

Preparations are under way for the most important meeting on agriculture in the Americas

The annual meeting of IICA's Executive Committee will be a forerunner of the Week of Agriculture and Rural Life of the Americas, to be held in Jamaica in October.



The Executive Committee is one of IICA's governing bodies; it holds a regular meeting each year.

Delegations from more than 16 States will come together on July 14-16 to participate in the annual meeting of the Executive Committee of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), in preparation for the most important meeting for agriculture and rural life in the Americas, to be held in Jamaica in October.

The Committee, one of the Institute's governing bodies, will comprise representatives of 12 of its Member States: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the United States of America. Other Member States and Permanent Observers are also expected to attend.

Key items on the agenda

The Director General of IICA, Chelston Brathwaite, will present a report on the most important accomplishment of his administration. Brathwaite, from Barbados, was elected to the post of Director General in 2002, and re-elected for a second term that will end in 2010.

In Jamaica, the IABA will elect the new Director General for 2010-2014. The three candidates for the post (Hector Hernandez, from Honduras; Mariano Olazabal, from Peru; and Victor Villalobos, from Mexico) will present their visions for the future of the Institute to the Executive Committee.

The meeting of the Executive Committee will help move forward with preparations for the "Week of Agriculture and Rural Life of the Americas" (Jamaica 2009), which will provide the backdrop for the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life in the context of the Summit of the Americas process and the Fifteenth Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA), the highest governing body of the Institute.

During the Week, the motto of which is "Building Capacity for Enhancing Food Security and Rural Life in the Americas," the ministers must promote the implementation of the agreements reached at the Fifth Summit related to improving food security in our countries, and which are a clear and strong mandate for the Fifth Ministerial Meeting.

The Executive Committee will discuss topics of great importance for the life and future of IICA, such as: (i) the definition of a Strategic Framework for the work of the Institute in the medium term; (ii) the upgrading of technical expertise at the Institute in order to strengthen and expand cooperation to the Member States; and (iii) the current financial situation of the Institute and the proposed Program Budget for 2010-2011.

The Executive Committee will also take cognizance of a report on the IICA strategy for addressing the issue of food security, which was requested in a resolution approved by the Committee last year. At the time, IICA was instructed to provide its Member States with support, advice and technical cooperation in the area of food security.

They will also receive the report of the external auditors, and reports on progress in joint IICA-IDB efforts and the actions undertaken with CATIE.

More information

Fernando.Del.Risco@iica.int



Director General calls for agricultural reform in the Caribbean

He stated that agriculture and rural life must be given priority in the development agendas.



Chief Agricultural Officer, Barton Clarke, and IICA Director General, Chelston Brathwaite.

The need to consolidate agriculture as a priority on the Caribbean development agendas was the message that the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Chelston Brathwaite, presented during a visit that he made to Barbados from July 5 through 10.

Brathwaite was one of the 52 speakers that took part of the official opening of the four day 2009 Barbados National Agricultural Conference/ XXVIII West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference, held from July 6 through 9, to discuss about food security, investment flows and agricultural development.

Brathwaite, a citizen from Barbados, spoke about the challenges that the sector is facing and stated that agriculture and rural life must be given priority in the development agendas.

“Agriculture must be valued for what it is, the bedrock of society and the cornerstone of any economy due to its key role in the provision of employment, energy security, the supply of water, the preservation of the environment, and the provision of social peace and social stability”, said to the Barbadian press.

The Director General stated that the current global economic crisis underscores the urgency of meeting the most basic of human needs: putting food on the table. “If agricultural development and food security are not items high on our agenda, we commit this generation and generations to come to a state of food dependence and continued impotence in the face of a serious global threat of rapidly increasing food prices,” he asserted.

Meanwhile Agriculture Minister of Barbados, Senator Haynesley Benn, said that his Ministry “recognizes the importance of food security, food sovereignty and nutrition for national development and has given it a high priority within the agenda.”

In opinion of the Director General, the current financial crisis will have the potential to reduce foreign direct investments, remittances and income from tourism and create social and economic challenges for all countries.

For this reason, Brathwaite said that the region must promote investment in research innovation, education and technology and also promote the linkage of tourism and agriculture as mutually supportive sectors.

In addition, he considered that regional farmers must be trained on the commercial aspect of the sector so that producers come to understand farming as a business. “We need farm schools that teach about new technologies, investments, savings and profitability,” he assured.

More information

Patricia.leon@iica.int



Official visit to Europe

In Spain, Director General of IICA proposes adoption of new development model

He stressed the need to make food security a national priority and thanked the Government of Spain for its support of agriculture in the Americas.

“A new green revolution will not suffice; what the world needs is a new development model,” said the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Chelston Brathwaite, during the First Meeting of Strategic Partners of the Institute, which was inaugurated on June 17 in Casa America, located in Madrid.

Brathwaite, the main speaker at the event, delivered an address entitled “A New Vision of Agriculture for the Twenty-first Century and Food Security” to representatives of institutions involved in agriculture, technical cooperation and development.



The President of REDR, Aurelio Garcia, and the Director General of IICA, Chelston W.D. Brathwaite, during the signing ceremony.

Participants included delegates from the Ministry of the Environment and the Rural and Maritime Milieu of Spain (MARM), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain (MAEC) and the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AECDI), as well as members of the United Nations Organization for Agriculture and Food (FAO), the Agrifood Research and Technology Institute of Catalonia (IRTA), the Spanish Rural Development Network (REDR) and other organizations.

The Director General took the opportunity to express his gratitude for the cooperation the Government of Spain has provided, through its Ministry of Agriculture, to IICA’s Permanent Office for Europe for the last eight years. As a result, the Office has become the gateway to the Continent and a conduit for countries and organizations of the European Union to channel support to agricultural and rural development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

As a lead up to this meeting, the Spanish Rural Development Network (REDR) and IICA signed a technical cooperation agreement calling for the joint implementation of rural development projects in the 34 member countries of the Institute and in Spain.

The visit to Madrid was the first stop on an official visit that will take him to France, Italy, Switzerland and England, where he will meet with senior officials of government organizations, development agencies and private enterprise.

The new development model

“Earlier development models, and even some current ones, have an anti-rural bias, advocate industrialization to modernize the economy, and favor the growth of urban areas,” he noted.

To overcome this situation, he proposed achieving a better rural-urban balance, through the integral development of both areas; encouraging greater investment in the rural milieu, essential to ensuring social and political stability; and promoting the competitiveness of agriculture and the economic activities of the sector.

The proposed development model is aimed at creating more jobs in the agricultural and non-agricultural sector, and calls for increasing the production and supply of food to meet the needs of consumers and markets.

“There are those who are calling for a new green revolution. However, they need to recall the negative aspects of such revolutions, which exclude small-scale farmers, create dependence on pesticides and fertilizers, pay no attention to nutritional considerations and contaminate soils and aquifers,” he noted.

The proposed model takes into consideration six basic components: adoption of national policies that support a multidimensional and multisectoral approach to agriculture and rural life; formulation of strategies aimed at increasing investment in agricultural research, promotion of innovation and technology transfer; promotion of new curricula in the agricultural sciences; institutional reform of the Ministries of Agriculture; adoption of new policies on food consumption and nutrition; and creation of a global partnership to reduce food insecurity worldwide.

He also said, “Food security must become a fundamental part of the planning of development and must be tied to the agricultural development policies that are part of national development goals.”

Long before the crisis in food prices of 2008, was already engaged in efforts to find short-, medium- and long-term solutions to food insecurity.

According to official statistics, by 2050 the world population will have climbed from 6 billion to 9 billion and will require twice as much food, but there will be less land available for food production.

For further information, contact
soraya.villaroya@iica.es



IICA facilitated dialogue between governments and agrobiotechnology organizations

Conversations focused on a compensation mechanism to provide recourse in the event of damage to biological diversity caused by living modified organisms.

Representatives of 15 countries of the Americas and delegates from CropLife International, a global federation representing the plant science industry, and the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO), met at the Headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) to discuss a compensation mechanism to provide recourse in the event of damage to biological diversity caused by living modified organisms.



Ramón Lastra and Christopher Hansen from IICA, Sarah Lucky from Bio and Tom Carrato from CropLife.

The meeting, entitled “First Dialogue on the Compact for Latin America and the Caribbean,” took place on June 18-19.

“The objective of the meeting was to foster an open dialogue on the contractual compensation mechanism known as the Compact, and to provide the private and public sectors with scientific information,” said Ramon Lastra, acting Director of Biotechnology and Biosafety of IICA.

According to the Executive Director of the Compact, Tom Carrato, “This voluntary instrument will provide parties with recourse for compensation in the event of damage to biological diversity.”

Even though events were held in Singapore in 2008 and in Germany in early 2009, this is the first official meeting held to exchange ideas on the mechanism. A second official meeting is programmed for Malaysia in March 2010, prior to the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, to be held in Japan in October 2010.

The activity held at IICA was inaugurated by the Deputy Director General, Christopher Hansen, who said “Due to falling yields per hectare of food crops, we must find alternative ways to meet the food needs of the region and, at the same time, protect human health and the environment.

In this regard, IICA, through its Biotechnology and Biosafety Program, is promoting dialogue among countries and the different social sectors in order to improve implementation of relevant international agreements.

CropLife is a global federation that represents the plant science industry and addresses international developments in the area of crop protection (pesticides), agbiotechnology (genetically modified organisms - GMOs) and sustainable agriculture, and is made up of 6 companies. In the case of Latin America, it is associated with 18 countries in which it promotes research aimed at developing, manufacturing and marketing agrochemicals, biotechnology products and services.

For further information, contact:

ramon.lastra@iica.int



International crisis is opportunity to rethink public agricultural policies

Experts from Spain, Brazil and Costa Rica participated in a technical forum organized by IICA.

The current global economic crisis provides an opportunity to rethink and make improvements in public agricultural policies, this according to experts from Spain, Brazil and Costa Rica who came together to analyze the relevant policies of the European Union, the United States of America and Central America.

“Common Agricultural Policies: challenges in times of global crisis, relations between Central America and the European Union, and the new Farm Bill” was the name of the activity held on June 24 by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) as part of its Annual Series of Technical Fora for the Modernization of Agriculture in the Americas.



The Executive Delegate of the ETEA Foundation, Vicente Gonzalez; the moderator of the Technical Forum, Juan Manuel Villasuso; and the Director of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management of IICA, James French.

According to the Executive Delegate of the ETEA Foundation (Spain), Vicente Gonzalez Cano, “The importance of policies lies in the fact that they ensure the sustainability of decisions.” He also said that, as such, these policies must be somewhat flexible.

Gonzalez, the first speaker at the Forum, provided background on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which emerged in Europe after the Second World War as a mechanism for eradicating hunger. However, he noted, at present “The CAP is no longer as effective in protecting prices due more to its own internal restrictions than to the international crisis. With and without the crisis, less is being budgeted for its operation, as are resources for the sector in general.”

The moderator of the Forum, Juan Manuel Villasuso, an economist, university researcher and a member of the Committee of the Latin American Trade Network (LATN), stated that the current international financial crisis is an excellent opportunity to review existing agricultural policies, and their regulations, such as those related to State funding.

“Important changes have taken place in public trade policies and, given the current international crisis, now is the time to undertake a thorough review of all of them because the crisis has not only economic, but also social implications,” he underscored.

The Coordinator for International Affairs of the Executive Secretariat of the Central American Agricultural Council (SCAC), Oscar Quesada, gave a brief account of the process of creating, discussing and approving the Central American Agricultural Policy (PACA), which entered into force in the region in December 2007.

“The goal of this policy is to promote an agriculture that is sustainable, modern and competitive, and that can improve the living conditions of producers in the region, most of whom are small-scale farmers,” he said.

Doris Osterlof, the former Minister of Foreign Trade of Costa Rica and a researcher and university professor, stated that, as regards international agricultural trade, there continue to be disparities between the countries of the region and their trading partners in the USA and the EU.

She asked how the PACA was to be financed, considering that the region's main agricultural trade partners have adopted policies calling for current subsidies to be maintained or increased.

IICA's Director of Policies and Trade, Antonio Donizeti, said that multilateral trade negotiations continue to be important, not only as a means of promoting trade liberalization, but also of establishing rules via sectoral agreements.

He explained the possible implications of the new U.S Farm Bill (The Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008), which has a budget of US\$307 billion for five years.

"The new Farm Bill maintains and expands the principal commodity programs that already existed in the U.S. legislation. It is important to recall that the previous Farm Bill (2002-2007) was approved at a time when international agricultural prices were low, and was viewed as protectionist because of the introduction of programs such as counter-cyclical payments, which essentially insulated producers from variations in prices on the international market," he said.

In this regard, he noted that programs are being expanded today at a time of high prices, and that the negotiations of the Doha Round may be affected by the passage of this new law.

"This is cause for concern because the leadership of the United States is essential if the negotiations are to move forward. The new law will make the U.S. negotiating position more rigid because it will be in force from 2008-2012, during which the current negotiations in Doha must come to an end," he concluded.

For further information, contact
rafael.trejos@iica.int



Hemispheric agricultural information service celebrates tenth anniversary

Agricultural information specialists from the hemisphere to meet in Costa Rica



AGRI2000 contains specialized collections on agriculture and related sciences from 162 information centers.

The Agricultural Information and Documentation Service of the Americas (SIDALC), which operates a mega database comprising more than 2 million entries, brings together some 300 information specialists in a virtual community and receives 25 thousand hits on its Website every day, will celebrate its tenth anniversary this year.

SIDALC is an international agricultural, livestock, forestry and environmental information service which enables institutions in 20 countries of the hemisphere to share information services and provide access to their repositories of knowledge for others outside the region.

The Service, administered by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and coordinated by the Orton Commemorative Library, operates the [AGRI2000](#) mega database, which contains specialized collections on agriculture and related sciences from 162 information centers throughout the hemisphere and provides access to other internationally renowned libraries.

SIDALC is also a community of practice that enables 300 information specialists to share experiences, discuss technical problems and develop or propose methodologies or procedures to be implemented in the different information units.

According to the Head of IICA's Documentation and Publications Unit, Federico Sancho, "In these ten years, SIDALC has acquired a reputation as a very unique service, one that links sources of information in all parts of the hemisphere, and has become the most important platform for dialogue in the field of agricultural information."

Another accomplishment of the Service is the increase in the number of visits to its Website, thanks to digitization by Google, the search engine that controls 64% of the search market worldwide (Newsweek 2009). As a result of this partnership, visits rose from 3000 in 2007 to more than 1.2 million in July of this year, he added.

Through SIDALC, IICA fulfills its mission of improving agriculture and rural life in the Americas, given that the management of information and knowledge is a basic input for decision making and in the fields of education, training, research, innovation, competitiveness and sustainable development.

“Today, our most important challenge is to ensure that these accomplishments reach the final user: the producers, who are the decision makers in rural territories and do not necessarily have access to computers,” he noted.

With that objective in mind, specialists from throughout the hemisphere will meet in Turrialba, Costa Rica, on September 24-25 to reflect on what SIDALC should become over the next ten years.

Participants in the meeting, entitled “SIDALC 10: The future of agricultural information services and professionals in the Americas,” will analyze the current state of the Service, learn about the experiences of the member countries since they joined SIDALC, and discuss new trends and tools in the management of information worldwide.

In addition, actions will be proposed to strengthen information networks and services in the countries and to encourage the development of policies and on-line national agricultural catalogues.

“We want to position SIDALC, in the medium term, as the principal point of access to information on agriculture and the environment in the Americas,” Sancho stated. To this end, mechanisms will be proposed at the meeting to ensure an efficient exchange of information among its members and that the needs of users are met.

In conjunction with the meeting, a course will be held from September 21-23. It will focus on training the personnel of libraries specializing in agriculture and the environment in Latin America and the Caribbean to use Web 2.0 applications to manage information and knowledge.

For further information, contact:

federico.sanch@iica.int



Canadian agricultural specialists visit Chile

The IICA Office in Chile and the Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes explored areas of common interest with an eye to identifying possible joint efforts.



A number of Chilean and Canadian organizations signed letters of intent.

An exploratory mission from Canada visited Chile in June to establish a program calling for agricultural consultancies and exchanges in the areas of extension and rural innovation between agricultural institutions in both countries.

Participating in this program are the Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes (AACTI), the Canadian Consulting Agrologists Association (CCAA), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Agricultural Development Institute (INDAP) of Chile. The visit also afforded the Canadians an opportunity to share their experiences in specialized technical advisory services, extension and rural innovation with the Chileans.

The Chileans presented an overview of agriculture in their country, and the IICA specialists stationed there provided details on the work being carried out and the partnerships that have been created to make their work more effective.

During the visit, the representatives of AACTI and CCAA also met with representatives of the Agrarian Research Group (GIA), the Council of Deans of Schools of Agronomy, the Corporation for the Social Development of the Rural Sector (CODESSER) and Technology Transfer Groups (GTT) to explore areas of common interest and to discuss the possibility of exchanges of consultancy services and programs of innovation and rural extension.

A number of organizations signed letters of intent. For example, CCAA and INDAP signed an agreement to support the development of a network of agricultural consultants and improve the quality of the services provided by agricultural consultants in Chile.

Under the letter of intent signed by AACTI and INDAP, a framework will be established for applied research and innovation to collaborate in the development and implementation of special initiatives and undertakings. The letter signed by AACTI and CODESSER focuses on education, training, professional development, exchanges, applied research and innovation. Under the terms of the letter, CODESSER will visit Alberta in the near future to explore possibilities for cooperation in the form of exchanges of students and professors.

For further information, please contact:

GPagani@iica.cl



IICA and Brazilian Ministry of the Environment publish glossary of desertification

The publication was launched as part of the commemoration of UN World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought.



It is estimated that 70% of the Earth's land surface is affected by desertification.

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment recently published a glossary of terms and concepts used in the context of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

The launch of the publication, which took place in the city of Fortaleza, in the State of Ceara, was part of the commemoration of UN World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, held every year on June 17.

In addition to the glossary, it includes international agreements related to this topic, in three languages. The manual will be distributed within the framework of the inaugural ceremony of the Second International Conference on Climate, Sustainability and Development in Semi-Arid Regions (ICID), to be held in August 2010.

According to Brazilian Minister of the Environment, Carlos Minc, "The glossary is a first step in establishing a common level of understanding on what the Convention is and how it operates."

Data cited by IICA's Natural Resources and Environmental Management Unit show that currently 70% of the Earth's land surface is affected by desertification; more specifically, almost 73% of the wilderness areas, 47% of agricultural lands and a significant percentage of lands under irrigation.

This phenomenon affects both flora and fauna, the water cycle, soil fertility, production levels for crops and livestock, and, in general, the biological potential of the Earth.

In response to this problem, IICA launched the "Program to Combat Desertification and Mitigate the Effects of Drought in South America," in 2003. Since then, the Program has been cooperating with the six participating countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Ecuador) to define indicators of desertification that could be taken into consideration in planning and formulating programs to reduce rural poverty in the region.

IICA also implemented the ARIDAS project, developed by the ICID, which served as a basis for planning related to sustainable rural development in the states of northwest Brazil.

For further information, please contact

iica.br.informa@iica.int



IICA celebrates 45th anniversary in Brazil

Exhibit and photograph album commemorate anniversary.



One of the photographs of the exhibit. © Roberto Martínez/Archivo IICA

“IICA, 45 years in Brazil: improving life in the countryside and in the city” is the title of an exhibit and a photograph album containing 20 photographs, accompanied by a written description of each, which chronicle the history of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in that country and the work it has carried out over the years.

The photographs were presented at the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply on June 1, as IICA was celebrating 45 years of work in Brazil.

According to Minister of Agriculture Rinaldo Junqueira, the exhibit was a way of sharing successful experiences that could be replicated in other countries of the Americas.

For the IICA Representative in Brazil, Carlos Basco “This photographic exhibit portrays the efforts made by the Office to develop agriculture and rural life, and the role IICA technical cooperation has played in transforming the structures of its production systems.”

IICA began operations in Brazil in 1964. Since then, its actions have focused on training and the transfer of knowledge in areas related to the planning, management and technical and administrative execution of programs and projects, through partnerships with other relevant entities.

Other priorities on which it concentrates are the promotion of trade and competitiveness of agribusinesses, rural development from a territorial approach, the promotion of agricultural health and food safety, the incorporation of technology and innovation in the agricultural sector, and the sustainable management of natural resources and the environment.

Over these 45 years, the IICA Office in Brazil has contributed to reducing poverty and to rural development in the country.

For further information, contact:

iica.br.informa@iica.int



Denominations of origin for Latin American products

IICA and FAO prepared eight case studies in different countries of the hemisphere



This is the latest IICA-FAO publication on protected geographical indications and denominations of origin.

Cacao from Venezuela is generally placed on the fine-aromatic market. However, the cacao from Chuao enjoys a more privileged position because of its quality, which can be attributed to “local production practices which have been handed down from generation to generation and have yet to be successfully imitated.”

This quote comes from a representative of the Empresa Campesiana Chuao, Julio Marrufo, one of the engineers that worked to secure a denomination of origin for cacao from Chuao, who was invited to speak on a radio program (Agroenlace) produced by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). Such a denomination guarantees that a product complies with a certain standard of quality.

Chuao cacao is one of the eight case studies included in the book “Calidad de los alimentos vinculada al origen y las tradiciones en América Latina: estudios de casos” published by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The book traces the evolution of geographical indications and of denominations of origin in Latin America, explains the process from beginning to certification, identifies those involved and the role they have played, and makes general recommendations.

The cases include: Arriba cacao from Ecuador; Cotija cheese in Mexico; Turrialba cheese in Costa Rica; coffee from Colombia; large white corn from Cusco, Peru; Pica lime from Chile; and Chivito de Neuquen in Argentina.

The authors of the publication conclude that, in general, the practice of associating the quality of a product with its place of origin and granting a denomination of origin favors sustainable rural development, in particular for marginal areas where such a distinction can add value to scarce local resources.

Such a denomination is awarded to products that guarantee a specific level of quality and possess specific characteristics, defined by all producers. Consideration is also given to products that are produced using traditional cultural practices, that add value to local resources, that enable local producers to form associations or networks, etc.

“While this distinction is beneficial for producers and consumers, it should be seen as means of contributing to local development and not only as an instrument that can support the positioning of products in market niches,” the document affirms.

The geographic indications and the collective brands can act as tools for rural development when they are associated with rural development policies. Therefore, it is recommended that the countries have a suitable framework of policies and an institutional framework that favor and boost that potential.

Other recommendations are that the countries identify their traditional products with the potential for obtaining a seal and invest in the creation of capabilities and in the formation of human resources in this area.

For further information, contact

marvin.blanco@iica.int