

Visit to IICA Headquarters in Costa Rica

Minister of Agriculture of Haiti is committed to the expanded vision of agriculture

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The Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development of Haiti, Joanas Gué, visited Costa Rica from 5-7 May to take part in the Forum for Leaders organized by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

During his stay, the minister called for more investment in his country's agricultural and rural sector.

Minister Gué said the expanded vision of agriculture championed by IICA was consistent with that of his country's Ministry of Agriculture. "Now what we need is a strategy that will make it possible to increase investment in the sector."

The minister was accompanied by the Deputy Director of the International Cooperation Division, Colette Blanchet, the Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Planning, Laurence Charleston Elisée, the IICA Representative in Haiti, Alfredo Mena, and the Representative's assistant, Emmanuela Charles. The Haitian delegation took part in the Forum for Leaders in Agriculture that IICA organized especially for them, through its Center for Leadership.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss both the global challenges and those facing Haitian agriculture, as well as actions that IICA could undertake to tackle them.

At the beginning of the discussions, IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite explained why agriculture should be given a strategic role within the countries' development agendas and recommended certain strategies for repositioning the sector and thus increasing the funds invested in it.

Getting down to work

During his presentation to a group of senior IICA officials, Minister Gué described the priority actions being undertaken in his country, where 60% of the population lives in rural areas and agriculture accounts for 51% of employment.

The ministry's objectives are currently to contribute to the sustainable development of the country, diversify sources of income in the rural milieu to improve the distribution of wealth and ensure that agriculture is seen as a profitable business activity.

Another priority action is the strengthening of food security, aimed at increasing food supplies and access to them. To achieve that, the goal is to increase agricultural production and the consumption of local products.

Other issues on which the minister is focusing are the generation of bioenergy, efforts to encourage young people to participate in the sector, agrotourism, the implementation of an agricultural insurance system and greater integration of the country into the region. The minister said he looked forward to receiving support from the Institute, as he had in regard to other initiatives.

At the end of the discussions, Minister Gué expressed interest in “strengthening the synergies that already exist with IICA in relation to the topics we have been discussing, so that the next time we come to Headquarters, we talk about the results obtained by implementing these initiatives.”

Field work



During the visit to EARTH University, the Haitian delegation learned about the organic pineapple production project.



At “La Esperanza” organic farm, Anselmo Rodríguez, the owner explained how they produce bio-fertilizers.

As a part of the Forum, on 6-7 May the Haitian delegation participated in two field trips organized by IICA to EARTH University and an organic farm.

At EARTH, the Haitian delegation learned about the university’s philosophy, programs and research, and its academic model. Minister Gué also had the opportunity to talk with Haitian students, and visit the organic pineapple and banana production project and the vegetable harvesting center, where alternative production systems are used for small-scale agriculture.

At “La Esperanza” organic farm on 7 May, the visitors learned about the systems used to produce vegetables, bioenergy and bio-fertilizers and raise cattle, goats and pigs.

Minister Gué was very impressed by what he observed and learned. “In general, the visit was extremely useful. We learned many lessons that we can apply to improve Haiti’s farming system,” he said.

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Following the outbreak of A(H1N1), IICA calls for veterinary services to be strengthened

The Institute will promote dialogue aimed at coordinating more closely the work of the health, agricultural and trade sectors.



The section of the website on A(H1N1) Influenza.

Following the outbreak of the human influenza A virus, the General Directorate of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) instructed all its Offices in the hemisphere to support the efforts of the Institute's Member States to deal with the public health emergency.

Although a human health problem is involved, in its capacity as an organization specializing in agriculture IICA recognizes the importance of continuing to implement the measures that help prevent transboundary diseases and, in particular, of keeping up the efforts to strengthen government veterinary services.

IICA's Area of Agricultural Health and Food Safety (AHFS) will therefore continue assisting the Member States in improving their biosafety systems and establishing good livestock practices. According to the document "[IICA in the face of the influenza outbreak](#)," the latter are "the best means to prevent and manage any disease or health emergency."

Indeed, thanks to the efforts carried out in recent years to prevent transboundary diseases such as bird flu, the countries are now better equipped to cope with the situation.

IICA will seek to promote dialogue in the hemisphere through its Offices in the countries and the directorates of regional operations, and will continue to participate in the various interagency forums, to foster actions that coordinate as closely as possible the work of the health, agricultural and trade sectors.

"We shall offer to collaborate with the health sector institutions and authorities that are handling the emergency, and coordinate our support with technical cooperation agencies specializing in the subject, according to the guidelines of our Medium Term Plan and the financial, human and technical resources at our disposal," the aforementioned document states.

IICA recommends raising awareness among consumers regarding the safety of pork and striking an appropriate balance between sanitary status, public health and trade facilitation.

To that end, the countries must base their decisions and actions on the international provisions established by standard-setting bodies such as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

On the Web

As part of its efforts to help contain the outbreak, IICA has created a [section on its website](#) containing information about the Institute's position on the emergency, the impact of A(H1N1) influenza on the agricultural sector and the position of the pork industry.

The Web page also provides details of basic prevention measures, instruments for strengthening veterinary services and answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ) with regard to A(H1N1) influenza.

The section also contains press releases and useful links.

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Inter-agency collaboration is key in strengthening T&T's agriculture

The results of IICA's technical cooperation interventions in Trinidad and Tobago in 2008 were presented during the Annual Accountability Seminar.

Port of Spain, Trinidad, April, 2009 (IICA). Several agencies within the agriculture sector in Trinidad and Tobago recently gathered to attend the Annual Accountability Seminar of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and to discuss effective ways in which collaboration among agencies can drive the development of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago.

A general spirit of cooperation and commitment to working together in support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and for the development of agriculture and rural life in Trinidad and Tobago pervaded the meeting, signaling a feeling of "now is the time".

The Seminar, presented the results of IICA's technical cooperation interventions in Trinidad and Tobago in 2008 and the planned areas of work for the period 2009-2010, highlighting the relevance of these actions to IICA's hemispheric and regional mandates as well as to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago's Vision 2020 and the New Transformation Plan for the Agriculture Sector.

An open discussion session among the agencies and other stakeholders focused on inter-agency collaboration in support of the development of the agriculture sector in Trinidad and Tobago, touching on a range of policy and technical issues, including inter alia, the importance of working together to increase the involvement of students at all levels: tertiary, secondary and primary in agriculture activities of the agencies.

Florita Kentish, FAO Representative Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana and Suriname noted the importance of including students as a means for ensuring the sustainability of agriculture and stressed that agencies must collaborate even further to seek funding to support initiatives in that area.

Agencies also identified a few areas in which collaborative efforts can begin with IICA immediately, particularly in the areas of agribusiness value chains and the development of cost of production models for determining farm profitability and for farm planning.

In his opening remarks, Gregg C.E. Rawlins, IICA Representative in Trinidad and Tobago reiterated "we are convinced that it is only through effective collaboration and strategic partnerships that we will be successful in tackling the challenges facing agriculture and exploit the potential which exists for increased production and marketing of primary and value-added agri-food products."

The need for collaboration was echoed by Patrick Cambridge, Chief Technical Officer in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (MALMR) who expressed his satisfaction at the fact that the agencies have decided to work together in order to move the sector forward, adding that the deliberation is very timely, as it relates to supporting the Transformation Plan of the Ministry.

In their quest to drive the sector forward, the agencies have committed to meeting on a quarterly basis to share information, address issues and arrive at concrete and tangible ways in which they can work together for the benefit of the sector, lessen duplication of efforts and coordinate the use of resources. The general agreement was that the process should be led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

Quite notably, agriculture is one of the more unique sectors in Trinidad and Tobago that has the benefit of the support and commitment of many national, regional and international agencies as well as universities that are based here in Trinidad and Tobago.

All are adequately poised to support the Ministry and other agri-stakeholders at all levels in the national efforts to reposition the sector to one with a greater agribusiness focus. The agricultural sector is indeed a resilient sector, which in tough times is capable of contributing to employment generation and incomes in rural communities, savings in foreign exchange and national food security.

“We fully endorse the Ministry’s renewed vision of a business approach to agriculture and are committed to supporting that vision,” affirmed Rawlins. This would have been the general consensus of the other key agencies participating in the seminar, which included: the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB), the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), the University of the West Indies (UWI), Faculty of Science and Agriculture and members of the Planning and Extension Divisions of the MALMR.

More information

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International organizations join forces to promote rural development with a territorial approach

The Interagency Group on Rural Development, of which IICA is a member, will discuss policies, programs, the institutional framework and challenges facing territorial rural development in the hemisphere.

Realizing that the global crisis has created an opportunity to reassess the importance of the role played by rural areas, nine international agencies have agreed to redouble their efforts to promote rural development with a territorial approach in the Americas, a field in which the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) has done groundbreaking work.

The agencies that took the decision are all members of the Interagency Group on Rural Development (IAGRD). IICA operates the Group’s Technical Secretariat and the other members include the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

At a meeting in Chile on 17 April, senior officials of these agencies presented their different visions of territorial rural development, explained their priorities with respect to the issue, identified opportunities for interagency collaboration and agreed on actions as part of a shared agenda.

IICA’s Director of Sustainable Rural Development, Carlos Jara, described the results of the meeting as “unprecedented,” not only because the institutions reaffirmed their support for the Interagency Group but also because their efforts will be geared toward achieving rural development “using the territorial approach, on which IICA has been focusing for some time,” he said.

The actions agreed by the Group include further joint initiatives in relation to the areas in which they share an interest. There was also consensus on the need to further develop instruments, increase knowledge of the subject and influence territorial rural development policies in the countries.

Furthermore, the organizations decided to conduct an analysis of the status of territorial rural development in the region by compiling data on policies, programs, the institutional framework and challenges facing the hemisphere.

The analysis will be carried out with the participation of the countries and the offices of the different agencies, and presented during the Week of Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas. Due to be held in Jamaica in October, the event will include the Fifteenth Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA) and the Fifth Hemispheric Ministerial Meeting “Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas.”

“We want the countries and the ministries of agriculture to see that the international development agencies are all on the same page, that we will begin to share information more frequently and seek synergies and complementarities,” explained Jara.

The final decision taken at the meeting of the IAGRD was that, with support from the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP), the group would prepare a proposed strategic project for securing financing for the action plan and seek new partners with whom to promote territorial rural development in the countries.

The IAGRD meeting was preceded by the International Seminar “The Agricultural and Rural Institutional Framework,” held 15-16 April in Chile, where regional experts were joined by the Minister of Agrarian Development of Brazil, Guilherme Cassel, and the Under Secretary for Rural, Marine and Natural Environment of Spain, Santiago Menendez.

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Biotech crops contribute to food security and food production at lower prices

The report on the global status of commercialized biotech/GM crops in 2008 was made public in Costa Rica.

The most recent report from the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) maintains that biotech crops are very important for worldwide food security and that they produce more affordable food.

The global study entitled “Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops in 2008”, written by Clive James, Chairman of the ISAAA Board of Directors, was made public on May 14 in Costa Rica.



During the presentation of the ISAAA report, from left to the right, the Director of Policy and Trade, Antonio Donizeti, the Specialist of Biotechnology, Xinia Quirós, and the Director of Biotechnology and Biosafety, Ramón Lastra.

The findings of that study were reported to decision makers from the public and private sectors and academia from Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic at the Distance Training Center (CECADI) at the Headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

The ISAAA report notes that of the US\$ 44 billion in economic benefits obtained from agrobiotechnology between 1996 and 2007, 44 percent was generated by increased yield and 56 per cent was attributable to lower production costs.

En 2007, the total increase in the production of the four main biotech crops (soybean, corn, cotton and canola) was 32 million metric tons, which would have required 10 million additional hectares, had transgenic crops not been used. Between 1996 and 2007, there was a 141 million ton increase in production (according to average 2007 yields), which would have required 43 million additional hectares, had these crops not been used.

According to IICA’s Director of Policy and Trade, Antonio Donizeti, “biotechnology plays a fundamental role in increasing productivity and trade without increasing hectares for cultivation or harming the environment. Given estimates that point to a world population increase from 6 billion to 9 billion people by 2050, we need to introduce agrobiotechnology, because we will require twice as much food as we consume today”.

Rice—a basic staple for the world’s poor – offers a unique opportunity, according to the report, to increase supply and therefore produce cheaper food with biotech rice, and produce more nutritious food: golden rice rich in pro-vitamin A. Transgenic rice –pending approval in China– has enormous potential as a factor in securing food supply and reducing poverty, according to the study.

Ramon Lastra, IICA’s Acting Director of Biotechnology and Biosafety, said that “access to scientifically verifiable information is particularly important for the countries to be able to analyze and base their decisions as to what action to take in the matter. At IICA, we promote the circulation of information and analysis to better serve the countries of the Americas”.

Contribution to the fight against poverty and hunger

The ISAAA study holds that increasing the income of small-scale farmers is one way of contributing directly to alleviating the needs of approximately 70 percent of the poorest inhabitants of the planet. Fifty percent of the world’s poor are small-scale farmers and another 20 per cent are landless farmers who depend exclusively on agriculture for their livelihood.

In 2008, the number of biotech farmers increased by 1.3 million, reaching 13.3 million in 25 countries worldwide. Ninety per cent, that is to say, 12.3 million of these biotech farmers, were poor small-scale farmers in the developing countries.

In Latin America, the countries that produce transgenic crops, classified by number of hectares, are Argentina (21 million ha), Brazil (15.8 million ha), Paraguay (2.7 million ha), Uruguay (0.7 million ha), Bolivia (0.6 million ha), Mexico (0.1 million ha), Chile (0.05 million ha), Colombia (0.05 million ha) and Honduras (0.05 million ha).

It should be noted that Bolivia was the ninth country in Latin America to adopt biotech crops and the third country, after Burkina and Egypt, to opt for agrobiotechnology in 2008. Bolivia is the world’s eighth largest producer of soybean and has ceased to be at a disadvantage in relation to its neighboring countries, Brazil and Paraguay, which have benefited from herbicide tolerant soybean for many years.

In short, the report underscores benefits from agrobiotechnology for conserving biodiversity, reducing the ecological footprints of agriculture, contributing to the fight against climate change and greenhouse gas emissions and improving the profitable and sustainable production of biofuels. The experts contend that all of these reasons make it necessary to come up with new, modern regulatory frameworks.

Internal and External Regulatory Frameworks

“The countries of the Americas are facing the challenge of achieving the competitive and sustainable development of agriculture and agribusiness that is compatible with the appropriate management of natural resources and the alleviation of hunger and rural poverty,” Lastra said.

In pursuance of that objective, IICA promotes discussion among countries and coordinates efforts in the Americas, through its Hemispheric Biotechnology and Biosafety Program, to improve the implementation of related international agreements and to provide scientific and verifiable information to Member States.

According to Donizeti, “many developing countries have highly complicated regulatory frameworks that virtually prevent the approval of biotechnological products. Many of these regulatory frameworks do not incorporate all of the scientific knowledge and experience gained over the last 13 years of regulatory activity”.

“Due to the complexity of the regulatory framework, many of the producers in our countries experience difficulty accessing new technologies, which is prejudicial for producers and consumers”, he concluded.

For further information

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New Press Room on IICA's Web portal

It includes a section on the upcoming Week of Agriculture and Rural Life.



The new design is intended to allow users to make optimum use of IICA's different communication products.

The website of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) (www.iica.int) has a new "[Press Room](#)" section. The innovations include better access to details of the Institute's activities and hemispheric agriculture, while it is also easier to share and update information.

The appearance was redesigned to permit users to make optimum use of the different communication products, such as the [IICA Connection](#) e-bulletin, the [Infoletter](#), the [AgroEnlace](#) radio program and the [COMUNIICA](#) technical magazine.

The Press Room now includes a section that will keep users abreast of the latest developments with regard to the Week of Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas, which will be taking place in Jamaica next October.