

Brathwaite before the Permanent Council of the OAS

“Without food security, our democracies are not sustainable”

The Director General of IICA presented the 2008 Annual Report of IICA to the OAS in Washington.



The Director General of the Institute, Chelston Brathwaite, presented the 2008 Annual Report before the Permanent Council of the OAS

The current global socioeconomic challenges, the achievements of technical cooperation delivered by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture in 2008 and the upcoming Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas were some of the key topics aired for discussion by IICA at the meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS), in Washington, D.C.

The Director General of the Institute, Chelston Brathwaite, presented the 2008 Annual Report on March 18.

At that time, he highlighted the preparations for the Fifth Ministerial Meeting, the most important hemispheric meeting on agriculture and rural life, to be held in Jamaica from October 25 through 30. Jamaica will also host the Fifteenth Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA), the highest governing body of the Institute, which will elect a new Director General this year.

During his stay in Washington, the Director General had the opportunity to meet with the new United States Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, with whom he discussed the importance of agriculture in reducing poverty in the hemisphere and the need to invest in science and agricultural technology to achieve development.

Both agreed that food security is a global concern which, in Vilsack’s opinion, should be addressed as a matter of urgency, given the challenges posed by climate change.

Addressing the Permanent Council of the OAS

Director General Brathwaite referred to today’s global challenges during his presentation to the ambassadors of the 34 Member States. “The recent downturn in the price of food and fuels could lead us to think that the challenges we faced in 2008 are behind us”. However, he said, changes in interest rates, the prices of fuels, basic grains, speculation and climate change could again cause turbulence.

It is against this backdrop that he defended the need for a new development model, one that makes agriculture and rural concerns a strategic priority on national development agendas, given its multiple contributions to food security, job creation, environmental preservation and peace and social stability. “Our democracies are not sustainable if citizens do not have access to food”, he said.

At the end of his intervention, the ambassadors acknowledged the work of the Institute and the strategic role of agriculture and rural life. Ambassador Enrique Castillo of Costa Rica agreed with the vision of agriculture being promoted by the Institute and with the development model it furthered. On behalf of the Central American Integration System, he thanked IICA for the work it had undertaken in aid of rural life in the Americas.

The Alternate Representative of the United States to the OAS, W. Lewis Amselem, then took the floor to thank the Brathwaite administration for all it had done since 2002. With regard to the decision that the IABA will be called upon to take, he said that we were seeking strong candidates who can work on issues related to the alleviation of hunger and poverty.

Subsequently, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Ambassador of Belize, Nestor Mendez, reiterated the importance of agriculture for development and social stability in the countries. He said that agriculture could bring us more responses in coming months and that, in this regard, IICA had a critical role to play.

He also commended the Institute on the role it had played as Secretariat for the Ministerial Process in Agriculture and Rural Life. In his opinion, the Ministerial Meeting, to be held in Jamaica, would make it possible to ensure the continuity of the process of repositioning agriculture in the hemisphere, a process that had started in 2001.

Subsequently, the Ambassador of Argentina, Rodolfo Gil, said, on behalf of the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), that “the strategic role of agriculture, given current trends, confers upon IICA an important role to play in contributing to achieving the Millennium Development Goals”.

Finally, the Ambassador of Uruguay, Maria del Lujan Flores, highlighted the support her country had received in areas such as the promotion of trade and competitiveness, agricultural health and food safety, rural development, the sustainable management of natural resources and innovation and technology.

Getting down to work

In 2008, IICA was involved in 570 different activities in the hemisphere, regions and in the individual countries. It published 202 technical documents, organized 85 technical events, and prepared eight programs and 14 investment projects.

As part of its efforts to promote rural prosperity, the Institute has developed capabilities in rural development based on a territorial approach in countries like Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, Honduras and Chile.

He also highlighted the work accomplished in increasing the competitiveness of producers in Panama, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Paraguay and Ecuador. Support has also been provided to entrepreneurs in Ecuador, Central America, Mexico, Colombia and Peru to help them more effectively place their products on new markets.

In the area of agricultural health and food safety (AHFS), efforts have focused on improving the performance of national services and on compliance with international sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

The Institute has also stepped up dialogue at the hemispheric level, promoted research and national and regional policy design in an effort to promote technology and innovation in agriculture.

The Director General of IICA also made reference to the innovative Center for Leadership in Agriculture whose responsibility is to form leaders, especially young leaders with a global vision so as to reposition agriculture in the hemisphere and meet the challenges of the 21st century.

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IICA discusses the challenges of food security in the Americas during visit with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

IICA's Director General invited the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to attend the Fifth Ministerial Meeting, "Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas."



IICA's Director General, Chelston Brathwaite, and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack

In discussions today with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, Chelston Brathwaite, Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) discussed a wide range of hemispheric agriculture issues.

During the first gathering between the two leaders, Brathwaite emphasized that the current food crisis can be overcome. He said, "We see the need for research, extension and teaching. This powerful combination is critical to developing the agriculture sector. And without agriculture we cannot overcome poverty."

Both, Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack and IICA's Director General Brathwaite, shared the common belief that food security is a global concern and organizations, such as IICA, play an important role in this hemisphere. There is a need to inspire creative and innovative approaches to help ensure that farmers find ways to 'stay in business.'

They both agree that there is a need to continue to invest in science, in research and in development. According to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, CGIAR, funding for international agricultural research has not increased in real terms since 1976.

In fact, despite the significant and growing need for agriculture investment and development, it has been reported that official development assistance to agriculture declined by about 66% in real dollar terms between 1985 and 2002.

According to Vilsack, the challenges of climate change intensify the need to address food security. Estimates of the total number of people living in hunger are more than 900 million. The World Food Programme identifies 923 million people as food insecure. In a preliminary report published by FAO on the Outlook of Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in 2008, it is expected that by 2015 there will be close to 41 million undernourished people in the region, despite the goal of an equivalent 30 million set at the World Food Summit.

During the meeting, IICA's Director General Brathwaite invited Secretary Vilsack to join the Agriculture Ministers of the Hemisphere to attend the Fifth Ministerial Meeting, "Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas" in the context of the Summit of the Americas Process and the Fifteenth Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture this October in Jamaica. The Ministerial meeting will be focusing on the theme, "*Building Capacity for Enhancing Food Security and Rural Life in the Americas.*"

IICA's Director General was in Washington, D.C. this week to present the Institute's 2008 Annual Report on Contributions to Agriculture and Rural Life in the Hemisphere. The presentation was directed at Members of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS). Brathwaite also met with the U.S. Department of State, the Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the OAS and the Permanent Mission of Barbados to the OAS.

In continued efforts to underscore the importance of agriculture and improve rural life in the Americas, IICA has focused its efforts on strengthening rural communities by contributing new technologies and innovation, promoting agri-business, agricultural health and food safety and management of natural resources.

Through the Institute's involvement as an Institutional partner in the Summit of the Americas Process and as a result of different proposals from several countries, food security has been included by the 34 Member States of the OAS in the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain.

In response to mandates issues at the 2007 Hemispheric Meeting in Guatemala, IICA will continue working to ensure that agriculture is being considered a key issue for national, regional and hemispheric development.

More information

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Costa Rica hosts world meeting on Biosafety Capacity Building

More than 50 representatives of governments and organizations worldwide participate in meeting.



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Government representatives from 20 nations worldwide, representatives of cooperation agencies, NGOs and the business sector have come together at the Headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) to evaluate and define criteria for biosafety capacity building in connection with genetically modified organisms (GMO).

From March 9 through 13, they will discuss strategies and experiences that will make it possible to integrate biosafety into plans and programs to promote sustainable development in the countries.

Two meetings will be held at the event: the “Fifth Coordination Meeting for Governments and Organizations Implementing or Funding Biosafety Activities” and the “Sixth Meeting of the Liaison Group on Capacity Building for Biosafety”.

Biosafety is a new and growing area of endeavor that analyzes matters related to safety in biotechnology.

The inaugural ceremony was chaired by the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Livestock of Costa Rica, Carlos Villalobos; the Director General of IICA, Chelston Brathwaite; the Director of the Phytosanitary Service of Costa Rica, Ana Gabriela Zuñiga; and the Program Officer of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Eric Tamale.

Brathwaite feels that traditional technologies will not be enough to ensure the volume of food needed for a growing world population. He said that global agriculture must feed a growing population which is estimated to reach 8 billion by 2020. Approximately 6.7 billion of this population will be living in the developing countries.

The crisis of food availability for human and animal consumption and for processing is expected to become so acute that in a short while, the capacity of available arable land will be saturated.

Given this panorama, the Director General of IICA feels that agro-biotechnology can be a highly useful tool in increasing agricultural productivity, ensuring food availability and meeting estimated demand in the near future.

Villalobos said: “this meeting provides an opportunity for the developing countries”. He added: “modern biotechnology holds the promise of contributing to human well-being as long as it is developed and used with the appropriate safeguards to protect biological diversity and human health”.

These meetings, which are held each year, are intended to seek successful ways of implementing the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Last year, they were held in New Delhi, India, and produced “A Guidance Framework for Promoting Synergies and Complementarities between Biosafety Capacity-building Initiatives at the Country Level” and “Guidelines for Facilitating Regional and Subregional Initiatives and Approaches to Capacity building in Biosafety”.

The meetings were attended by government representatives from India, Cambodia, Holland, Norway, Germany, Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, Zambia, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Canada, United States and Costa Rica, among other countries.

This year, the Government of Costa Rica is hosting these meetings. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Costa Rica (MAG), through the State Phytosanitary Service, and IICA are coordinating the event. The office of the Executive Secretary for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which comes under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is responsible for organizing and sponsoring the event.

The Institute serves as the venue for the activity and participates in the analyses and evaluations. In fact, IICA is coordinating efforts in the Americas through its Hemispheric Biotechnology and Biosafety Program in an effort to foster dialogue among countries and improve the implementation of related international agreements.

Participants also include representatives of agencies and bodies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Global Environment Fund (GEF), the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity, the International Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), the Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad de Costa Rica (INBio) and the Global Industry Coalition, etc.

The Convention on Biological Diversity is the first international agreement to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. To date, it has been ratified by 191 countries. It was signed in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the “Earth Summit”.

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Brazil to reinforce agricultural research unit in Haiti

Efforts will focus on the Experimental Office of the Ministry of Agriculture.



The IICA Representative in Brazil, Carlos Basco, and the Director of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, Marco Farani.
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The objective of an agreement signed by the Office of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in Brazil and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) is to strengthen rural extension services and agricultural research in Haiti.

The document, entitled “Complementary Addendum to the Basic Agreement for Technical and Scientific Cooperation between the Governments of Brazil and Haiti for the Implementation of the 2008-2010 Strategic Program in the Areas of Food Security and Agriculture,” was signed on February 5 by the Director of the ABC, Marco Farani, and the IICA Representative in Brazil, Carlos Basco.

Its objective is to provide the Experimental Office of the Ministry of Agriculture with the support it needs to again play a strategic role as a rural extension and agricultural research unit.

“The challenge is to lay the foundation for Haiti to incorporate new varieties, crops, methods of organization, production practices and technology that have been adapted to meet the needs of the country,” said Basco.

On March 10, a Brazilian delegation visited Haiti to identify the actions to be taken to achieve this objective. The Brazilian government and the IICA Offices in Haiti and Brazil will determine how the cooperation resources are to be allocated.

Basco noted that “Food insecurity is a constant in Haiti,” the poorest country in the hemisphere; hence, the importance of finding ways to increase agricultural productivity and production.

This agreement is one more effort to promote South-South technical cooperation, which both institutions implement jointly with countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in the areas of agriculture, food security and nutrition.

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Sustainable cocoa production discussed

Trinidad and Tobago was the site of an international meeting on the sustainable development of cocoa production.

The Second Roundtable Meeting for a Sustainable Cocoa Economy (RSCE2), held in Trinidad and Tobago on March 24-26, was promoted by the Office of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Marine Resources of that country.

The objective of the RSCE is to foster dialogue among the different parties interested in this economic sector and to exchange information on best practices in areas that range from pest control to the management of value-added chains and certification systems.

The first roundtable meeting, held in Accra, Ghana, in October 2007, was attended by 200 people from 25 countries. On that occasion, discussions focused on drafting a set of principles for sustainable cocoa economy.

The RSECE2 brought together cocoa growers, merchants, exporters and processors and representatives of governmental and nongovernmental organizations and financial and donor institutions.

Following up on the Accra agenda, agreed upon at the 2007 meeting, participants analyzed the three pillars needed for the sustainable development of cocoa production: the environment, economy and society.

Papers were presented and group and plenary working sessions were held to discuss initiatives that will promote the sustainability of this crop, the development of standards and the implementation of best practices in cocoa production chains, taking into consideration the special needs of the operators of small-scale agribusinesses.

Participants also addressed the topic of traceability, identified ways to trace and monitor the cocoa chain, from production to processing and consumption, and discussed the importance of certification.

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RSCE website: <http://www.roundtablecocoa.org>



Trinidad and Tobago one step further in linking agriculture and tourism for economic benefits

IICA and OAS convened a final workshop under the OAS-funded project “Strengthening of the Tourism Sector through Development of Linkages with the Agricultural Sector in the Caribbean.”



The workshop was very well attended by over 40 persons from private and public entities

Trinidad and Tobago is one step further in the quest to develop an industry out of the linkages that can be forged between agriculture and tourism.

The Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) convened a final workshop under the OAS-funded project “Strengthening of the Tourism Sector through Development of Linkages with the Agricultural Sector in the Caribbean”.

The 3-year project, which comes to an end in March 2009, was implemented by IICA in seven countries of the region, viz. Barbados, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

The overall objective of the project was to ‘Promote increased linkages between tourism and agriculture that will create economic opportunities, build resilience in rural communities and enhance the sustainable development of both the tourism and agriculture industries’.

The workshop was very well attended by over 40 persons from private and public entities who are either integrally involved in or with an interest in agro-tourism ventures, in both Trinidad and Tobago.

Presentations made at the workshop addressed some of the project outcomes that were considered successful, such as the “farm to table” initiatives, focusing on inter-relationships between producers and hotels and the exercise of engaging a rural community in agro-tourism.

Maurice Fahey, Managing Director of Food and Beverage at the Hyatt Regency Trinidad was on hand to speak about the Hyatt’s “inter-relationship” with Lopinot agri-entrepreneur Arthur Guerrero, who supplies the hotel with products from his farm on a regular basis.

Fahey admitted that the Hyatt has benefitted from this intervention as guests are impressed with the quality of the fresh produce and also as it feeds directly into the hotel’s community-based and “buy local” policy. He also expressed the desire to see other hoteliers taking this approach on board.

IICA’s Regional Specialist in Agribusiness, Robert Reid, advised that the successes of the Hyatt-Guerrero relationship need to be examined and promoted and ways sought in which to foster other similar trading relationships with other hotels and small business agri-enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago.

A special presentation was made by the community group from Matura, which under the project benefited from going through a process of community engagement and the development of a strategy which would guide them towards establishing a community agro-tourism enterprise.

Roxanne Waithe, IICA’s Agro-Tourism Specialist who is based in Barbados, clearly defined agro-tourism to the participants as “any activity, enterprise or business that links agriculture with products, services and experiences in tourism” and presented highlights of agro-tourism ventures being pursued in other countries of the Caribbean: a sample of what is already working in these countries and reaping benefits for both sector and practitioner.

The inclusion of Agro-Tourism in the ‘Transformation Plan of the Agriculture Sector’ of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (MALMR) was noted during the workshop. Chief Technical Officer in the Ministry, Patrick Cambridge, added that the Ministry embraces the concepts of agro-tourism and agri-entertainment and will support developments in these areas.

The workshop concluded with a session on the way forward. The next best step agreed to, was the convening of a Task Force made up of private sector and community practitioners to drive the process forward and provide the necessary interface with the public sector and support institutions.

It is envisaged that this will lead to the establishment of an eventual agro-tourism industry association that would be self-financing. IICA, through its Representative in Trinidad and Tobago, Gregg C.E. Rawlins, has agreed to coordinate the initial meetings of the Task Force.

He will continue to strengthen its contributions through the agro-tourism programme of the IICA Office in Trinidad and Tobago, backed by the specialized agro-tourism unit in the IICA Office in Barbados. The OAS and the Inter-American Development Bank, whose representatives were both present at the workshop, have also pledged their support to work with IICA in this area.

Riyad Insanally, OAS Representative in Trinidad and Tobago expressed his Organization's satisfaction with the work done under the project and added that he believed that the exchange of views among stakeholders at the workshop would give a good sense of the way forward.

"I am sure that you will agree that these have been hugely useful contributions to the development of agro-tourism in Trinidad and Tobago, the potential of which is yet to be fully realised," he said.

More information

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Agro-ecotourism and good agricultural practices: two new on-line courses

Both courses are being developed in collaboration with the Distance Training Center (CECADI) of IICA.

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is organizing an on-line course on agro-ecotourism and another on good agricultural practices, through its Distance Training Center (CECADI).

The course on good agricultural practices, to be held from March 17 to May 9 of 2007, is intended to provide scientific and practical information related to the safe production, handling, storage and transportation of fresh agricultural produce.

The IICA Office in Uruguay and CECADI have been working together to organize the course, which will be taught on line using the E-VIDA (Interactive Virtual Learning Environment for Agriculture) platform.

In the course, participants will be able to exchange points of view, consult with instructors, access course materials and see evaluations. Even though participants must comply with the schedule established for each week, the course methodology will allow each student to use his/her time for reading, interaction with other participants and work.

Six modules will be taught:

- Importance of training in improving the safety and quality of fresh fruits and vegetables
- Good agricultural practices
- Good practices in handling, packing, storing and transporting fresh produce
- Quality assurance and food security
- Food-related laws and regulations
- Training and preparation of workers

This course is aimed at farmers, exporters, specialists, scholars, professionals, operators of vegetable/fruit companies and officials of agencies that regulate agricultural exports and imports who are involved in ensuring quality control, agricultural health and food safety from the field to the table.

Agro-ecotourism: second edition

The virtual course on agro-ecotourism, to be held from May 5 to August 11, is organized by CECADI and the Department of Human Development of the Organization of American States (OAS).

The first course on this topic was held in 2008, with 96 participants from 21 countries of the Americas.

The course, which is both theoretical and practical, will focus on rural tourism and on the planning, coordination and implementation of agro-ecotourism projects, as a source of additional income in small- farmer settlements and to expand the types of activities offered by the national tourism sector.

The course, to be taught on line through the Virtual Classroom of the Educational Portal of the Americas, requires a commitment of at least 12 hours weekly on the part of participants. It is aimed at owners of small- and medium-size farms, specialists and others interested in the topic of agro-ecotourism.

The cost of the course is US\$470. Financial aid totaling US\$220 is available from the GS/OAS and IICA, and registration will be open through March 31.

For further information on the course on good agricultural practices

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For further information on the course on agro-ecotourism

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IICA launches “Central American Territories” portal

Web site is supported by several international agencies, governmental institutions and civil society organizations.

In December 2008, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) launched the “Central American Territories: Communities for Rural Action” Web portal.

The objective of the site is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information and promote joint action among institutions, organizations and people involved in the development of rural territories in the seven countries of Central America.

Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Belize, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama contribute to the site, which hosts pages organized by subject matter and managed by groups and institutions interested in specific topics.

The pages operate as communities of practice. IICA supplies the technological platform and provides other support through its Offices in the countries.



The objective of the site www.territorioscentroamericanos.org is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information.

The following communities are currently on line:

- Experiences in territorial rural development
- Institutions and rural development
- Ecoagriculture in Mesoamerica
- Family agroindustry
- Agrotourism in Mesoamerica
- Network of studies and rural alternatives (REDESAR)

The resources shared on the portals include, depending on the stage of development of each, spaces for discussion and communication, information on events and activities, as well as the storage of conceptual documents, tools, methodologies, systematized experiences, work materials, etc.

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Agreement will strengthen agricultural innovation and technology in Central America

The Central American Agricultural Technology Integration System, IICA and CATIE signed a new Technical and Administrative Cooperation Agreement.



The heads of the research centers in Central America participated in the SICTA meeting.

The Central American Agricultural Technology Integration System (SICTA), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) signed an agreement on March 12 at IICA Headquarters to strengthen their joint technical cooperation actions.

The agreement, which will be in force between 2009 and 2012, is aimed at promoting technological change in the agriculture and forestry sector in Central America, with a view to making it more efficient and modern.

According to President of SICTA, Max Myrol Gonzalez, in this effort, it is essential that the technology innovation systems of the countries complement one another. SICTA, created by the Central American Agricultural Council (CAC), is the regional body that coordinates the agricultural research agendas of the seven countries of Central America.

Its strategic partners are IICA, which supports the operation of the national technology innovation systems and serves as the SICTA Executive Secretariat, and CATIE, which provides training for professionals and researchers.

This strategic partnership was created in the first technical and administrative cooperation agreement they signed in 2003, which remained in effect until 2008.

“By signing this second agreement, the countries wish to form national agricultural technology systems. That will require the integration of the different institutions that engage in innovation, transfer and extension activities. The consolidation of these systems will later be reflected in the SICTA,” Gonzalez said.

The Minister of Agriculture of Costa Rica, Javier Flores, who participated in the event, underscored the urgency of “strengthening the ties that link our institutions because, unless we strengthen our institutions we will not be able to bring technologies, and the opportunities they provide, to farmers.”

For his part, the Director General of IICA, Chelston W.D. Brathwaite, who was also present at the signing, stated “The strategy of promoting interinstitutional partnerships creates opportunities for meeting the needs of the participants in agrifood chains.”

A similar opinion was expressed by the Director General of CATIE, Jose Joaquin Campos, who warned that “To be able to innovate and meet the challenges of today, an efficient scientific and technological platform is required. At CATIE, we believe strongly in partnerships and in integration, and we want to support the process of regional integration in the area of agricultural technology.”

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