



IICA Office in Uruguay again certified by ISO

ISO 9001 is granted by international certification organization.

Montevideo, Uruguay, December 2009 (IICA). The Office of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in Uruguay once again received the ISO 9001:2008 certification from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

This certification was granted following a thorough audit of institutional performance by the Uruguayan Technical Standards Unit (UNIT), which was validated internationally by the Spanish Standardization and Certification Association (AENOR).

The Office was certified for the first time in 2006 and retained its certification in 2007 and 2008.

The audit report identified no “nonconformities,” which means that the Office has a solid and integrated management system whose principal strengths are:

- a) the commitment of the administration and all the personnel,
- b) the monitoring of processes and activities with informatics tools, and
- c) A clear emphasis on the needs of clients.

Five years ago, the Office decided to apply a management approach known as the Continuous Improvement Process (CIP), which is aimed at making technical cooperation services more effective and efficient.

“This approach is based on the application of what is known as the Deming Cycle (plan-do-check-act), a problem-solving process the ultimate goal of which is to create intelligent organizations. Such organizations, rather than attempting to place blame, grow by learning from and capitalizing on their mistakes,” explained IICA Representative Manuel Otero.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) promotes the development of international standards, and is responsible for standardizing product and safety standards in businesses and organizations worldwide.

In applying the CIP, the Office chose to apply the ISO 9001:2008 standard, which calls for a certifiable audit to be conducted in and outside the country.

According to Otero “The fact that the management of our Office has been certified by the ISO verifies that we are giving due consideration to the technical and support processes that have a direct and indirect influence on the cooperation we provide in this country.”

Under the ISO quality management system, all activities must be represented on a process map and carried out correctly to ensure certification.

The same system checks to see that all processes are under control and evaluates the extent to which they are being carried out and the satisfaction of clients. “That is how we detect deviations, opportunities for improvement and needed corrective action,” Otero added.

The Office must also define a policy, objectives and high-quality plans. This ensures that all certified activities respect the laws of the country and comply with IICA rules and procedures. He went on to say “We are in compliance with IICA’s Medium Term Plan, the National and Regional Technical Cooperation Agendas and the Annual Action Plan.”

The level of satisfaction of external and internal clients (institutional partners, Office personnel and staff members at Headquarters) is determined via questionnaires that measure the perception they have of the services provided by the Office. The surveys are conducted every year and are complemented with specific surveys conducted in connection with seminars, workshops and training events.

The quality certification obtained by the Office has led to improved performance thanks to:

- a) **Quality plans** based on priority actions identified in the Annual Action Plan, which make it possible to follow up on implementation of programmed activities.
- b) **An annual record of activities**, prepared using an Excel template, which includes all activities programmed and not programmed. This repository includes agendas, documents, lists of participants, photographs, survey results and any material of interest on specific activities. It helps to simplify the preparation of reports and serves as an institutional memory.
- c) **A weekly schedule of events** which the Office has been using has been using for more than a year and a half to display the activities of the Representative and the technical team in order to keep track of activities.
- d) **The Integrated Management Table (IMT)**, still in the developmental stage, is a useful management tool with strategic indicators and plans of action for monitoring achievement of objectives.
- e) **A strategic partnerships map**, which monitors the status and type of relationship with IICA’s major strategic partners.
- f) **An annual training program**, together with a Knowledge Matrix, identifies personnel training and development needs and makes it possible to plan changes in technology, institutional strategies and orientation for new personnel. Also included in the program are personnel initiatives for professional technical upgrading.
- g) **An opportunities for improvement system**, which Office personnel use to offer individual or group suggestions on actions aimed at the continuous improvement of the system.

For further information;
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