

OAS Museum Reception

IICA AND IFIC ENGAGE WASHINGTON PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN FOOD SAFETY AND RISK COMMUNICATION

'Food scientists, agronomists, health official, government and the food industry must not only work together, but they must go a vital step further to ensure that the public understands what we are doing and why'- Andy Benson

Washington, D.C., February 20, 2008 – Before a gathering of biotechnology professionals, government officials, grain traders and the private sector, the Vice President, International Relations, International Food Information Council (IFIC), Andy Benson reminded his audience of the importance of partnerships in food safety and risk communications. He said, "You can have near perfect science, near perfect agricultural practice, near perfect regulation, but if the system doesn't function effectively as a whole, you can still have a near perfect disaster on your hands!"

As part of a year-long series of activities commemorating the 65th anniversary of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Benson spoke at a reception held at the Organization of American States' Museum of the Americas where he emphasized that risk communications is an on-going practice and that it needs to play a key role in all major policy discussions, including biotechnology and bio-safety. According to Benson, there is a need to engage all those potentially affected in identifying the hazards, assessing the risks, implementing risk management, and communicating measures up and down the food chain, so that appropriate response can be met. Benson reiterated that in achieving this, the effectiveness of risk management measures will increase, and trust in the system will grow.



In early 2007, and under the IICA Directorate for Strategic Partnerships (DSP) and IICA Representative Office in the United States, IICA and IFIC signed an Agreement of Technical Cooperation aimed at carrying out joint initiatives in improving stakeholder and public understanding of food safety and nutrition issues. For IICA Deputy Director General, Christopher Hansen, the partnership is a perfect union.

"IFIC has over 20 years experience and achievements in nutrition in food safety risk communication." He continued, "Both organizations firmly believe in the modernization of the rural sectors and in the promotion of food security as a key to combating poverty and improving living conditions in the countryside."

In 2002, the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Application, ISAAA, estimated biotechnology crops were planted on 145 million acres worldwide.

The subject of agro-biotechnology and bio-safety is not new for IICA. The Institute has been supporting regional initiatives such as the Central American Regional Strategy and an initiative to develop a regional agenda for agro-



biotechnology in the Caribbean. In the northern region, IICA works with the North American Biotechnology Initiative (NABI), as an observer, reporting on its activities and serving as a channel to sharing experience with other regions in technology transfer, communications, regulatory and trade issues. Similarly, IICA works with the Biotech Group of the Southern Council of Agriculture. In 2007, the Institute also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to cooperate for the continued adoption of agricultural biotechnology in the Americas as part of IICA's Hemispheric Biosafety and Biotechnology Program (HBBP).

Primarily a U.S. communications organization, IFIC encourages the development of cooperative strategic approaches and partnerships

to effectively address key international issues related to food safety, nutrition and health communications. The organization participates in, and helps to facilitate an informal network of independent food information organizations in Europe, Asia, Canada, Japan, Latin America and New Zealand. IFIC is supported primarily by the broad-based food, beverage and agricultural industries but does not represent any product or company and does not lobby for legislative or regulatory action.