



Promoting Prosperity in the Rural Communities of the Americas

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IICA DISCUSSES THE CHALLENGES OF FOOD SECURITY IN THE AMERICAS DURING VISIT WITH U.S. SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

*IICA's Director General emphasizes the critical importance
of investment in agriculture for the Americas.*



Left to Right: Director General of IICA, Dr. Chelston Brathwaite and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack meet in Washington, D.C. to discuss agriculture in the Hemisphere.

Washington, D.C., March 17, 2009 – In discussions today with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, Dr. Chelston Brathwaite, Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) discussed a wide range of hemispheric agriculture issues.

During the first gathering between the two leaders, Brathwaite emphasized that the current food crisis can be overcome. He said, “We see the need for research, extension and teaching. This powerful combination is critical to developing the agriculture sector. And without agriculture we cannot overcome poverty.”

Both Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack and IICA's Director General Brathwaite, shared the common

belief that food security is a global concern and organizations, such as IICA, play an important role in this hemisphere. There is a need to inspire creative and innovative approaches to help ensure that farmers find ways to ‘stay in business.’ They both agree that there is a need to continue to invest in science, in research and in development. According to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, CGIAR, funding for international agricultural research has not increased in real terms since 1976. In fact, despite the significant and growing need for agriculture investment and development, it has been reported that official development assistance to agriculture declined by about 66% in real dollar terms between 1985 and 2002.

According to Vilsack, the challenges of climate change intensify the need to address food security.

Estimates of the total number of people living in hunger are more than 900 million. The World Food Programme identifies 923 million people as food insecure. In a preliminary report published by FAO on the Outlook of Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in 2008, it is expected that by 2015 there will be close to 41 million undernourished people in the region, despite the goal of an equivalent 30 million set at the World Food Summit.

During the meeting, IICA's Director General Brathwaite invited Secretary Vilsak to join the Agriculture Ministers of the Hemisphere to attend the Fifth Ministerial Meeting, "Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas" in the context of the Summit of the Americas Process and the Fifteenth Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture this October in Jamaica. The Ministerial meeting will be focusing on the theme, "*Building Capacity for Enhancing Food Security and Rural Life in the Americas.*"

IICA's Director General is in Washington, D.C. this week to present the Institute's 2008 Annual Report on Contributions to Agriculture and Rural Life in the Hemisphere. The presentation will be directed at Members of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States, (OAS). In continued efforts to underscore the importance of agriculture and improve rural life in the Americas, IICA has focused its efforts on strengthening rural communities by contributing new technologies and innovation, promoting agri-business, agricultural health and food safety and management of natural resources. Brathwaite will also be meeting with the U.S. Department of State, the Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the OAS and the Permanent Mission of Barbados to the OAS.

Through the Institute's involvement as an Institutional partner in the Summit of the Americas Process and as a result of different proposals from several countries, food security has been included by the 34 Member States of the OAS in the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain. In response to mandates issues at the 2007 Hemispheric Meeting in Guatemala, IICA will continue working to ensure that agriculture is being considered a key issue for national, regional and hemispheric development.

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.

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