



IICA Executive Committee to hold 2008 annual meeting

Closing sessions will be held at CATIE, in Turrialba.



The Executive Committee holds a regular meeting each year, normally at the Institute's Headquarters.

Delegations from 17 countries will be meeting in Costa Rica from 22-24 July to take part in the Twenty-eighth Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

The following twelve Member States comprise the Executive Committee this year: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Dominica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia, the United States of America and Venezuela.

On the first two days, all the sessions will take place at IICA Headquarters. On day three, the participants will travel to CATIE, in Turrialba, where the fourth plenary and closing sessions will be held, followed by a meeting of CATIE's Governing Council.

This is the first time that an Executive Committee meeting has been divided up in this way. It is a further example of the importance that IICA and CATIE attach to joint efforts aimed at creating synergies and complementing their capabilities to achieve more effective cooperation for the Member States.

During the activity, IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite will be presenting information about the joint actions undertaken by the Institute and CATIE in 2007, while the Director General of CATIE, Jose Joaquin Campos, will present the Center's annual report for 2007 and his Administration's Plan of Action for 2008-2012.

Topics on the agenda

One of the main topics discussed will be the progress made in executing the recommendations for enhancing the Institute's technical capabilities. The Executive Committee is expected to give the present and future management of IICA a mandate to enhance its expertise in order to meet the new technical cooperation needs of the organizations' Member States.

Other topics to be addressed at meeting of the Executive Committee include IICA's 2007 annual report, which details the progress achieved in implementing the Institute's 2006-2010 Medium Term Plan (MTP); and the reports of the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues and the status of the resolutions of the Executive Committee's Twenty-seventh Regular Meeting.

IICA's Financial Statements for 2007 and the Report of the External Auditors will also be presented. For the fourth consecutive year, the external auditors recommended that the financial statements be approved without comments, demonstrating the transparency with which the institution manages its funds.

The Executive Committee will be studying the proposed 2008-2009 Special Program Budget, designed to strengthen the Institute's priority actions in areas such as agrotourism, horizontal cooperation, agricultural insurance, training for leaders, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and the modernization of IICA's infrastructure.

The participants will also discuss the status of the resolutions of the Fourteenth Regular Meeting of the IABA and the preparations for the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life of the Americas that will be taking place in Jamaica in 2009.

The Committee will also discuss the progress made in implementing the Leadership in Agriculture Program and the Declaration of Young Leaders of Agriculture of the Americas will be presented.

There will also be a dialogue entitled Food Security in the Americas.

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International workshop of experts in food security and sustainable development to be held in Costa Rica

The ultimate aim is to draft a proposal for the Fifth Summit of the Americas, due to take place in 2009, and draw up an agenda for work on important agricultural and rural development issues.

Experts from a number of international organizations and leading academic institutions will be taking part in the International Workshop “Contribution of Agriculture and the Rural Milieu to Sustainable Development and Food Security in the New International Context.” The activity will be held at the headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), in Costa Rica.

The participants will discuss the different interpretations of what “rural” means and agriculture’s role in helping to reduce poverty in the current international context, which is characterized by the escalating prices of food and basic raw materials, the energy crisis and the increasingly visible effects of climate change.

The experts invited to take part are drawn from institutions such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE), the World Bank, the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) and IICA.

Also participating will be specialists from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Brazilian Institute of Agricultural Research (EMBRAPA), the Regional Technical Assistance Unit (RUTA), Missouri and Purdue universities and the Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá.

The goal of the activity is to tap the expertise available, promote the dialogue among the international organizations working on behalf of agriculture, and obtain input for an IICA proposal - with a common vision - that will be presented at the Fifth Summit of the Americas, Trinidad and Tobago 2009, and discussed at the next Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life.

IICA believes that the renewed importance of agriculture should be reflected not only in the formulation and implementation of public policies but also in the establishment of national, regional and hemispheric priorities.

Detailed information about the international workshop will be available at <http://www.iica.int/Eng/organizacion/LTGC/ForosTécnicos/Pages/default.aspx>, including the program and the presentations and résumés of the participants. The event will be webcast live on 8-9 July.

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Google to digitize IICA's repository of documents

Nearly nine thousand documents will be made available via the Internet in the coming months.



IICA sent Google 8,868 original documents for digitizing and uploading to Internet.

With a view to sharing knowledge and information, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) sent Google 8868 hard copies of original documents so they can be digitized and made available on Internet.

Under the agreement with the world's leading search engine, 3000 institutional documents were sent at the end of 2007 and a further 5800 in March and April of this year. IICA's collection is an important reserve of knowledge related to topics such as agricultural policy, agricultural marketing and health.

“What we sent was the non-digital material produced from 1974 onwards, copies of which are kept in the library at IICA Headquarters in San Jose, Costa Rica. A similar number of unique original documents produced between 1942 and 1974 have yet to be digitized. They are stored at the Orton Commemorative Library, in the town of Turrialba, Costa Rica, where IICA had its first headquarters,” explained IICA's Head of Documentation and Publications Federico Sancho.

IICA's is the first library in Latin America to begin digitizing its collection of older documents with Google, to form part of a huge virtual catalogue designed to make it easier to find important books (further details are available on the company's website - <http://books.google.com/googlebooks/about.html>).

This tool is not the only one that the Institute has used to share the knowledge it generates. In 2006, IICA joined Google Book Search, a service that allows millions of users worldwide to “open the pages of books” on Internet. The Business Development Manager of Google Book Search, Framework Marinucci, has explained in various interviews that, as well as making it possible to consult books, and thus further disseminate their contents, information will be available about where books can be purchased, or what libraries have the books available.

The Institute also linked the databases of the Agricultural Information System of the Americas (SIDALC) to Google Scholar, one of the search engines specializing in (mainly scientific) bibliographies (<http://scholar.google.co.cr/>), thus boosting the site's traffic and requests for items in the collections available. “Before, www.sidalc.net received 3000 visits per month. The figure is now 20-40,000 visits per day, reflecting the service's enhanced visibility and usefulness. It affords access to over 141 prestigious agricultural institutions interested in sharing their knowledge,” Sancho said.

The official views the use of tools of this kind as consistent with the Institute's objectives: “Our mission is to provide innovative technical cooperation. Internet has given us the opportunity to share our information free of charge and without restrictions.” Furthermore, the partnership with Google has improved IICA's presence on Internet, demonstrating that “the Institute promotes the idea that knowledge should be distributed among as many people as possible.”

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Experts review projects that will impact food security

Twenty-three projects designed for the Andean, Southern Cone, Central American and Caribbean regions were presented at the Third Workshop on Technical Follow-up to Projects of the Regional Agricultural Technology Fund (FONTAGRO).

The workshop took place 25-27 June at the Headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). Over the three days, the participants analyzed the projects presented in response to the world food crisis.

Details were given of the status and results of 23 of the projects financed by the Fund, which are being carried out in the Andean, Southern Cone, Central American and Caribbean regions. The research - on crops such as rice, bananas, potatoes, citrus fruits and vegetables - has been under way for less than two years but is already yielding positive results for the countries of the Americas involved.

“This is an accountability activity but also an opportunity to revel in an exchange of scientific knowledge,” said Bernardo Mora, Director of the Agricultural Research and Technology Transfer Institute (INTA), who represented the Minister of Agriculture of Costa Rica, Javier Flores, at the event.

Diseases, soil health, good agricultural practices in integrated pest management, reduced use of agrochemicals, sustainable production, production chains and improved quality of life in rural communities are the focus of some of the initiatives discussed during the workshop.

Mario Pareja, Technical Coordinator of IICA’s Northern Region and the official responsible for providing technical support to FONTAGRO, said, “I’m impressed with the caliber of the projects presented, all of which are set to have a positive impact on agriculture in the Americas in the future.”



(1) Bernardo Mora (Director of INTA), Fernando Quevedo (IDB Representative in Costa Rica), Chelston Brathwaite (Director General of IICA), Leopoldo Sanchez (President of FONTAGRO) and Enrique Alarcon (IICA’s Director de Technology and Innovation).

(2) The FONTAGRO Workshop was attended by some 50 representatives of 20 countries.

The right time to innovate

In addition to providing follow-up to the technical progress of the projects, the workshop was used to share the results with researchers and consortia from twenty countries in the region that participated in the event.

According to the President of FONTAGRO, Leopoldo Sanchez, “The opportunity to exchange experiences and learn about different approaches to similar problems benefits all of us, and provides us with useful information and ideas we can take back to our countries.”

IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite also underscored the importance of the Fund. He said that alliances that promoted hemispheric cooperation and integration in the technological field “are today, more than ever, a strategy that offers the countries high value added.”

At a time when the effects of climate change are beginning to be felt, the availability of soil and water for production is limited and the costs of inputs and transportation have risen due to high oil prices, raising agricultural productivity is essential but requires “more environmentally favorable technologies that are more inclusive of the different productive sectors,” Braithwaite added, after describing how IICA had supported the Fund since its creation.

The IDB Representative in Costa Rica, Fernando Quevedo, endorsed the Director General’s comments. He said FONTAGRO’s tenth anniversary - which is being celebrated this year - came at “a very special and difficult moment for agriculture and for the situation in our countries.”

Another objective of the workshop was to update the 50 participants in the activity on emerging agricultural issues, such as food security, climate change, the technological consortia and the protection of regional public goods.

These topics, which were addressed during the inaugural panel by specialists from IICA and the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE), will be discussed at the next meeting of the Board of FONTAGRO due to take place in October in Peru, Pareja said.

Sanchez and Pareja both said the event had achieved its objectives and highlighted the important role that FONTAGRO plays in meeting the challenges facing agriculture in the Americas.

“Activities such as this help us see how the Fund can do more to solve problems related to food security and rural poverty in the region. FONTAGRO is making a contribution to agriculture in the Americas,” said Sanchez.

Pareja added, “IICA is pleased to support an alliance like FONTAGRO, which funds projects aimed at making the agricultural and rural sectors more competitive, reducing poverty and promoting the sustainable management of natural resources.”

FONTAGRO, which is co-sponsored by IICA and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), comprises 15 countries that, to date, have contributed US\$52.3 million.

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IICA takes part in the International Economic Forum for the Americas

At the International Economic Forum for the Americas, an event of which IICA is an associate sponsor, the Institute’s Assistant Deputy Director General gave a presentation on the impact of food prices on agribusinesses.

Some 3000 executives and officials from countries in Latin America and Europe, Canada and the United States of America attended the International Economic Forum for the Americas, held 9-12 June in Canada. The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is an associate sponsor of the event.

David C. Hatch, Assistant Deputy Director General of IICA, Michael Bedoya, the Institute’s Representative in Canada, and Emilie Bergeron, IICA’s technical cooperation specialist at the Office in Canada, took part in the fourteenth meeting of the Forum, also known as the Conference of Montreal.

The IICA Assistant Deputy Director General served as the moderator of a panel discussion entitled “The impact of commodity prices on agribusinesses: new strategies, new policies.”

In his presentation, Hatch explained that a series of factors had contributed to escalating food and commodity prices, including higher meat production to meet the growing demand from China and India, high oil prices, the protectionist policies implemented by major agricultural producers and the production of biofuels.

One of the panel members at the Forum, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza, urged the governments and the development banks to assist the poorest countries and find solutions to the crisis.

He said that as major agricultural producers the Latin American countries were called upon to play a leading role in the search for actions to end the crisis. However, if they were to raise production levels, obstacles like subsidies and import tariffs had to be eliminated.

In this regard, the Assistant Deputy Director General of IICA said it was important to bring the Doha Round to a satisfactory conclusion. Then it would be possible to increase agricultural production and lower barriers to trade.

He also emphasized the importance of investing in research and innovation, with a view to developing increasingly efficient technologies for agricultural and bioenergy production.

The agenda of the conference

The objective of the International Economic Forum for the Americas is to enhance knowledge of the major issues involved in economic globalization, with a particular emphasis upon the relations between the Americas and the other continents.

The theme of this year’s conference was “Mastering Change: the Great Transition.” The participants discussed the political and economic challenges facing the countries of the Americas, and the outlook for growth in the changing conditions.

On Monday, the first topic addressed was the role of the central banks and financial institutions and intellectual property. On Tuesday, the discussions focused on agrofuels, markets for agricultural products, sustainable development and natural resource management.

On Wednesday, the participants dealt with innovation, international trade, private sector competitiveness and the economic outlook for the Caribbean. The last session was devoted to the renewal of finances and infrastructures.

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IICA and IFAP continue to strengthen ties for joint work

IICA's Director of Institutional Modernization, Rafael Trejos, and Director of Policies and Trade, Julio Paz, represented the Institute at the 38th World Farmers' Congress of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP).

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) discussed further joint work in five areas, namely: science and technology, agribusiness, trade and negotiations, agricultural policies and institutional modernization and health and food safety.

The Federation's 38th World Farmer's Congress, held 30 May-6 June in Poland, provided an opportunity for the two organizations to consider new joint activities. The Institute's was represented at the event by the Director of Institutional Modernization, Rafael Trejos, and the Director of Policies and Trade, Julio Paz.

With regard to trade and negotiations, IICA reiterated its commitment to collaborating with IFAP in implementing three training workshops for farmers' leaders and technicians of farmers' organizations in the Southern, Andean and Caribbean regions.



IICA's Director of Institutional Modernization, Rafael Trejos, gave a presentation on the results of the IICA-IFAP agreement and the opportunities for work in the future.

Furthermore, based on the experience of IICA's Export Platforms Program and the use of manuals on the requirements for the United States of America and Europe, it was suggested that the two organizations collaborate in training agricultural entrepreneurs in topics related to business management and exports.

In the field of science and technology, IFAP confirmed it would be taking part in the International Meeting of FORAGRO, due to be held in Montevideo this month. The Federation will also be involved in the analysis of the findings of IICA's research project on technological innovation and small-scale agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the area of agricultural policies and institutional modernization, the officials discussed the possibility of systematizing, disseminating and sharing experiences in regard to proposed public policies and the private management of public policy. Another possible area of work is the systematization and sharing of experiences related to the strengthening of producers' organizations and integration into value chains.

Finally, the two institutions proposed facilitating farmers' access to information via the IICA network on food health and safety and trade issues.

The Institute and IFAP began working together in 2007, when they signed a cooperation agreement. IICA's Director of Institutional Modernization said, "IFAP-IICA relations are a promising partnership, because IFAP is an ideal forum obtaining feedback for the work of both organizations."

The issue of food security

During the meeting of IFAP's Regional Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean, in which the Institute also took part, the discussions focused on food prices.

Some of the causes of the current situation that were mentioned were: inefficient or uncompetitive trade or supply chains - which push up retail and wholesale prices without increasing the prices paid to farmers - and the growth of income in emerging economies, fueling the demand for food.

The participants also said the situation had been affected by the higher transportation costs of food imports, triggered by soaring oil prices, and the growing demand for agricultural products to manufacture fuels.

The situation was compounded by the fact that climate change was expected to increase the risk of poor harvests and outbreaks of animal diseases worldwide, thereby causing further instability in agricultural markets. The Final Declaration of the IFAP Congress states, "This is a major new challenge to world food security."

In this context, the participants called for new national plans for agriculture, developed with farmers' organizations, to ensure food security and secure livelihoods for producers throughout the world.

They also said that farmers need comprehensible explanations and analyses of the causes and effects of the current situation. In this regard, the collaboration agreement between IICA and IFAP was cited as an example of how farmers and intergovernmental institutions can work together to generate better understanding of the subject.

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<http://www.ifap.org/fr/CongresoMundialAgricultores.html>

Final Declaration of the IFAP Congress:

http://www.ifap.org/en/about/documents/worldfarmerscongress/IFAP_Statement_WorldFoodCrisis.pdf



IICA teaches courses on Codex Alimentarius

FAO provided support for the courses, which were targeted at representatives of the public, private and academic sectors.

On June 10, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) launched a series of regional induction and refresher courses on the process followed by Codex Alimentarius in developing new standards.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission is the most important international reference body for food quality issues.

A total of four two-day courses took place. The first course was taught on 10-11 June, for the Southern Region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay), and the second on 12-13 June, for the Andean Region (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela).

The course for the Central Region (Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, plus Dominican Republic and Mexico) was held on 16-17 June. The countries of the Caribbean Region (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, plus Belize) participated in the course on 18-19 June.

IICA's Director of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management, James French, said, "The active and continuous participation of the Latin American and Caribbean countries in the process of developing Codex standards is very important, to ensure that particular circumstances and points of view are taken into consideration."

Each course was attended by 20 participants per country, drawn from the public, private and academic sectors. Efforts were made to involve "critical individuals" willing to play an active role in the work of the Codex committees in the countries, French added.



IICA's Director of Agricultural Health and Food Safety, Ricardo Molins, and nutritionist Mary Kenny, of FAO's Food Quality and Standards Service, during the closing session of the distance courses on Codex Alimentarius webcast from IICA Headquarters.

The two-day courses took the form of webcasts from IICA's Headquarters in Costa Rica, using the facilities of the Institute's Distance Training Center (CECADI). The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), through its Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, provided support for the courses, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) contributed financial resources.

Nutritionist Mary Kenny, of FAO's Food Quality and Standards Service, and Grace Brisco, a food standards officer with FAO and the Codex Secretariat, served as the facilitators of the meeting.

Since it was founded in 1963, Codex Alimentarius has conducted scientific research and helped make the international community more aware of the relationship between food quality and safety and public health.

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Brazil holds seminar on sustainable rural development

The meeting was used to share experiences that have given rise to new regulatory frameworks for the management of rural territories.



The twelfth seminar of the Permanent Forum on Sustainable Rural Development (SRD Forum), of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), took place 24-25 June in Brazil. The theme of the event was "A legal framework for sustainable rural development."

The objective of the activity was for the 40 participants to share information about the economic, political and social processes that have given rise to new regulatory frameworks for the management of rural territories.



The participants also swapped information about proposals developed by the public agents and social actors involved in designing and implementing rural development projects with a territorial approach.

On the first day of the activity, Jesus Regidor (a professor from the Autonomous University of Madrid) and Antonio Ruiz (Undersecretary for Rural Development of Mexico's SAGARPA) explained how their countries' legal frameworks had been developed in response to economic changes (e.g., trade integration with the United States of America and Europe) and social pressures and private interests.

In both cases, the legal instruments created were underpinned by State policies adapted to the countries' new sustainable rural development needs.

1. The head table on the second day of the activity, when the participants discussed the formulation and implementation of a legal framework for sustainable rural development with a territorial approach in Brazil.

2. Forty participants attended the seminar, including specialists, representatives of governmental and social organizations, and members of the National Council on Sustainable Rural Development (Condraf).

Brazil's Secretary of Territorial Development, Humberto Oliveira, also took part in the discussion. He said that three elements had to be taken into account in designing his country's rural development policy: the system of financing for rural territories (he used the word "rural" in the broadest sense); the management of public policies in the rural milieu; and the legal framework needed to strengthen the SRD policy.

Territorial challenges

On day two, the discussions focused on the challenges involved in formulating and implementing a legal framework for sustainable rural development with a territorial approach in Brazil.

Specifically, the participants analyzed mechanisms for articulating sectoral policies that make it possible to coordinate the management, planning and sustainability of actions in rural spaces. They also focused on institutional management models, based on a decentralized structure of public sector agencies.

The panelists for the session were Pedro Eugenio Correia (a federal congressman), Ronaldo Coutinho García (Secretary for the Articulation of Institutions and Society, of the Ministry of Social Development - MDS), Maria Nazareth Wanderley and Arilson Favareto (professors from the ABC/SP Federal University) and Sonia Moraes (agricultural lawyer and Vice President of ABRA).

Based on the results of the seminar, the National Council for Sustainable Rural Development (Condraf) and the Territorial Development Secretariat (SDT) - through the SRD Forum - will be implementing a program of work on the issues addressed with a view to devising a possible legal framework for SRD in Brazil.

Carlos Miranda, executive coordinator of the SRD Forum, said a document would be produced in the coming weeks containing the presentations given during the seminar. The report will be uploaded to the websites of IICA and the SRD Forum.

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The IICA Office in Venezuela takes part in biotech forum

During the activity, held 3-5 June, Institute officials took part in working groups on different topics related to the Special Biotechnology Project.

The Office of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in Venezuela participated in the final activity of the Special Biotechnology Project, “Protecting National Sovereignty: Consolidation of the National Biotechnology Network,” which took place 3-5 June.

During the meeting, Institute officials formed part of working groups on different topics, including proteomics applied to the agricultural value chain to help achieve food security; the integrated use of the cachama species; biotech processes used in shrimping; and prospective studies to strengthen the biotech sector.

The biotechnology project, which was developed in 2004, was consolidated by creating a National Biotechnology Network. An initiative of the Ministry for Science and Technology (MPPCT), its remit is to implement research projects that will help achieve food security and transfer technology to boost the productivity of the agricultural and livestock sectors.

The different methods that the project uses to achieve its goals include the reproduction or protection of animals, plant breeding, the definition of plant diseases, soil treatment and recycling (including the recycling of waste).

A total of US\$24 million has been invested in the ministry’s initiative. So far, 21 networks have been set up in Venezuela with resources from the National Fund for Science, Technology and Innovation (FONACIT).

FONACIT has already financed 38 subprojects involving 148 pieces of research, which were presented at the forum. Many of them are already being transferred to universities, institutes affiliated with the MPPCT, cooperatives and several industries.

IICA is supporting institutions involved in biotechnology and biosafety efforts in Venezuela. It also contributes information about the costs and benefits of agricultural biotechnologies, and about regional needs in that field.

Thus, the IICA Office in Venezuela is carrying out the mandate of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA) that calls for support for hemispheric biotechnology and Biosafety programs.

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Mistreatment of animals results in lost production worth one million dollars

The information is contained in a study on the economic impact of injuries to cattle in Costa Rican slaughterhouses, carried out by the Livestock Corporation (CORFOGA).

The country's livestock sector is losing one million dollars per year on account of the mistreatment on animals such as cattle and pigs, according to experts who took part in the First National Congress on Farm Animal Welfare, which was held 11-12 June in Costa Rica.

The issue of animal welfare is becoming increasingly important for meat producers and merchants, because highly competitive markets like Europe and the United States have strict standards.

The congress was organized by the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), EARTH University, CORFOGA, the National Animal Health Service of Costa Rica (SENASA) and the Humane Society International (HSI). The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the School of Veterinary Medicine of the National University (UNA) also supported the event.



The congress on animal welfare was inaugurated by the Professor of Animal Reproduction at EARTH University, Richard Taylor; the Director General of the National Animal Health Service of Costa Rica, Yayo Vicente; and the IICA Representative in Costa Rica, Byron Miranda.

The speakers were from Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Uruguay, the United States of America and Colombia. The participants included producers, merchants, students and academics.

Marcela Vargas, Programme Manager for WSPA, said the activity was part of the efforts to create opportunities for dialogue on the benefits of improving the welfare of farm animals. Those benefits include higher productivity for companies that produce meat and its byproducts.

“Various sectors have responded to the call to improve the conditions in which farm animals are kept and handled. That motivates us to create further opportunities to exchange ideas on animal welfare,” Vargas said.

Good for animals and humans

It is estimated that 60% of injuries to cattle in Costa Rica affect the most valuable cuts of meat, such as sirloin tip roast and bottom round roast. Around half of the injuries to livestock occur during the last 20 hours before the animals are slaughtered.

Over the past twenty years, the animal welfare movement has become a powerful lobby worldwide. Members of the European Union and importers of animal products must meet strict standards and the requirements of the European countries and the United States are expected to become even tougher in the years ahead.

According to Vargas, “the change in the treatment of animals stems from the demand for certified products. Animals must be raised, transported and slaughtered with a minimum of suffering in each stage of production.”

The Regional Director of the project Improvement of the Beef Sector in Central America (ILRI-CFC), Edwin Perez, said there was a strong link between animal welfare and production. According to the expert, for various reasons - including economic ones - the industry has introduced intensive meat production systems or systems that do not use natural methods.

Even leaving aside the ethical issues involved in activities of this kind, it is clear that when animal welfare is ignored the quality and profitability of products are adversely affected.

HSI Program Manager Cynthia Dent and CORFOGA Head of Projects Julio Gonzalez said the one million dollars' worth of production lost on account of the mistreatment of animals was basically due to poor management and injuries to the animals.

The Representative of the IICA Office in Costa Rica, Byron Miranda, said, “The economic and commercial considerations alone should be enough to encourage producers to take action, although no one can deny the strength of feeling that exists on the issue.”

Scientifically tested and proven methods exist for breeding, developing, transporting and slaughtering animals properly, without causing them unnecessary pain and distress. Several organizations like the WSPA promote training for national producers and merchants.

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