

IICA – ‘NEW AGRICULTURE’ TO DRIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEEPEN REGIONAL INTEGRATION

“We, in the Caribbean cannot develop to be world class societies if we depend on others to produce what we eat, drink and wear.” – Dr. Cheston Brathwaite

Washington, D.C., June 20, 2007 - Dr. Chelston Brathwaite, Director General of The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on agriculture (IICA), reminded his audience today during a panel discussion at the ‘Conference on the Caribbean – A 20/20 Vision’ in Washington, D.C. that food is not only a basic right, but access to food is the most basic requirement for social equity and peace in our world.

Speaking before Heads of States of Governments from the Caribbean, local and international government officials and representatives from the public and private sector, Brathwaite emphasized the strength and importance of the ‘new agriculture,’ now encompassing food, feed, fiber and fuel. He said, “There is a prevailing myth in the development literature that agriculture’s importance declines as a county develops.” He stated, “Food is a critical input for sustainable development – Agriculture’s importance increases because of its linkages to agribusiness, the food industry, input supplies, tourism, agro-industry, health and nutrition and its contribution to rural prosperity which is a prerequisite for balanced development, social equity and social peace.”

According to Brathwaite, the agricultural sector contributes more than 25% of the regions GDP; more than 40% of its exports and provides jobs for thousands of rural families – and as a result, greater investment is urgently needed. Though areas of potential investment are wide spread throughout the region, Brathwaite called for further investment in Organic Agriculture; Herbal and Medicinal products; Agro-energy; Agro-biotechnology; Food for Ethnic Markets; Agro-tourism and more efficient and innovative Production From the Sea.

“Gone are the days of protected markets and preferential treatment,” exclaimed Brathwaite.” As maintained by his administration, the agricultural sector must now find new building blocks for the ‘new agriculture’ of the 21st century which needs to support food security, energy availability and competitiveness as well as job creation. In order to achieve this, greater regional integration and partnerships are critical.

To help achieve regional integration, IICA has intensified its activities to face these new global agricultural challenges by fostering relationships and creating new strategic alliances with the public and private sectors in the region.

By partnering with regional entities such as the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA) and the Caribbean Tourism Organization, (CTO) IICA is able to identify and address any synergistic concerns between the agriculture sector and tourism industry within in the Americas.

Recognizing the fundamental role of youth and the ‘new agriculture’, the Institute has established a Youth Foundation for Agribusiness and a ‘Forum for Young Leaders’ which will result in a cadre of trained leaders for the sector in the future.

Conference on the Caribbean – A 20/20 Vision

The Conference aims to strengthen the existing relationship between the U.S. and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a 15 Caribbean nation group. It further seeks to develop future relationships and focus on the way forward to achieve developmental objectives for the Caribbean. The event is being held prior to the 2008 implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy. That plan calls for one large market of CARICOM’s member states to provide better opportunities to produce and sell Caribbean goods and services to foreign markets while attracting investment to the region.

The 15 CARICOM members are: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

During the 3 days of talks, conference participants will discuss the promotion of Caribbean trade and tourism, competitiveness and investment, and ways to provide better social and economic equity.

Other topics to be addressed include the threat of natural disaster and terrorism to the Caribbean region, job creation for youth in the region, drug smuggling, bringing more stability to Haiti and the strengthening of the Caribbean diaspora communities in the United States, which refers to Caribbean populations who have migrated to the US. This group is of significant importance for CARICOM economies because collectively, they send billions of dollars in remittances home each year.