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*Building Capacity for Enhancing Food Security and Rural Life in the Americas*

## **IABA grants Inter-American Awards in the Rural Sector**

*The former Agriculture Minister of Brazil, Roberto Rodrigues, and the Bolivian scientist, Alejandro Bonifacio, share the prestigious Inter-American Agricultural Medal.*

**Montego Bay, Jamaica, 30 October (IICA).** The Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA), which has just concluded its Fifteenth Regular Meeting in this Jamaican city, today announced the Inter-American Awards in the Rural Sector for 2008-2009.

These awards recognize outstanding contributions made by citizens and institutions of the Americas to the development of agriculture and the improvement of rural life.

The **Inter-American Agricultural Medal** is shared by the former Minister of Agriculture of Brazil, Roberto Rodrigues, and by the Bolivian scientist Alejandro Bonifacio.

Mr. Rodrigues is a prominent agricultural business leader. During his term as Minister, he spearheaded comprehensive institutional reforms, promoted new laws on biotechnology, organic products, rural insurance and new marketing standards. He is widely credited with having laid the foundations for a modern agriculture in Brazil.

Mr. Bonifacio, for his part, is a distinguished researcher, whose most important work has been linked to the genetic improvement of quinoa. His tenacity and determination made it possible to recover and develop the germplasm bank currently maintained by the Ministry of Agriculture of Bolivia.

This medal recognizes outstanding contributions to the development of sustainable agriculture and the improvement of rural life in the honorees' own country and, in particular, honors individuals whose contributions have impacted other countries in the Americas or the world. This award, introduced in 1958, is the most prestigious, and consists of a medal, a scroll and a cash prize of US\$10,000.

The **Inter-American Award for the Contribution of Women to Rural Development** went to Ms. Susana Mejillones, of Bolivia, who will receive a medal, a scroll and US\$5,000. This award is granted to women who have promoted women's participation in rural development and made significant contributions to improving the quality of life in rural communities.

Mejillones has waged a tireless fight for equal opportunities for men and women, and particularly for her country's peasant farmers and indigenous people.

The **Inter-American Award for Institutional Contributions to Agricultural and Rural Development** went to the Fundación de Comunicaciones, Capacitación y Cultura del Agro (FUCOA), of Chile.

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This award is extended to a public or private organization, company, university or NGO of the Member States of IICA, in recognition of its outstanding contribution to the improvement of sustainable agriculture and rural life in one or more countries of the Americas.

FUCOA is renowned for its efforts to preserve the rural *campesino* culture that represents Chile's national roots and identity.

The winner of the **Inter-American Award for Young Professionals** was Rodolfo Bezerra of Meneses Lobato da Costa, of Brazil.

This award is bestowed on professionals under the age of 35 who have distinguished themselves for their professional contributions and have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to service, initiative and a vocation to work for the development of sustainable agriculture and the well-being of rural communities.

It consists of a medal, a scroll and a scholarship to participate in IICA's Program for Young Leaders. If the winner has already participated in this course, he will receive a scholarship for US\$10,000 to participate in a similar initiative that will guarantee the development of his leadership skills.

Bezerra is honored for his efforts to promote an entrepreneurial attitude among young people and for his defense of important social causes aimed at improving living conditions for rural youth.

The **Inter-American Award for Innovative Rural Producers** was awarded to the Federación de Cooperativas NGEN, of Chile.

The prize is awarded to producers (individuals or groups) who have made outstanding contributions, especially in innovations in production, and who represent an example for national producers and those in other countries of the hemisphere. The award consists of a medal, a scroll and US\$ 5,000.

The Federación de Cooperativas NGEN, constituted by 120 Pehuenche women, applies a management model that is unique in the country, in activities such as horticulture under plastic, apiculture, sheep production and harvesting of pine nuts. It seeks to improve the position of women within the community.

In the category of the **Inter-American Agricultural Award for Young Professionals**, Karen Latoya Tamasa, of Jamaica, and Carol Thompson, of Barbados received an **honorable mention**.

Tamasa plays an active role in organizing youth groups and encourages other young people to become involved in agriculture. Thompson, for her part, contributes to local development through the production of a species of sheep known as *black belly sheep*, which are native to the country.



*Press Release*



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Two distinguished agriculture professionals of the Americas received posthumous awards: Assefaw Tewolde of Mexico and Roberto Villeda Toledo of Honduras.

Tewolde, a distinguished academic and an expert in biotechnology, was the director and founder of IICA's Hemispheric Program in Biotechnology and Biosafety. Villeda Toledo, meanwhile, played a prominent role in agricultural institutions and worked to harmonize Central American policies and promote regional integration from the perspective of agriculture.

**For more information, contact**  
[patricia.leon@iica.int](mailto:patricia.leon@iica.int)