



IICA recommends giving all-out priority to food security

Official document makes bid for giving all-out priority to agriculture and food security in the national agendas and comes out in defense of biofuels.

In an official document released this Monday, May 5, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) contends that the time has come for the countries of the Americas to review their food security policies and take the necessary steps to design appropriate policies to make agricultural production a priority on the national development agendas.

In the document entitled *IICA's Response to Rising Food Prices*, IICA, an organization of the Inter-American System, based in Costa Rica, with offices in its 34 member countries, comes out in defense of biofuels which, it claims, provide an opportunity to stimulate agriculture in the region, as long as sources of production other than basic grains are used.

The Institute is forwarding the document to the Ministers of Agriculture in the hemisphere, strategic partners and representatives of the private sector and civil society. It is doing so at a time when its 34 Representatives in Member States are being asked to redouble their efforts to support governments endeavoring to shape policies to protect the most vulnerable in society from the impact of rising food prices and to stimulate output to face demand.

In the opinion of the Director General of IICA, Chelston Brathwaite, those countries that are “net exporters” of food products are benefiting from the high prices, while “net importers” are feeling the negative impact and seeing their food import bill increase.

In general, families, especially, “net consumers”, even those involved in agriculture, also feel the negative effects, when increases in their income or earnings from the sale of products do not offset higher food costs.

Biofuels and reasons for the crisis

IICA recognizes that food prices and food supply are not determined by any single factor and points to four basic reasons for the current crisis: increased demand for agricultural products as feedstock for bio-fuel production; droughts in Australia and low crop output in Europe; increased demand for meat protein and cereals, especially in China and India; and the increased cost of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides as a result of increased oil prices.

While there are those who hold that the food crisis can be attributed to bio-fuels production, Brathwaite feels that agro-energy can contribute to the world energy supply without being a threat to food security, if we use non-cereal resources such as sugarcane, oil palm, cellulosic biomass, agricultural waste and *Jatropha* (popularly known as *Barbados nut*), among others, for the production of biofuels.

The Institute maintains that the debate over “food versus fuel” will be less controversial as national governments and their private-sector partners become engaged in developing national agro-energy and bio-fuel policies as well as regulatory frameworks that are based on scientific knowledge and sound economic policies.

National Strategies

In the face of the food crisis, IICA announced that it will work closely with national authorities in its 34 Member States to analyze, develop and implement national agricultural strategies that are in tune with the new international context, and programs aimed at taking advantage of the opportunity provided by higher agricultural prices to promote production and lessen the negative impact that such prices may have on certain territories or population groups in rural areas.

At this time, it is important to identify those population groups, especially in rural areas, whose food security is threatened and those agrifood chains affected by increases in their production costs and a decline in their competitiveness.

Here, IICA would draw on its experience working in rural areas and in value chains to identify and design production and food programs.

IICA's contribution will be based on its 2006-2010 Medium-Term Plan, which calls for work on major issues such as trade and agribusiness; agro-energy; agricultural health and food safety; biotechnology; agricultural insurance; agro-tourism; rural agroindustry; and organic agriculture.

"We are of the firm belief" Brathwaite said, that "work in these areas, together with the implementation of sound national policies, will help our countries modernize their agricultural sectors and confront the challenges associated with rising food prices and food scarcity in our Member States."

He further announced that in July next, an international workshop on "Agriculture and Food Security as an Instrument for Integral Development" will be held in Costa Rica.

"At this time when we face the enormous challenge of food security, our Institute is prepared to support our countries by providing knowledge and information" and prepare agricultural development projects aimed at improving the situation with respect to food security, concluded Brathwaite.

For further information: www.iica.int



Successful joint IICA/FAO efforts highlighted in Brazil

Director General of IICA presented report at FAO Regional Conference held in Brazil

The Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) presented a report entitled "FAO and IICA Working together for agriculture and rural life" at the 30th Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), held in Brazil from April 14-18.

The document seeks to strengthen the technical cooperation both organizations offer to their member countries in the Americas, which is aimed primarily at helping them move toward food security and improve conditions in the agricultural sector and the rural milieu.

According to Brathwaite, "The report details the results of joint actions involving IICA and FAO. These actions, we hope, will strengthen our relationship in the future and enable us to make maximum use of our resources and join forces to provide technical cooperation to our Member States."

FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf also underscored the importance of the efforts his organization has undertaken with IICA to help the countries.

"The excellent relations between IICA and FAO are conducive to the provision of technical cooperation and to achieving the objectives of the countries," said Diouf.

He called attention to the actions carried out over the last five years in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, and spoke of the most important issues addressed at the meeting, especially the need to reduce hunger in the world. In his judgment, the poor must have access to factors of production and rising food costs must be brought under control.

Referring to agricultural health and food safety, Diouf emphasized the importance of combating transboundary diseases and of the agreement signed by IICA and FAO in April 2006, one result of which was the report presented by Brathwaite at the Conference.

Under the agreement, the organizations set up a Codex Alimentarius Committee for Latin America to analyze draft norms and disseminate information on, among other topics, sanitary control, disease prevention and eradication, biosafety, and best agricultural practices.

“FAO and IICA Working together for agriculture and rural life” also details work carried out in the area of animal health, specifically through projects aimed at strengthening capabilities to prevent highly pathogenic avian influenza in the Southern Region.

Efforts to date in the area of food security include the Planning Workshop for Central America, of the Latin America and the Caribbean without Hunger Initiative; the joint review of the National Food Security Plan of El Salvador; and the actions carried out under the National Alliance against Hunger in Honduras.

As regards regional integration, the report focuses on IICA/FAO collaboration in the formulation of the Central American Agricultural Policy and the implementation of the Jagdeo Initiative in the Caribbean Region, aimed at enhancing the participation of agribusinesses there in domestic and international markets.

The report also looks at areas such as research and genetic resources, formation of agribusiness leaders, differentiation of products using local resources, environmental sustainability, agricultural insurance, development of rural networks, strengthening of rural education, agricultural information and biofuels and their connection to food security. Referring to the latter, he called attention to their involvement in the “Second Latin American and Caribbean Biofuels Seminar,” organized by the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE) in El Salvador.

Thirty-three Member States from the region, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and observers participated in the 30th FAO Regional Conference.

Important Brazilian authorities were also in attendance, including the Secretary of International Relations and Agribusiness of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply of Brazil (MAPA), Celio Porto; the Minister of Agricultural Development, Guilherme Cassel; and Brazil’s Permanent Representative to FAO, Jose Antonio Marcondes.

Download the report “FAO and IICA working together for agriculture and rural life” at:

<http://webiica.iica.ac.cr/bibliotecas/repiica/B0661i/B0661i.pdf>

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Advisory commission formulates recommendations for IICA

Representatives of seven member countries met in Costa Rica to discuss key aspects of the Institute’s operations.

The Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues met 21-22 April to lay the groundwork for the next meeting of IICA’s Executive Committee (due to take place in July in Costa Rica). The Commission members were drawn from seven Institute Member States - Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, Saint Kitts and Nevis and the United States of America

On the first day, the Commission held a special meeting to discuss the Institute’s technical capabilities, based on the external assessment carried out at the request of IICA’s Executive Committee at the end of 2006, assisted by a Steering Committee Guide composed of representatives of Argentina, Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama and Paraguay.

On 22 April, the agenda of the Commission’s regular meeting was dominated by financial matters. The Commission recommended the approval of a special budget to beef up IICA’s work in six areas:

- Capacity building to make effective use of the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)
- Systematization and dissemination of experiences related to agricultural insurance
- Support for initiatives involving horizontal cooperation among the Member States
- Promotion of links between agriculture and tourism
- Center for Leadership in Agriculture
- Continuous professional development
- Modernization of the institutional infrastructure

Responsibility for giving final approval of the special budget rests with the Executive Committee.

Assessment of expertise at IICA

The Commission studied the comments of the United States, Canada and the Dominican Republic with regard to the assessment's conclusions. It also considered the Steering Committee's report on the entire process and the IICA Director General's report on the implementation of the evaluators' recommendations.

Following wide-ranging discussions with senior IICA officials, the Commission acknowledged that "it is important to reposition to the Institute and give it the technical expertise it needs to meet the growing demand for its technical cooperation services in the Member States and at the regional and hemispheric levels."

To this end, the Commission decided to make the following recommendations to the Executive Committee, which will consider them at its Twenty-eighth Regular Meeting, scheduled to take place 22-24 July 2008 in San Jose, Costa Rica:

1. Devise a Strategic Framework for the Institute for 2010-2020, taking into account the changes and challenges faced by agricultural and rural development worldwide and in the hemisphere, in order to enhance the mission, vision and objectives and make the organizational changes and improvements needed to the institution's management and human resource systems.
2. In 2010, prepare IICA's Medium Term Plan for implementing the Strategic Framework between 2010 and 2014, which will be the responsibility of the next Administration, including the financial requirements, the guidelines for implementing the framework and a procedure for accountability.
3. Improve the Institute's Management System, reviewing the role and mechanisms of the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues, the Executive Committee and the Inter-American Board of Agriculture in light of the new Strategic Framework and the Medium Term Plan.
4. Redesign and strengthen the Institute's human resource base by enhancing the rules and regulations, instituting innovative procedures and generating more information to mobilize external technical capabilities to meet the Member States' needs.

A key contribution

The Director General, Chelston Brathwaite, told the members of the Advisory Commission that they had made a key contribution by facilitating the work of the Institute's governing bodies (the Executive Committee and the Inter-American Board of Agriculture).

The Commission's role, Brathwaite said, was to translate important recommendations into viable decisions that would make it possible to continue transforming and modernizing the Institute. The process was essential if the organization was to build the capacity required to meet the growing demand for its services in the Member States and, at the same time, carry out the mandates issued by the Summit of the Americas Process.

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IICA appoints new Assistant Deputy Director General

David C. Hatch is the new Assistant Deputy Director General, Director of Strategic Partnerships and Representative in the United States.

American citizen David C. Hatch took up his new post as Assistant Deputy Director General of IICA on 21 April. He will also serve as the Director of Strategic Partnerships and IICA Representative in the USA. Hatch, who will be based in Washington, D.C., replaced Christopher Hansen, who is now the Institute's Deputy Director General.

With 25 years' professional experience, Hatch has occupied various posts in the business and government sectors. He also has broad experience in risk financing and insurance and in administrative areas, including the preparation of budgets and product development.

In 2002, the new Assistant Deputy Director General was appointed by The White House to serve as an Associate Administrator to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a harvest insurance program with US\$45 billion in funding. He remained in the post until 2005. He also pioneered the development of business models that have reduced risk management and insurance costs by over US\$200 million. He has also served as the chairman of three companies and been a university professor.

Hatch, who graduated with honors from Brigham Young University in the United States, undertook specialized studies in International Policy and Organizational Behavior. He also has expertise related to a wide range of industries, including agriculture, chemicals, insurance and medical products.

IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite introduced the new Assistant Deputy Director General to the staff at the Institute's Headquarters during the monthly meeting with the personnel held on 30 April.

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IICA trains Jamaicans in new agricultural techniques

Thirteen technical officials are taking part in the International Training Program in New Agricultural Techniques under an agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture of Jamaica and IICA.

On 5 May, 13 technical officials from Jamaica began a course-workshop in new agricultural techniques in Costa Rica. The activity, which ends on 31 May, involves training in production in protected environments and organic agriculture.

The activity forms part of IICA's cooperation agenda with Jamaica.

It was organized by the Center for Leadership in Agriculture, which was inaugurated recently at IICA Headquarters. The Center aims to shape leaders with a global vision and capable of promoting modern, sustainable and equitable agriculture on behalf of the peoples of the Americas.

The course, targeted at technicians, agronomists and biologists, is being given by five specialists with over 10 years' experience, all of whom are recognized experts in their respective field. Also taking part are guest lecturers, organic and hydroponic producers and entrepreneurs.

The objective is to update and expand the participants' knowledge of innovative agricultural production techniques. The course combines the theory and practice of the intensive cultivation of four vegetables (lettuce, tomatoes, Dutch cucumber and sweet pepper) in a protected environment using hydroponic and organic techniques.

During his visit to IICA Headquarters last February, the Minister of Agriculture and Lands of Jamaica, Christopher Tufton, said that hydroponics, production in greenhouses and orchards were priority areas for his country.

Minister Tufton took part in a forum organized by the Center for Leadership designed for newly appointed ministers of agriculture, which focuses on the major challenges facing agriculture in the 21st century.

During the Forum, IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite and Minister Tufton reviewed the Institute's technical cooperation agenda in Jamaica.

The priority actions identified as "critical and urgent and requiring the Institute's support" include the facilitation of technology transfer between Costa Rica and Jamaica and research to determine expanded agriculture's contribution to the Caribbean country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture is a strategic sector, whose importance is many times greater than that usually suggested by official statistics, Brathwaite said.

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IICA Headquarters hosts preparatory meeting for world conference on biotechnology

Delegates from 18 countries took part.

From 10-11 April, IICA Headquarters in Costa Rica hosted the Preparatory Hemispheric Technical Meeting of the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP 4), due to be held in Bonn, Germany.

The meeting in Germany will bring together representatives of all the countries that have ratified the Protocol. These conferences are used to manage, supervise and reach decisions related to the implementation of the biosafety agreement.

IICA has been coordinating efforts in the Americas to promote dialogue among the countries and improve the implementation of the international agreement. The objective of the Preparatory Hemispheric Meeting held at the Institute's Headquarters was to share the results of the national discussions on the different issues that will be addressed at the COP-MOP 4.

With delegations from 18 countries present, the meeting marked the start of the discussion of important issues that will continue in Germany. At the preparatory meeting, efforts were made to improve the understanding of key elements related to negotiations in this field.

IICA also encouraged the countries of the Americas to play a more active part, as a group, in the world conference.

“It is essential that the countries of the Americas, as net food producers and exporters, get organized as a region in order to engage in technical discussions and negotiations that have serious implications for the hemisphere’s competitive strength,” said IICA’s Director of Institutional Modernization, Rafael Trejos.

IICA believes that traditional technologies will not be sufficient to guarantee the level of food production that population growth will require. In the Institute’s view, the technological challenge lies in increasing agricultural productivity without degrading or destroying the natural resource base and without extending the agricultural frontier into forested areas and natural reserves.

“The new technologies, particularly agro-biotechnology, provide a means of raising agricultural productivity and guaranteeing that enough food is available to meet the demand that is projected for the near future,” Trejos stressed.

During the opening ceremony of the Hemispheric Meeting, the expert went on to say that “to ensure there are no adverse effects on the environment or on the consumers and users of products obtained using biotechnology, the countries of the hemisphere must have suitable, internationally harmonized biosafety standards and regulations in place. Hence the importance of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.”

Mindful of the importance of this issue, since 2005 has been implementing a Hemispheric Biotechnology and Biosafety Program, at the express request of the 34 Member States and pursuant to the mandate issued by the Inter-American Board of Agriculture, comprised of the Ministers of Agriculture of the countries of the Americas.

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Cartagena Protocol: <http://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cartagena-protocol-en.pdf>

Official Web page of the COP-MOP 4: <http://www.cbd.int/mop4/>



Intellectual property and agricultural research and innovation

IICA holds forum on intellectual property management.

To contribute to the ongoing dialogue on intellectual property in the hemisphere’s agricultural sector, IICA’s Directorate of Technical Leadership held a technical forum on 21 April entitled “Intellectual property management: the case of regional public goods.”

Referring to the event, IICA’s Director of Technology and Innovation, Enrique Alarcon, said, “We wish to facilitate a dialogue that will lead to a better understanding and treatment, in both operational and legal terms, of intellectual property management in the case of products and processes that are public or semi-public goods resulting from collaborative research at the regional level and technological innovation.”

The Institute believes the Latin American countries must tackle the regional and global challenges facing their agricultural sectors together if they are to do so efficiently, because research costs are high and the topics complex. That is why the States and international institutions are resorting increasingly to collaborative action and integrated research and innovation efforts.

IICA is supporting this process by promoting mechanisms for reciprocal cooperation among countries under the so-called “PROCI” and other bodies such as the Central American Integration System for Agricultural Technology (SICTA) and the Regional Cooperative Program for Technology Development and the Modernization of Coffee Growing in Central America, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica (PROMECAFE).

The Institute is also supporting the consolidation of the Regional Fund for Agricultural Technology (FONTAGRO) as a regional funding mechanism and promoting the hemispheric dialogue on technology policy via the Forum for the Americas on Agricultural Research and Technology Development (FORAGRO).

These mechanisms are opening up major opportunities for the countries to work with others sectors of society - such as universities and the private sector - to generate products and services that could be classed as public or semi-public goods.

However, in tapping these opportunities the countries must also address issues related to the protection of the goods created and intellectual property (IP) concerns.

“Although the aim of the PROCIS, SICTA, PROMECAFE and FONTAGRO is to generate public goods, their research is also likely to produce new intermediate or final products, innovations or processes that the public and private institutions involved may wish to own or protect in different forms,” explained Alarcon.

“Public-private partnerships that make large investments to produce goods are entitled to establish their ownership of the goods concerned and make use of intellectual protection mechanisms. However, the parties involved need to be clearer about the conditions that apply to such protection.”

The legal issues

The Forum was divided into three parts. The first was used to address the question of intellectual property management in the case of regional public goods for which ownership rights may be granted. The experts who dealt with the subject were the Director of the Institute of Computer Law of the Law School of the Universidad Mayor of Uruguay, Carlos Delpiazzo; and the Costa Rican specialist in intellectual property rights and plant genetic resources, Jorge Cabrera.

“When projects are being prepared, and before they are implemented, the parties must be clear, in general terms, about how the results of the project will be managed, to ensure they are managed properly,” Delpiazzo said.

Cabrera explained that an international legal framework exists for IP in agriculture. The agreements and mechanisms to which the countries adhere, such as the treaties on plant genetic resources promoted by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), must be taken into account when presenting the results of agricultural research projects.

The progress achieved in Latin America

The second part of the Forum was given over to experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Director of Technological Linkages of the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) of Uruguay, Jose Silva, explained how his institution makes use of different types of protection - such as plant breeders' rights, franchises and industrial secrecy - to protect different types of innovations.

The Executive Secretary of PROMECAFE, Guillermo Canet, described the scope of the projects that the cooperation mechanism handles. He also commented on the regional research products that have emerged and the agreements among countries on the use and management of protection.

Finally, the Administrative Technical Secretary of FONTAGRO, Nicolas Mateo, gave an overview of the scope of intellectual property protection in projects managed by the Fund.

Research to improve the sector

Toward the end of the Technical Forum, there was a panel discussion involving the President of the Forum for the Americas on Agricultural Research and Technology Development (FORAGRO), Mario Allegri; agricultural economist and FONTAGRO Board member Jorge Aued; and intellectual property specialist Silvia Salazar. The experts discussed, from different perspectives, the complex role of intellectual property in regional goods.

“We must not lose sight of the main objective of research, which is to help agricultural producers improve their quality of life by means of improvements in production processes, increased competitiveness and higher quality,” IICA's Director of Technology and Innovation, Enrique Alarcon, said.

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Senior PROCISUR officials meet in Costa Rica

PROCISUR provided details of its technology agenda and IICA of its technical cooperation work.

The 34th meeting of the Management Committee of the Cooperative Program for Agrifood and Agroindustrial Technology Development in the Southern Cone (PROCISUR), whose members include the most important agricultural research institutes of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay, as well as IICA, took place 9-11 April.

IICA hosted the meeting for the first time. With a view to strengthening ties between the two institutions, PROCISUR provided details of the progress of its work and the Institute of its hemispheric cooperation agenda.

Welcoming the participants, IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite said, “We are delighted with the cooperation among research institutions in the Southern Region, which, under PROCISUR’s leadership, has evolved continuously over the last 25 years.

The Cooperative Program, created in 1980 with support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), supports the Southern Cone countries by promoting research activities in the agricultural sector.

“We believe that IICA has important things to contribute. We know you are working on important projects and we must find a way to take them on board,” said the President of PROCISUR’s Management Committee, Carlos Cheppi.

During the activity, the Committee approved the 2008 Annual Work Plan and decided how to finance an innovative project, a South American platform for dealing with biotic and abiotic stress caused by Asian Soybean Rust.

The Committee also discussed the Fifth International Meeting of the Forum for the Americas on Agricultural Research and Technology Development (FORAGRO 2008), which will be held in July in Montevideo, Uruguay.

The representatives of PROCISUR also met with senior officials from the Central American agricultural technology system (SICTA), with a view to establishing a working relationship with the network.

Based on PROCISUR’s Medium Term Plan and IICA’s cooperation agenda, the participants discussed common priorities related to issues such as biofuels, climate change, family agriculture and biotechnology.

Toward the end of the meeting, the members of PROCISUR’s Management Committee, accompanied by senior Institute officials, visited the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE).

“This is a historic meeting, it is an example of integration between Central and South America, something that will benefit everyone,” Cheppi said.

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Official PROCISUR Web page www.procisur.org.uy



Seminar on access to information in Argentina

Some 200 librarians attended a seminar in Argentina on access to information and knowledge.

The IICA Office in Argentina, the Argentine Ministry of Science and Technology and the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development organized a seminar that took place on 22 April entitled “Access to information and knowledge: making optimum use of resources.”

The activity was the 14th meeting of agricultural and veterinary libraries and the fourth meeting of science and technology libraries. Nearly 200 librarians and information specialists took part in the event, drawn from a variety of public and private academic, research and technology organizations.

The presentations focused on technological advances, open access systems and the processes involved in producing information in the context of the World Wide Web.

Sonia Novello, the information and documentation specialist of the IICA Office in Argentina, provided an overview of the Agricultural Information and Documentation System of the Americas (SIDALC), which affords access to documentation in the agricultural field produced by 141 institutions in 23 countries.

“SIDALC is the result of a joint effort by the national networks and is a source of reliable, quality information,” she said.

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