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IICA Sums Up its 2009 Technical Cooperation Achievements and Focuses on the Future of Agriculture before the Organization of American States (OAS)

“Policies for agriculture that are competitive, inclusive and sustainable cannot be considered the sole responsibility of the ministries of agriculture. They must take into account other sectors and actors.” – Dr. Victor Villalobos, Director General of IICA



Dr. Victor Villalobos, newly elected Director General of IICA delivers inaugural address to Members of the OAS Permanent Council.

Washington, DC, April 7, 2010 – In his inaugural address before Members of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS) and key government officials, newly appointed Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Dr. Victor Villalobos reaffirmed his pledge to strengthen the technical capacities of the Institute to better serve its Member States. “For our peoples, it is very important that we shift from the concept of “agricultural policies” to “policies for agriculture.” He continued, “In other words, we need to adopt a broader vision that goes beyond what is traditionally considered “sectoral.”

In his address, Villalobos summarized key achievements and results undertaken during the year, but not before praising the commitment of Heads of Governments and hemispheric leaders for helping to position agriculture and rural life on the political agendas at the country level by the recent signing of an Agreement to promote the sustainable development of agriculture at the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life, held in Jamaica in October, 2009.

Key to IICA’s year long activities was development of programs and initiatives that addressed the challenges of food security. Villalobos emphasized work done in collaboration with its Member States at local levels to develop short term and long term innovative programs that aim to increase agriculture production for small to medium size farmers; help provide sustainable farming practices for families, and training and capacity building workshops, among others. Villalobos highlighted the PROHUERTA project in Haiti, an example of horizontal cooperation between the governments of Haiti, Argentina, and Canada. Under this program, training courses in organic vegetable production have been conducted in families, schools, the community and institutions. Fifteen-hundred volunteers are involved in the project. Close to 10,000 demonstration gardens have been built thus benefiting over 62,000 people through food self-sufficiency, better diets and a source of income. Support has also been provided by Spain and IFAD.

In 2009, IICA, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC) conducted a study and published, *“The Outlook for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Americas.”* The study concluded and verified that investment in agriculture was at a critical low and that if not addressed by the international community will no doubt contribute to the further increase in poverty and negative impact on other sectors of national economies.

The Director General also highlighted initiatives in distance training education, extension programs and innovative development and expansion of the Institute’s knowledge management systems.

In the area of animal health and food safety, IICA contributed to the modernization of government services by introducing monitoring and performance measuring systems to handle emerging issues and emergencies such as outbreaks of pests and diseases, incidents of food-borne diseases and news about trends that could affect trade, such as possible regulatory changes in importing countries.

In its commitment to the advancement of agriculture, IICA's Center for Leadership and the Institute's Forum for Young Leaders hosted numerous seminars and symposiums for ministers of agriculture and future professional leaders at IICA headquarters in Costa Rica.

Underlining the Institute's efforts in contributing to make agriculture more competitive, the Director General highlighted the Institute's Export Platform Program in Belize and the Dominican Republic in which exporters had the opportunity to move at least 46 agrifood products into the Miami, Florida market. Furthermore, at least 22 experiences in agro-industrial and rural tourism enterprises headed by women and young people were systemized in 2009. Moreover, throughout the year, there was active participation in various Codex Alimentarius Committees in support of agricultural health concerns.

Turning attention to the future of the Institute during his Administration, Villalobos called attention to the need for partnership. Villalobos's work over the past 30-plus years has been closely related to, and focused upon, the agricultural sector and its challenges. He said, "These times demand from us a "new multilateralism" based on a common agenda and a commitment from "our countries to common standards in terms of democracy, human rights, security and development," and to the formation of "networks and mechanisms to support them."

In order to better serve the small scale farmer, Villalobos called for the implementation of a new paradigm that ensures agriculture be seen as a catalyst for development of national economies. He articulated that agriculture's greatest challenge is increased investment in the sector. However, he warned that food security must continue to be on the forefront of international dialogue and national and international policy if countries are to keep up with the world's rapidly growing population.

In conclusion, Villalobos urged the OAS Permanent Council Members to reaffirm their commitment to the development of agriculture. He said, "I urge you to take the message back to your governments that agriculture must be a priority in national agendas; that the commitment to food security be maintained; that rural development policies must be strengthened and that models of sustainable development be supported and defended by local authorities."

ABOUT IICA

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture is the specialized agency for agriculture and the rural milieu of the Inter-American System, whose purpose is to provide innovative technical cooperation to the Member States, with a view to achieving their sustainable development in aid of the peoples of the Americas.

For additional information on IICA, please visit <http://www.iica.int/usa> or <http://www.iica.int>

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