

## **IICA IN THE FACE OF THE INFLUENZA OUTBREAK**

### **Statement Read to the Permanent Council of the OAS**

May 1, 2009

Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)

The appearance of a type-A outbreak of human influenza this April has given rise to grave public health concerns. Our countries, however, are now better prepared to face this phenomenon, thanks to the efforts undertaken over the last few years to prevent transboundary diseases such as Avian Influenza. In this regard, IICA – particularly its Animal Health and Food Safety area – will continue to help member states to strengthen their veterinary services, improve their biosafety systems, and establish good livestock practices.

#### **IICA's Position**

As an organization specializing in agriculture, we readily acknowledge the public health implications of the current outbreak. While the porcine and avian origin of the virus has been noted, transmission among humans is currently under investigation. In this regard, IICA will offer support to the health institutions and authorities currently addressing the emergency. We also pledge our support to technical cooperation agencies that have expertise on the issue, in accordance with the guidelines established by our Medium-term Plan, within the limits allowed by our financial, human, and technical capabilities.

Given the ability of IICA to promote inter-institutional and inter-agency dialogue and coordination, we will promote dialogue and coordination between the health, agricultural, and trade sectors through our efforts in each country, as well as the Institute's regional directorates of operations. We will also promote declarations conducive to joint efforts and the pursuit of common objectives at the inter-agency forums of which IICA is a part.

IICA also recognizes the importance of state veterinary services. Accordingly, it will continue to support countries in the strengthening of such services, which are the best means to prevent and manage any disease or health emergency. Monitoring of swine farms should also be increased, and biosafety measures and good livestock practices should be applied.

The role in disseminating the true dimensions of the emergency and raising awareness among consumers regarding the safety of pork may be crucial.

The lessons learned from the avian influenza outbreaks of recent years remind us of the need for countries to strike an appropriate balance between sanitary status, public health, and trade facilitation. To that end, they must base their decisions and actions on the rules established by competent bodies such as the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Agricultural health and food safety specialists (in every area – hemispheric, regional, and national) should liaise with national authorities, in order to determine which actions are being taken at the national level, and identify areas in which the Institute may be of service.