

**‘IICA Day’ 2011:**  
**“The Impact of Youth and Innovation in Agriculture  
in Latin America and the Caribbean”**



**David C. Hatch**  
**IICA Representative in the United States**

**SALUTATION:**

- Thank you Dr. Klinger and your staff for graciously hosting this important roundtable today, especially in the midst of moving offices this week! I would also like to thank Ambassador Ramdin for his continuous commitment to agriculture and IICA. He truly understands the importance of sustainable agriculture for governments, economies and people.
- Honorable OAS Assistant Secretary General, Albert Ramdin; Chair of the Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Guyana to the OAS, Ambassador Bayney Karran; Dr. Irene Klinger; Keynote speakers, Mr. Ernesto Fernandez Polcuch from UNESCO; Mr. Gustavo Manrique, from SAMBITO S.A.; Ambassadors to the OAS, distinguished **youth** panelists; IICA’s staff, present and around the hemisphere and guests who are joining us via webcast; ladies and gentlemen, Welcome!
- IICA Day began 6 years ago in response to a resolution of the Permanent Council requesting that IICA develop a special event once a year focusing on an agricultural issue. Last year we looked at the critical role of women in agriculture, the year prior we held a hemispheric conference on food security in the Americas. In 2008 we had a Nobel Prize Laureate speak on the effects of climate change on agriculture. Many of our IICA Day’s were held during a meeting of the Permanent Council. However this year we determined that a Roundtable approach may be more conducive to the topic.
- We are here today to ponder and discuss some critical issues relating to my future, your future and the future of our families and friends. Without food we will not survive. This is an obvious statement however current policy and practices in too many countries today simply do not adequately reflect this fact. Agriculture is more than just food itself; it is also the many jobs **generated** by agriculture. Studies indicate that agriculture accounts for upwards of 30%

of many economies when taking into account the entire value chain from inputs to your table; farm to fork as they say.

- So I pose a question: Who will produce, transport, store, process and sell the food? Just the day before yesterday we passed 7 billion people on earth with another 2 plus billion expected in the next 40 years or so. Yet, the average age of farmers today in this region is between 50-55 years old. In the US alone some 49% of its citizens experienced some form of food insecurity in 2010. Furthermore, the food import bill for LAC continues to increase. For example, according to FAO's 2010 statistical yearbook, Haiti imports roughly 98% of its food needs while Costa Rica imports 82% and Bolivia 84%.
- A second question: Who will help us preserve and protect the environment as we meet the food needs of this world? Is it you? Perhaps, but more likely these essential tasks will be performed by people like those we will hear from today. Our very lives and the lives of our descendants are directly connected to their success.
- For these and other **reasons** we are hosting a dialogue today on youth and innovation in agriculture. A theme that should have top priority in all governments and all countries....and by all citizens.
- IICA remains committed to continuing almost 70 years of service promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development in the Americas. Our current Director General Victor Villalobos certainly understands how important youth are to agriculture. In fact, in September, the Director General announced an Agreement with the National **Council** on Science and Technology of Mexico to establish a scholarship program aimed at professionals from the agricultural sector in the hemisphere.
- The agreement will allow 100 young professionals to complete short-term, technical courses, specialist studies, masters or doctoral studies in institutional programs within the National Science and Technology System. Also announced **was that the** Caribbean Region will have priority in the selection of candidates for the postgraduate program.
- Furthermore, just two weeks ago IICA **convened** its bi-annual Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture, in which all 34 member countries issued an important declaration regarding innovation in agriculture. Please visit [www.iica.int](http://www.iica.int) for more information on the event.
- ..... And so, we hope you find today's discussions enlightening as we learn from our speakers and panelists who have traveled from the region to share their experiences. We also hope their stories will inspire you and compel you to action within your own sphere of influence.
- Let me now introduce IICA Day's two main speakers. Unfortunately time does not permit me to provide their complete qualifications. This information can be found in the brochure. First,

**Ernesto Fernandez Polcuch**

- Mr. Polcuch is a specialist in Science, Technology and Innovation Policy, with a M.Sc. in Science, Technology and Society from the National University of Quilmes, Argentina.
- He currently serves as Senior Program Specialist, Science and Technology Policy and Capacity Building, at the UNESCO Regional Office for Science in Latin America and the Caribbean, based in Montevideo.
- While at UNESCO **Ernesto** worked on a variety of scientific and technological issues for five Southern African countries, and was responsible for producing world-wide science and technology statistics in developing countries and producing various analytical reports.
- Before joining UNESCO he worked in a variety of capacities for various organizations including the Ibero-American Network on Science and Technology Indicators, as an adviser to the National Secretary for Science, Technology and Innovation in Argentina; and as a consultant to the Organization of American States, the World Bank, and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
- Ernesto has published and presented numerous papers and has conducted training seminars and workshops in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe.

Our second speaker is

**Gustavo Manrique, President, of SAMBITO, S.A.**

- Gustavo Manrique is an agronomist who graduated in 1996 from EARTH University in Costa Rica. He has founded and/or led various agricultural related companies involving such products as the exportation of cocoa and plantain. One of the firms he started called INNOVEX works closely with small, medium and large producers to facilitate their exports and provide these farmers greater economic benefit-which I might add is an essential component to food security.
- Convinced that environmental challenges represented an innovative business opportunity of high social impact, Gustavo decided to form SAMBITO S. A that stands for Soluciones Ambientales Totales. This company promotes eco – projects and specializes in developing and providing innovative solutions to environmental problems. SAMBITO works with both the public and private sectors, providing a series of quality services in order to help businesses become more profitable and sustainable over time.
- Additionally, he was Managing Director of the Guayaquil Chamber of Commerce from 2004 to 2010.
- In 2009 Gustavo was elected as a member of the Board of the insurance company Ecuaprimas. Then in 2010 Gustavo was elected to the Board of EARTH University’s Foundation in Washington DC.

We are honored to have both of you with us today and look forward to your remarks!