thesaurus and glossary

The 2008 editions of the documents produced by the U.S. National Agricultural Library include some 70 new terms in Spanish and English

The National Agricultural Library (NAL) has published the 2008 edition of its Agricultural Thesaurus and Glossary, in both Spanish and English, updated in collaboration with IICA.

IICA's Documentation and Publications Unit spent some three months assisting the NAL - the world's most important agricultural library - with the task of adapting to Spanish these important tools for increasing knowledge of the terms used in agriculture.

The 2008 editions of the Thesaurus and the Glossary include 70 new terms in Spanish and English, expanded terminology related to a wide range of subjects, such as fuels, chocolate processing, bodies of water and the U.S. National Forest System, and acronyms used in the taxonomic classification of viruses.

The Thesaurus and Glossary website has parallel English and Spanish interfaces so that users can search and read the materials in either language.

Both the Thesaurus and the Glossary can be downloaded from the website in a variety of formats and on the contact page users can propose terms for possible inclusion in future editions of the documents.

Future plans

As a result of the work of IICA's Documentation and Publications Unit and the efforts of the IICA Office in Washington during 2007, cooperation between the Institute and the NAL will continue in 2008.

IICA and the Orton Commemorative Library - administered jointly with the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) - developed a work plan to provide further support to the NAL, this time with the 2009 Thesaurus.

The institutions are currently working with specialists in linguistic hierarchies from Latin America and the Caribbean, who will be contributing their knowledge to next year's publications.

The 2008 edition of the Thesaurus is available at <http://agclass.nal.usda.gov/agt/agt.shtml>

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Rural women and their true worth

IICA supported knowledge sharing through an international meeting held in Mexico.

The work of rural women has a positive impact on their surroundings and creates greater possibilities of achieving a decent life without having to leave the countryside. To analyze and recognize the contribution that women make, Mexico's National Network of Rural Women (RENAMUR) - with support from IICA - held an international meeting to share experiences.

From 6-7 February, over 400 women from various Mexican states, some 20 international guests, representatives of government agencies, academics, specialists and researchers met to discuss "The role of women in the revaluation of the rural milieu."

IICA was a major contributor to the activity: the Institute's Offices in Uruguay, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala all made presentations during the meeting on their experiences with regard to the core topic under discussion. The IICA Office in Mexico was also involved in handling all the logistics of the event.

The meeting achieved its objective of providing an opportunity for different social actors to share their knowledge, resources and experiences. All are involved in the effort to improve the quality of life and achieve food security, dignified work and social justice in the rural milieu. The event was also used to strengthen proposals for action and local, regional, national and international development, with a gender perspective and a vision of sustainability.

Over 100 organizations signed a manifesto at the end of the activity that, according to Nuria Costa Leonardo, the President of RENAMUR, will be used as the basis for the work proposal of RED, a civil society organization with which IICA signed a cooperation agreement recently.

Mexico's First Lady, Margarita Zavala, the Secretary of Agrarian Reform, Abelardo Escobar Prieto, the Under Secretary of Rural Development, Antonio Ruiz, the Deputy Director General of IICA, Christopher Hansen, IICA's new Representative in Mexico, Gino Buzzetti, and rural development specialists Melania Portilla and Alberto Zuloaga all took part in the activity.

The institutions that sponsored the international meeting included the Secretariat of Agrarian Reform, the Fideicomisos Instituidos en Relación con la Agricultura (FIRA), the European Delegation for Family Agriculture in Latin America (DEAFAL) and the Cooperative of Advisers for Social Progress (SCAAS).

IICA's Directorate of Sustainable Rural Development supported the preparation of the general framework for the meeting, identifying experiences in coordination with the IICA Offices. One of the unit's specialists, Melania Portilla, gave a presentation entitled "Rural Development and the Strengthening of Small Businesses Run by Women in Latin America: Problems, Challenges, Opportunities."

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The first crop of improved seeds in Central America is ready to be harvested

The IICA/Red SICTA/COSUDE project is beginning to bear fruit.

The first of the projects aimed at technological innovation in the production of corn and bean seed and grain in Central America, based on a value-chains approach, is about to harvest its first crop.

Implemented by IICA in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (COSUDE), via the Agricultural Innovation Network (Red SICTA), the aim is make grain producers more competitive in the region through the use of high-quality seeds.

The first harvest of some 100 cwt. of registered red bean seed will be ready this month, produced under an innovation project co-financed by Red SICTA in the area of Cardenas, in southern Nicaragua.

This is good news not only for Nicaragua but for all of Central America, as other innovation projects are under way in different parts of Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

“There is big demand for bean seed and people are prepared to pay high prices,” project coordinator Armando Ferrufino said. The rising prices are due, among other things, to the demand from the so-called “nostalgia markets,” and the support that some governments in the region are providing to increase the acreage given over to this grain.

Ferrufino explained that the projects that the Red SICTA co-finances are using the chains approach, which means they focus not only on productive links but on the entire process, including the agroindustrial phases in which value is added (cleaning, polishing, drying and packaging of the seed and grain) and commercialization, which includes marketing and sales.

Support for seed production is important because it is one of the most important components of any agricultural plan. Seed quality is a big factor in productivity and seeds are also one of the main ways in which diseases may be spread.

According to the project coordinator, the objective is to increase the income of Central American producers and make them more competitive.

The projects also include a knowledge management component, aimed at training both producers and technicians. Several producers involved in the different initiatives in Central America recently traveled to Costa Rica for a training course.

Initiatives of this kind are currently under way in four places: Ipala, in southern Guatemala; Dali, in Honduras; and Boaco and Cardenas, in Nicaragua.

In each location, the cost of the project is approximately US\$300,000, with IICA/Red SICTA/COSUDE and the producers each contributing half of the funds.

The Red SICTA also supports corn seed innovation projects. On 11 and 15 February, the first meetings took place to begin the process of preparing the innovation project for the agroindustrial chain of the QPM variety of grain and seed in the districts of Río San Juan and Rivas, in southern Nicaragua.

A similar process will soon be starting in El Salvador, to support the white corn chain in that country.

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Environmentally friendly wet coffee mills under development in Nicaragua

The system uses only one quarter of the water required under traditional systems.

This year will see the start of the construction of 200 environmentally friendly wet coffee mills in Nicaragua, on small and medium-sized farms. The mills' design reduces pollution and helps improve the quality and health of the coffee produced.

Construction of the mills is due to get under way in the first months of this year, following a nationwide study on the status of mills, complemented by proposed environmentally-friendly designs tailored to the productive capacity of each farm.

The construction of the mills forms part of the Program to Improve Wet Coffee Mills in Nicaragua, which is being financed by the Common Fund for Commodities (a loan of US\$1.6 million) and the Rural Credit Fund (US\$525,000). Producers are contributing US\$200,000 in local labor and materials to construct the mills.

The Ministry of Development, Industry and Trade (MIFIC) is executing the program and IICA is responsible for the technical supervision.

"The new mills are going to have a functional structure, to handle and make productive use of the pulp and run-off water, and a system of fermentation differentiated according to the altitude at which the farm is located," said IICA's Representative in Nicaragua, Gerardo Escudero.

Most traditional mills operated by small producers simply remove the coffee pulp, with the waste finding its way into water sources. Furthermore, the designs of traditional mills do not take into consideration the day on which production peaks and the time it takes for the beans to ferment.

According to the person appointed by IICA to supervise the program, Livio Saenz, the common denominator of the environmentally-friendly proposal is the capacity to process the harvest on the day when production peaks, to avoid building overly large structures based, erroneously, on the total volume of production.

Five proposals have already been drawn up. The designs include a system that uses approximately one quarter of the water used previously and the innovative use of two fermentation sinks for coffee plantations located at higher altitudes.

Saenz explained that coffee produced at altitude takes over 24 hours longer to ferment if high quality is the goal. "Thus, with an extra sink producers do not have to interrupt the process as more and more of the freshly picked coffee arrives."

The mills will be constructed over a three-year period. The first 200 applications have been received from coffee growers in Esteli, Nueva Segovia, Madriz, Jinotega and Matagalpa.

Taken from the February edition of Agronoticias, Nicaragua.