

FOREWORD

The agricultural sector plays a pivotal role in the lives of people in the Americas, providing food as well as employment for the population and constituting the base of our agro industry. In the Caribbean, it is this sector that must also feed the millions of tourists that visit our shores. In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), some 22,4% of the population resides in rural communities, compared to 50,8% in the rest of the world. This underlines the fact that our region has a higher level of urbanization than the rest of the world, and emphasizes the need for the modernization of agriculture through capacity building, to attain higher levels of productivity, since only a quarter of the population has the responsibility to feed the entire hemisphere.

Agriculture's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2007 was 5,2%, and the sector employed 19% of the population. This mismatch between the contribution of the sector to GDP and the percentage of the labour force it employs speaks to the relatively low level of productivity and translates into lower levels of income in the agricultural sector compared to the rest of the economy. Although the scenario in LAC is somewhat better than the average situation in the world, where agricultural GDP is 4% and the sector employs 35% of the labour force, this is no cause for complacency.

The fact is we underestimate the value of the sector when we evaluate its worth and contribution solely in terms of GDP contribution. When the various linkages between agriculture



and the other sectors of the economy are properly evaluated, agriculture becomes more than food on the table.

Research has shown that growth in the overall economy is driven largely by growth in the agricultural sector because, when this sector grows, it reverberates throughout the economy. On average, a \$1,00 increase in agricultural production generates \$2,32 of growth in the overall economy. This is because increases in agricultural income and production lead to higher demand for consumer goods as well as for agricultural supplies and services. It is also the case that growth in agricultural production generates employment in processing, distribution and storage activities, in order to handle increased production volume.

The positive multiplier effect of growth in this sector must be harnessed through modernization in order to gain stronger economies in LAC, and improve rural livelihoods. The current world food prices should also give the region additional impetus to build local capacity in order to produce more of the food we consume. This is an imperative, not only from the standpoint of our farmers benefiting from increased prices for their products, but also to reverse the high levels of poverty that characterize rural communities in LAC.

There is therefore an urgent call for the region to deliberately put in place appropriate measures to build local capacity in the agricultural sector to enhance production and productivity in order to increase food security and incomes in the rural areas. In this regard, for the 2008–2009 Ministerial process and the Fifth Ministerial Meeting “Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas”, we are emphasizing the theme “*Building Capacity for Enhancing Food Security and Rural Life in the Americas*”.

This process builds on the two (2) strategic orientations emphasized in the Fourth Ministerial Meeting held in Guatemala in 2007:

- to promote with the agricultural stakeholders a broad based approach to thinking and acting in agriculture and the rural milieu and,

- “Working together” to improve agriculture and rural life in the Americas.

These two strategic orientations, increasingly adopted by the actors of agriculture and rural life in the Americas, offer a promising way to create a renewed partnership and a national commitment to the sustainable development of agriculture and rural milieu, and their reappraisal.

The commitment made by our colleagues and predecessors for the last 8 years at the Ministerial Process has also been supported, reflected and mandated by the Heads of State and Government within the context of the Summit of the Americas process when they acknowledged the fundamental importance of agriculture and rural life for the development of countries, and pledged to undertake actions aimed at bringing about improvements in both.

This finds its expression in the *AGRO 2003-2015 Plan for Agriculture and Rural Life*, which is the centerpiece of the Ministerial Process “Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas.”

The Ministerial Process is a hemispheric effort focusing on dialogue, consensus building and commitment, and encompassing a number of objectives and strategic actions the goal of which is the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural milieu.

The Ministerial Meeting is the highest level political forum, within this Process, and the highest level body for reaching agreement by consensus, in response to the commitments assumed by the Heads of State and Government in the context of the Summit of the Americas process.

Following the Ministerial Meeting, the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA) will hold its XV Regular Meeting. The IABA is the highest governing body of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), an inter-american



organization that acts as Secretariat of the Ministerial Process. In this governing body, the Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas establish the strategic guidelines needed to ensure that IICA's activities support the countries' efforts to implement the Hemispheric Ministerial Agreements adopted at the Ministerial Meetings "Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas".

The Government of Jamaica is therefore pleased and honoured to host these important events and would like to extend a cordial invitation to all its partners and friends in this process to renew and reenergize their commitment to work together, with a wide view of agriculture and rural life, for the reappraising of rural milieus and the reenergizing of our rural economies.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Tufton", followed by a horizontal line.

Dr. The Honourable Christopher Tufton
Minister of Agriculture of Jamaica