



IICA strengthens ties with Ibero-American Summit process

IICA's Director General renewed the alliance with Spain's Minister of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs, Elena Espinosa; and signed an historic agreement with the Secretary General of the Ibero-American Summit process.

The Secretary General of the Ibero-American Summit Process, Uruguayan Enrique Iglesias, and the Director General of IICA, Mexican Víctor M. Villalobos, have just signed a general agreement in Madrid that paves the way for innovative Ibero-American and inter-American cooperation that will boost mutual understanding and joint work in the field of agriculture and rural life.

Iglesias - President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for almost 17 years - is the highest executive officer of the Ibero-American Summit process, while Villalobos took over as the head of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture at the beginning of this year. IICA's mandates include providing follow-up to agriculture and rural life within the framework of the Summit of the Americas process.

IICA is an institutional partner in the Summit of the Americas process.

In the western hemisphere, most Heads of State and Government attend two types of summit: the Ibero-American summits and the summits of the Americas. Some 22 Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin American and European countries participate in the Ibero-American summits; while 34 nations from the hemisphere take part in the summits of the Americas - from Canada in the north to the Caribbean nations, and Argentina and Chile in the south.

The agreement signed by Iglesias and Villalobos will help create synergies between the two integration processes on behalf of Latin American and Caribbean agriculture.

One of the projects in which they will pool resources will be Proterritorios, the Ibero-American Program for Cooperation in Territorial Management.

The two men also pledged to promote together the importance of agriculture and climate change in the Ibero-American and inter-American ministerial meetings that their two organizations spearhead.

A rewarding visit

IICA's Director General made an official visit to Spain from 21-25 June, during which he took advantage of the opportunity to renew agreements, and establish new ones, with other agencies that support the development of sustainable and competitive agriculture in the Americas.

Villalobos said the meetings in which he took part gave him the opportunity to explain to senior government officials, cooperation agencies, research centers and universities the core elements of IICA's work over the next four years. He was also able to promote new partnerships for IICA's Permanent Office (OPE) in Spain, which is the only member of the Institute that enjoys the status of Associate Country.

“The visit enabled IICA to renew its agreement with the Ministry of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs (MARM). The agreement facilitates the Institute's presence in Spain for a five-year period and provides for the incorporation of new areas of technical cooperation, such as organic agriculture and the promotion of agrarian insurance,” he pointed out.

The head of the MARM, Elena Espinosa, and IICA's Director General signed the agreement.

Villalobos met with the Director General of Catalonia's Institute for Research on Agricultural Technology (IRTA), Josep M^a Monfort, to determine the areas on which the renewed agreement between IICA and the IRTA will focus. They include increased technical cooperation on the transfer of greenhouse technology.

The Director General's program also included a meeting with representatives of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), to whom he presented the projects that IICA and other agencies have prepared for the reconstruction of the agricultural sector in Haiti.

Villalobos met with representatives of ETEA, the ETEA Foundation for Development and Cooperation and the School of Economic and Business Sciences of the University of Cordoba. The foundation has provided support to Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) for many years and the Director General discussed with its representatives the financing of a rural development project with a territorial approach in Central America in which both institutions are interested.

Another meeting involved the governing body of the Campus for Agrifood Excellence of five universities in Andalusia, which offered to finance the master's degree studies of six experts from LAC (three women and three men) at the campus.

Meetings also took place with important IICA partners, including the State Agricultural Insurance Agency (ENESA), the Spanish Rural Development Network (REDR), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Action of Catalonia (DAAR), the Agency for Development and Innovation and the Competitiveness of Catalonian Enterprises (ACCIÓ), the Catalonian Agency for International Development Cooperation (ACCD) and the Department of the Environment of Catalonia.

During his visit to Spain, the Director General took part in the Ninth Meeting of the NARIs of Ibero-America, held in Tenerife, during which he gave a presentation on IICA's new vision for the period 2010-2014.

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Karen Lezny to be new Deputy Director General of IICA

Ms. Lezny, from the United States, is an expert in the field of international negotiations.



Karen M. Lezny, an expert in the field of international negotiations, yesterday took up her post as the Deputy Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

IICA, headquartered in Costa Rica, specializes in agriculture and rural well-being and has 34 Member States. The current Director General of the Institute is Victor M. Villalobos, from Mexico.

In announcing the Lezny appointment, Villalobos called attention to her thorough knowledge of the Latin America and Caribbean region. He added that “She has had a highly successful career as the Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).”

He went on to say that IICA will benefit greatly from her many professional contacts with international institutions and government officials throughout the western hemisphere.

Experience and background

With almost 20 years at the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), Ms. Lezny has extensive experience leading policy making on initiatives related to all aspects of trade negotiations, food security, economic and development policies, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), among many others.

She has achieved successful implementation of trade-related initiatives as a result of close collaboration with senior officials in organizations such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), among others.

She is a graduate of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, with a Master's Degree in International Economics and Russian Studies. Her Bachelor's Degree was in International Studies, also at the Johns Hopkins University.

Among other honors she has received the Meritorious Service Medal from the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

She is fluent in English and Spanish and has a working knowledge of French, Portuguese and Russian.

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Director General strengthens ties with Canada

During his stay, the IICA Director General met with various groups and senior officials, including the High Commissioners of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Upon his return from a four-day visit to Canada, IICA Director General Víctor M. Villalobos said he had identified the priorities of Canada's cooperation related to agricultural development and efforts to improve food security and natural resource use and management in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).



Villalobos' first visit to the country as Director General took place from 15-19 June. One of the objectives was to present to senior government officials and representatives of key agencies the strategy that the Institute intends to implement on behalf of agriculture and the rural sector in LAC over the next four years.

Canada is one of the 34 Member States of this specialized agency for agriculture of the Inter-American System, whose headquarters are located in San Jose, Costa Rica.

“Our aim,” - explained the Director General - “was to renew and strengthen the Institute's relations and commitments with the Government of Canada and its institutions, in order to continue working together to solve common problems that affect agriculture in the Americas.”

During his stay, Villalobos met with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), Gerry Ritz, Deputy Minister John Knubley and other ministry officials.

He also had a meeting with the advisor to the Minister of International Cooperation, Robin Guy, and Lisa Filetrault, Regional Director General for LAC of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Villalobos met with the Director General for LAC of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), James Lambert; the Director General of Export and Import Controls, Susan Harper; the Vice-President for Policy and Programs of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Sandra Wing; and the Director of Agriculture and Environment of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Jean Lebel.

The Director General took advantage of his stay in Canada to hold discussions with the ambassadors of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) and the High Commissioners of the Caribbean Community (Caricom).

Fruitful visit

The outcome of the Director General's meetings with representatives of various Canadian institutions was highly positive. The institutions concerned confirmed their commitment to collaborating with IICA on matters of mutual interest, such as competitive agriculture, rural development, environmentally sustainable agriculture, food security, and economic growth. These topics dovetail with the key areas for cooperation included in IICA's proposed 2010-2014 Medium-term Plan.

As a result of the Director General's visit, the parties agreed to prepare together a Strategic Plan for Collaboration between Canada and IICA to strengthen current and future cooperation, with the Canadian partners playing a key role in the activities and projects.

The Canadian partners have already been playing an active role in the Americas with IICA in fields such as innovation and technology transfer, the prevention of and response to animal health emergencies, biotechnology, agribusiness and fair trade. The new plan will support the governmental initiative "Canada and the Americas."

The Director General traveled to Canada with IICA's Secretary of External Affairs, Lars Pira, and the Director of Performance Management and Evaluation, Dowlat Budhram. The IICA Representative in Canada, Michael Bedoya, accompanied them on their official engagements.

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Director General visits Honduras

He met with the Minister of Agriculture, Jacobo Regalado (pictured), other senior officials and diplomats after participating in a regional conference on biotechnology and food security.



IICA Director General Víctor M. Villalobos took advantage of his visit to Honduras to take part in a regional conference on biotechnology and food security to meet with senior government officials and explore new possibilities of joint work with other organizations that support Honduras' agricultural sector.

During his visit, from 28-30 June, Villalobos was received at the Presidential Palace by the Vice President of Honduras, Samuel Reyes, who is also the coordinator of the country's agricultural sector.

One of main issues discussed with Vice President Reyes was technological innovation and, in particular, the contribution that biotechnology development can make to the efforts to combat hunger and poverty. Villalobos congratulated Honduras on hosting the biotechnology conference, thereby demonstrating its regional vision and leadership on the issue.

Villalobos also had meetings with the Minister of Agriculture, Jacobo Regalado, and the Director General of his ministry.

Minister Regalado expressed satisfaction with IICA's input and said the organization was attentive to the government's needs, providing it with useful technical support. Villalobos reiterated the Institute's commitment to providing cooperation for the national plans aimed at achieving the sustainability and competitiveness of agriculture.

During a meeting with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mireya de Corrales, it was agreed that the Institute would implement a training activity on climate change for members of the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Partnership with USDA

The visit to Honduras gave the Director General an opportunity to strengthen the IICA's strategic partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

He had a working lunch with the Administrator of the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, John Brewer, for which they were joined by Agricultural Counselor Robert Hoff, Agricultural Specialist Ana Gómez and Economic Officer Ryan Guirlinger. IICA's Representative in Honduras, Salvador Monge, also took part in the meeting.

The IICA/USDA partnership has permitted productive joint work in areas such as agricultural health, food safety and the promotion of agribusinesses to improve the well-being of rural communities. Work of this kind is enabling farmers to take better advantage of free trade agreements like the one between the United States and Central America and the Dominican Republic.

The IICA Director General and Mr. Brewer visited the community of Jutiapa, 20 km outside the capital of Honduras, which is part of the Tegucigalpa Green Belt project and supports the production of vegetables in neighboring municipal districts.

They saw the operations of a farm that produces carrots, cauliflower, squash, string beans and corn, on which the farmers use good agricultural and soil conservation practices in cultivating their plots.

With support from the Foundation for Development (FUNDER), the farmers have managed to establish links with large supermarkets to market their products.

The producers have access to a trust fund that finances their harvests. This allows them to plan their production based on demand and improve their productivity thanks to the incorporation of technology.

The IICA officials discussed with their FUNDER and USDA counterparts, and the producers themselves, mechanisms for sharing the potential of these production links with other farmers.

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The Caribbean is preparing to improve its risk management

Ministers from the Caribbean, specialists and representatives of cooperation agencies met in Antigua and Barbuda to discuss the planning, development and management of a sustainable agricultural insurance scheme.

From June 15 to 18, organizations and authorities involved in agriculture in the Caribbean were in Antigua and Barbuda to participate in the Caribbean Regional Symposium on Disaster Risk Management / Caribbean Agriculture Insurance Symposium on Disaster Risk Management which was also attended by representatives of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).



The event was organized by IICA, the CARICOM Secretariat, the World Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, FAO, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and the Government of AUSTRALIA Aid Programme.

The event was inaugurated by the Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & the Environment of Antigua and Barbuda, Hilson Baptiste, and IICA's Director of Management and Regional Integration, Victor del Angel.

“Agriculture vitality stimulates the economy, creates jobs, increases civil stability, improves food security, eliminates hunger and reduces poverty”. With these words, David Hatch, the Deputy Director General of IICA and IICA Representative in the United States, sought to increase awareness of the importance agricultural insurance and risk management in mitigating the impact of disasters have taken on.

Agriculture and the rural sector play an essential role in generating jobs and driving economic growth. However, the lack of a coordinated framework at the national and regional levels for managing the risks related to disasters has resulted in little investment being made in agricultural production and marketing.

In 2009, agriculture accounted for almost 5% of GDP in the Caribbean, varying from 1% in several island nations to 20% or more in countries such as Haiti (20.3%) and Guyana (30.2%).

Hatch explained that interaction between the public and private sectors is essential in creating the framework needed to manage risk, and would have an influence on the availability of credit, which is essential to the expansion of agriculture.

For his part, Minister Baptiste noted that agriculture in the Caribbean had suffered at the hands of Mother Nature for years, leading to an increase in imports. “We can grow what we eat in the region. However, this requires a collaborative approach.”

In his judgment, the high food import bills of the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) “must come to an end”.

The Minister of Agriculture of Guyana, Robert Persaud, added that climate change will lead to higher tides, abrupt changes in precipitation patterns and more climate-related natural disasters, which will have a great impact on agriculture and food security in the region.

“We need to do more as a region to coordinate and strengthen our risk management measures. I hope this Symposium will lead to concrete and tangible outcomes with regards to rendering the Region’s agricultural sector more resilient to natural disasters in particular,” he noted.

He concluded saying that from 1988 to 2006, the sector was hit by seven natural disasters, resulting in economic losses totaling almost US\$35 million a year.

The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry of Dominica, Matthew Walter, said that the region urgently needs an agricultural insurance scheme, adding that the government is responsible for protecting farmers, but has limited resources to do so.

Florita Kentish, FAO Subregional Coordinator for the Caribbean, called attention to the need for governments to become more involved not only in the creation of policies on risk, but also in research on agricultural insurance.

Coordinator of the IICA Technical Cooperation Agenda for the Caribbean, Vincent Little, suggested that the region could implement risk management measures that are transferable, make relevant information on the management of risks and disasters part of planning processes, develop protocols, upgrade national and local capabilities, and develop new means of limiting damage and assessing losses.

Those participating in the symposium included regional authorities involved in policy design, funding agencies, the private sector, insurance companies, farmers and other agencies involved in agriculture.

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IICA ratifies its commitment to the Sixth Summit of the Americas

During the recent OAS General Assembly, IICA's Secretary of External Affairs expressed the Administration's desire to continue supporting the agencies, meetings and mandates of the summit process.



As preparations get under way for the Sixth Summit of the Americas, “in keeping with IICA’s role in this process, IICA reaffirms that will continue to strengthen the link between the ministerial process ‘Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas’ and the summits.”

With these words, IICA’s Secretary of External Affairs, Lars Pira, ratified the Institute’s commitment to the summit process and the organization’s desire to see issues related to agriculture and rural life - such as climate change, food security and natural resources - remain on the agenda.

Pira gave his presentation during the Fortieth General Assembly of the OAS, held from 6-8 June in Lima, Peru. Some 33 ministers of foreign affairs and heads of delegation from the organization’s member countries attended the event, where they discussed, among other issues, arms control in the region and matters of hemispheric interest related to ‘Peace, security and cooperation in the Americas,’ the theme of the assembly.

The Secretary of External Affairs took advantage of the occasion to explain the four core areas of cooperation on which the Institute will be focusing its action for the next four years: competitiveness, production and agricultural markets; territories and rural well-being; natural resources and climate change; and food security.

He announced that IICA would also be contributing reports on topics within its remit for inclusion on the agenda of Sixth Summit of the Americas.

Pira, who took up his post a few months ago, said the creation of the Secretariat of External Affairs demonstrated the importance that IICA attributed to the Summit of the Americas process and work with different strategic partners in the hemisphere.

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Good Practices for Participation in SPS Forums

The overall objective of the workshop is to raise awareness of the importance of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures.

The Initiative for the Americas was established by Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture (IICA) as a means of facilitating the attendance and participation of its member countries in the meetings of the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Committee) of the World Trade Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. The first meeting funded under this Initiative was in October 2002, and to date, delegates from Bahamas have attended 10 out of 18 such meetings.



Funding under the Initiative ended in October 2008. As a follow-up to the Initiative, IICA secured funding from the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) for a project (STDF Project #108) to develop sustainable institutional capabilities in the countries to consolidate gains made as a result of their participation in the SPS Committee, and to promote implementation of the SPS Agreement.

The first activity of the project, the collection of country-specific information took place in The Bahamas June 30 to July 1, 2008. Interviews and meetings were held with various persons drawn from the public sector and the private sector and representing the Ministries of Agriculture and Health as well as farmers, farmers' organizations, exporters, importers and processors.

The IICA PVS (*Performance, Vision and Strategy*) instrument for SPS was used to gather the relevant information from public and private sector representatives. Three components were assessed: (a) Interaction within the public sector and with the private sector; (b) capacity to access international markets; and (c) human and financial capital.

The second activity was a common vision event, held August 6, 2008, where representatives from the public and private sectors discussed the findings, examined the shortcomings, the limiting factors responsible for these shortcomings, agreed on priority actions and schedules and assigned responsibilities to overcome them. The results of the common vision session constitute a national implementation agenda on SPS issues.

As a follow-up to the SPS PVS done in 2008, this SPS workshop will be held in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

The overall objective of the workshop is to raise awareness (especially among policy and decision makers in both private and public sectors) of the importance of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement) as it relates to trade in

food products with particular emphasis on the standard setting process of the Codex Alimentarius, the impact of such standards, the importance of participation in the international standard setting process and the role of the SPS Notification and Enquiry Point.

The workshop will also focus on good practices for participation in the various international SPS and forums. Participants at this workshop will include persons from the Bahamas and Belize

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IICA/Ministry of Education to launch Secondary Schools Hydroponics Competition

The competition provides a creative way to renew the interest of student in the agricultural sciences.



Hydroponics has taken off as a popular method of alternative of production among community and women's groups and schools in Guyana. Now for the third year, the Secondary Schools' Hydroponics Competition is being hosted by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

The official launch is scheduled for Monday, June 28, 2010 at 09:00 hrs at the Hector Muñoz

Agricultural Training Centre, St. Stanislaus Association Farm, Sophia. The Honourable Shaik Baksh, Minister of Education, is expected to formally launch the event. The opening ceremony will be followed by a training workshop for 41 teachers in preparedness for the start of the competition in the first week of September, 2010.

This year, a record 41 secondary schools will participate in the competition across the coastal communities of Guyana, a marked increase from the 27 schools that participated when the competition was last held in 2008.

In previous years, the hydroponics competition was keenly contested, generated tremendous excitement and enthusiasm and drew much hidden talent out of the students. The winner of last year's competition was the Linden Foundation Secondary School.

The demand for continuation of the competition has shown that in addition to teaching hydroponics as an alternative method of production, it has been a creative way to stimulate and renew the interest of the students in the sciences, particularly agricultural science.

Hydroponics is often defined as "the cultivation of plants in water". Research has determined that many different aggregates or media (Sand, stones, paddy hulls, charcoal, bricks, saw dust,

etc.) will support plant growth: Therefore, the definition of hydroponics has been broadened to read: “The cultivation of plants without using soil”.

Ever since the late Dr. Hector Muñoz, IICA Emeritus Professional, introduced the technology to St. Stanislaus Farm in 2005, this method of production has been taken across the country to community groups, particularly women’s groups and schools. The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), St. Stanislaus Farm, the Partners of the Americas and Caribbean and African Self Reliance International (CASRI) have all partnered in this process.

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Strengthening Market Access Opportunities for SMEs in the Caribbean Agri-Food Industry

The Caribbean AgriBusiness Association is working with IICA to promote competitiveness and exports among the CARICOM states

Caribbean Agri Business Association (CABA) Jamaica is spearheading the CABA/Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF) project ‘Strengthening Market Access Opportunities for (Small, Medium size Enterprises) SMEs in the Caribbean Agri-Food Industry’. This project’s main goal is to promote the competitiveness and exports of SMEs in the Agri- Food Industry in CARICOM Member States.



With the project once again underway and the training tools under Component 1 completed, CABA recently embarked on a series of pilot testing workshops. The objective of which, were to test the tools and solicit feedback from a random sample (twenty in each territory with the knowledge that this number would be less in St. Lucia) in approved regional training centres: Jamaica, Bahamas, the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago, and St. Lucia.

The series of training tools developed were executed through the use of Simulation Games, E-learning Mechanisms, Video Presentation, Trade and Market Analysis Tools and Booklet Series, all with related topics on Regional/Multilateral Trade Agreement, Trade and Market Access Maps, and Food Safety and Food Quality Regulations.

These tools would enable SME's to access online databases of global trade flows and market access barriers for international business development. Trade Maps and Market access Maps provide detailed export and import profiles and trends for over 5,300 different products in 224 countries and territories.

Eight Trainers from regional countries were trained in Jamaica between May 3 – 5, 2010. It is anticipated that these trainers will in turn deliver aspects of the training at the pilot testing as

well as train participating SMEs during the national workshops. In so doing, CABA also ensures a mechanism of sustainability at the close of project execution in January 2011.

Pilot Testing Workshops spanned a duration of two days in each of the four (4) testing centres. They commenced in Jamaica on May 6th and concluded in St. Lucia on June 8th. These workshops were a resounding success in that the objectives were achieved vis-a-vis the feedback and comments received via the requisite mechanism such as the evaluation forms and interaction with the participants. This feedback is currently being employed to revise and/or update the training material.

Success was also achieved by way of meetings with the Minister and the Permanent Secretary in Bahamas who reconfirmed the commitment of the Bahamian Government to CABA and its MIF Project. Through discussions with CABA representatives in St. Lucia, along with the IICA Representative for the OECS, a commitment was made to revitalize the once active St. Lucia Chapter.

National Workshops are scheduled to commence on July 19th in Jamaica and end on August 4th in the Bahamas.

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Regional Agricultural Policy Network launches strategic planning workshop

Online platform and survey tools used to maximize participation in the strategic planning process



In 2003, stakeholders within the agricultural sector in the Caribbean, including representatives from the CARICOM Secretariat, agreed on the need for collaboration and participation in the development of a network that would strengthen linkages at the national and regional levels and contribute to cost effective agricultural policy decision-making. This emerged as the vision of the Caribbean Regional Agricultural Policy Network (CaRAPN), which was established in 2003 with external resources from the

Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and managed and supported by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

The CaRAPN has developed over the years as an open community for all stakeholders in agriculture and rural development in the Caribbean to communicate, share ideas, experiences and information for the benefit of all. Counting on the support and participation of individuals and institutions across the region, the network has succeeded in meeting some of its objectives towards contributing to the policy analysis and dialogue for collective regional action, through information dissemination and exchange, communication, advocacy and capacity building.

As it stands now in 2010, the challenge of a lack of information and inadequate timely access to this information, which is crucial for policy formulation, decision-making and effective implementation, still exists within the agricultural community in the Caribbean. Given that in 2010 there is now a marked increase in the number of players and projects in the agriculture community – external funds, government projects, private sector, NGOs, quasi-government associations, and good-intentioned philanthropists – as well as increased demands on and expectations of improved sectoral performance, the need to address this challenge is even more urgent.

The CaRAPN's Medium Term Strategic Planning Workshop, which will be held in Port of Spain, Trinidad from July 27-29, 2010, targets persons interested in moving the process forward, specifically those with the ability to communicate information that needs to be shared for development. It aims to establish the need for a stronger common networking platform to support regional agriculture in its new and evolving contexts. Additionally, the workshop seeks to redefine the vision, mission and strategic objectives of the CaRAPN in the medium term, while developing a modus operandi for collaboration among key strategic partners piloting the common information platform.

As a precursor to the workshop an online electronic survey was launched, which seeks to obtain opinions about agricultural policy networking. This tool provides an open invitation to anyone who can participate in the CaRAPN as an equal partner and contribute meaning fully to communication flows in agriculture. The survey can be found on the network's website www.carapn.net

“A common consensus among all stakeholders in the agricultural sector in the Caribbean is key to going forward,” indicated Ms. Diane Francis, Regional Specialist in Policy and Trade Negotiations, IICA and coordinator of the IICA-CTA CaRAPN project.

Initial evaluations of the network have indicated that there are more strengths and opportunities than weaknesses and threats to move CaRAPN to a level of full ownership and participation. The CaRAPN's strategic planning workshop is therefore an important step in the right direction.

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Consultation on harmonized standards for organic production about to get under way

The initiative, developed by the Competent Authorities in Organic Agriculture of those countries, has aroused international interest.

Pedro Cussianovich, coordinator of the Hemispheric Organic Agriculture Program (PHAO) of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), has announced in Costa Rica that the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic are about to embark on a public consultation on harmonized regional standards for organic production.

The Competent Authorities - the government officials in charge of implementing technical and legal standards for the development of organic production and monitoring and keeping track of organic enterprises in the countries - have been working on the proposal since 2008, with technical support from IICA.



Once instituted, the harmonized standards will facilitate intraregional trade in organic products and spur the development of national markets for products of this kind.

Adoption of the standards will also speed up the recognition of equivalence with countries that have strong trading links with the region, the IICA expert explained.

The methodology for the regional harmonization of organic production standards has aroused interest in various regions of the world. Authorities in Asia, in particular, have expressed interest in replicating the experience of the Central Americans and Dominicans, with support from the Global Organic Market Access (GOMA) project.

The public consultation will be carried out through the communications media in each country, with interested parties being invited to send in their suggestions, accompanied by the pertinent technical, scientific or legal justification. Web and email addresses and post office box numbers will be provided.

A process that took nearly three years to complete

The Competent Authorities in Organic Agriculture of Central America and the Dominican Republic - under the coordination of the Competent Authority of Costa Rica - has spent nearly three years working on the proposed standards.

Initially, the discussions focused on the provisions of the Codex Alimentarius and the national standards of the different countries involved, as well as considering certain elements of the standards of other regions, such as the European Union.

The process began in 2008, with a dialogue conducted via a private discussion group administered by the PHAO. The Competent Authorities used that platform to discuss the structure and contents of the basic proposal and draft a document that was studied in greater depth at a subsequent onsite meeting.

In order to continue their work, in March of this year the Competent Authorities obtained financial support from the Global Organic Market Access project sponsored by FAO, UNTACD and IFOAM.

The support is being provided under an agreement with IICA in which GOMA pledged to fund the remaining stages of the harmonization process and IICA is committed to assisting the Competent Authorities with the process and the management of the resources involved.

Under the agreement, a third onsite meeting was held in Panama City in May of this year. On that occasion, the Competent Authorities revisited the issues on which consensus had yet to be reached and discussed a number of points that were pending.

The meeting was also used to establish the methodological guidelines that will be followed in the countries in the later stages, when the actors in the organic movements will be consulted.

The proposed harmonized standards are now ready to be submitted to a process of public consultation in each country.

Once the consultation has been completed, the Competent Authorities will draw up a new version of the document, incorporating the observations made in the countries, which will be sent to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the form of a notification, following the procedures of good regulatory practices.

After the Competent Authorities have the harmonized document, validated at both the national and international levels, it will be presented to the actors of the organic movements in the countries.

With assistance from IICA, the pertinent steps will then be taken to secure official approval of the proposal via the Central American Agricultural Council (CAC).

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Stakeholders to discuss the potential uses of mobile telephony in the rural and agrifood sector

An online forum will get under way on 6 July to discuss ways in which cell phones can be used to provide strategic information in rural areas (photograph of e-agriculture.org).



Almost anywhere, a small farmer armed with a cell phone could receive information about how to improve his products, how to market them better and even daily price variations in agricultural markets.

Farmers could also have immediate access to early warnings about possible risks to agricultural production, such as pests or floods. The possibilities seem to be infinite.

The wide range of opportunities offered by mobile technologies in the rural milieu will be discussed in the electronic forum [Tecnología Móvil en el Sector Rural y Agroalimentario: Experiencias Internacionales y Oportunidades para Uruguay](#), which will be taking place from 6-19 July.

The aim of the forum is to share knowledge about the use of the new information technologies in rural areas, including business applications and their implementation and development at the grassroots level, and to explore the opportunities for their development in Uruguay.

The results of the forum will provide important input for a research project on mobile telephony that the IICA Office in Uruguay is carrying out with funds from Canada's International Development Research Center (IDRC).

The IICA Office in Uruguay is organizing the activity, with the assistance and participation of the Informatics Unit of the Directorate of Technical Cooperation at the Institute's Headquarters, and with support from the IDRC.

A Webinar will also take place to present the results of the forum "Mobile Telephony in Rural Areas" held by e-agriculture (www.e-agriculture.org) in April of last year.

IICA's Emmanuel Picado and FAO's Lisa Céspedes will be presenting the results.

For more information, visit

<http://www.iica.org.uy>

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