

## Youth Panelists Call for Increased Support for Agricultural Development from Governments



'IICA DAY' 2011 participants: (Left to Right) Heather Fulton; Junior Ebanks; Martín Durán; Jorge Armando Alamo Torres; Ernesto Fernández- Polcuch; Gustavo Manrique.

**Washington, DC, November 3, 2011** – “In Canada, a large majority of the population lives in urban areas so the voice of the 2% of farmers in the rural areas can sometimes get lost,” said Heather Fulton, a youth representative from Canada’s Young Farmers Forum and one of four young entrepreneurs who participated in the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual ‘IICA DAY’ celebration entitled, ‘The Impact of Youth and Innovation in Agriculture in Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC).’ “Provincial and national governments play a large role in helping youth advancement in business,” she continued. The event was organized by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and hosted by the Secretariat for External Relations of the Organization of American States (OAS).

During the two hour session, youth panelists from Canada, Jamaica, Peru, and Uruguay involved in agriculture, shared challenges and rewards encountered in growing their agribusinesses. Key note speakers included UNESCO’s Senior Program Specialist for the Regional Office in Uruguay, Ernesto Fernandez Polcuch, who linked agriculture, innovation, education, culture and youth as key pillars for UNESCO and also Gustavo Manrique, President of Soluciones Ambientales Totales (SAMBITO, S.A.), Ecuador.

“UNESCO’s Youth Program aims to help empower young people, reaching out to them, responding to their expectations and ideas and fostering useful and long-lasting skills, to name a few,” explained Polcuch. “Agriculture should be incorporated into the science and technology agendas within UNESCO”, he added. Polcuch also made reference to the report prepared by UNESCO-IICA-FAO which highlights the importance of education for the rural communities in the Americas.

Gustavo Manrique, a graduate of EARTH University in Costa Rica, President of SAMBITO, underlined three agents of change – the sustainability of our planet, the fight to combat hunger and the struggle to secure the well-being for the millions of inhabitants of our nations. Manrique called on governments to increase support for investments in agriculture development. He said, “We need our governments to understand the benefits and impact of addressing environmental concerns including the reduction of carbon emissions, reforestation and global warming.”

During his brief remarks, the IICA Representative in the United States, David C. Hatch, reminded the audience of the significance of youth development for the future of our planet. “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.” He posed the following questions, “Who will grow the food to meet the needs of our population and who will help us preserve and protect the environment as we meet the food needs of this world?”

Moderated by OAS Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Albert Ramdin, discussions focused on themes including: How best to mold youth as agents of change; Importance of social networks; Access to resources and; Policies and capacities necessary for long term youth involvement in agriculture development.

For Jorge Alamo Torres, an agronomist and entrepreneur from Peru, innovation and attitude are key. He is the founder of a group of young scientists. The group, J2XN, investigated the industrial use of the rice husk, discovering that it could produce an alcohol that could also be used as bio-fuel. "We found out that different uses and qualities can be used, including applying it towards medicine for cancer treatment," he explained. In concluding remarks, Torres stressed that youth should be taken more seriously. "We are the present and future of national economies and local governments should make better efforts to understand and have faith in today's youth." He continued, "Our generation is forced to deal with the current environmental concerns."

Heather Fulton who represented the Young Canadian Farmers Forum explained that she is currently working on her parents' farm and also going through the process of succession to purchase her parent's business. As a young female entrepreneur, Fulton feels that her generation is the best equipped to tackle today's world problems. "My generation seems to be the most optimistic about the future of agriculture and the most open minded to change and new ideas."

According to Martin Duran, an agronomist and technical specialist, his passion is influencing government policy for agriculture development in his country. He stressed that, "today's youth are stronger, more adaptable and committed to their future than ever before." He also said, "Youth voices in politics need to be heard and supported because their perspectives are essential to our future."

For Junior Ebanks, an agribusiness entrepreneur in Jamaica, even though the effects of climate change can deter interest in agriculture, it was access to modern technology that drove his desire to pursue agriculture. "After I introduced the process of fertigation (using water pressure to distribute fertilizer) to the 235 members of the water users group I'm responsible for we eventually saw a peak of up to 50 percent increase in youth engagement."

Ebanks called for government officials to help empower youth. He said, "Governments should provide youth with the resources they need to succeed, build capacity and lead in the development of new technology." He continued, "At the end of the day, our environment is very crucial and important to the development of agriculture in the region."

Additional topics discussed included: The need for incentives to attract youth to agriculture; the importance of private sector partnerships for sustainable development; increased natural disasters and the need for risk management tools such as agriculture insurance; the need for more direct access to markets; improved gender related policies;; leveraging technology to provide extension services; and the use of innovative technology to generate increased interest and involvement among youth in agriculture 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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