

IICA is supporting the efforts of Haiti's Ministry of Agriculture to cope with the emergency

IICA Director General Víctor Villalobos is coordinating the actions involved, working closely with the Minister of Agriculture of Haiti, Joanas Gué.

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 20 January 2010 (IICA). In response to the emergency in Haiti caused by the 12 January earthquake that registered 7.3 on the Richter scale, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) took steps to provide support for Haiti's agricultural sector.

Immediately after the tragedy occurred, the Institute's Director General, Víctor Villalobos, ordered that an Ad Hoc Haiti Support Committee be set up, which organized an initial mission to assist Haiti's Ministry of Agriculture and IICA's staff in the country. Spearheaded by the IICA Representative in Haiti and comprised of Institute officials in the Dominican Republic, the mission received support from the Ministry of Agriculture (SEA) in Santo Domingo.

The mission traveled to Haiti on 17 January. After providing essential assistance to IICA/Haiti staff and making sure they were well taken care of, the mission met with the Minister of Agriculture of Haiti, Joanas Gué, and several ministry officials. Gué gave details of the situation of his personnel and the damage suffered by the ministry's infrastructure.

The Haitian minister stressed the need to support his country's agricultural sector and take advantage of the new labor force available in rural areas to implement short- and medium-term actions designed to mitigate against the problem of hunger, which will become more acute as international aid tails off.

In light of the minister's comments, the mission is working in close coordination with the ministry, which is now operating out of IICA's premises in Haiti. Other international organizations whose buildings were destroyed in the disaster are also coordinating their actions from the Institute's Offices on the island.

After completing its first mission, IICA established an operations center in the Dominican Republic to coordinate its assistance to Haiti. The center's actions so far include coordinating joint work with the SEA and international organizations such as the IDB, World Bank, PADF, and FAO. Implementation of projects of special interest to Haiti's Ministry of Agriculture will be coordinated with FAO.

IICA is also preparing a second coordinated mission to Haiti that will depart on 21 January. In coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, IICA will be conducting an assessment and evaluation of the damage suffered by Haiti's agricultural sector. The information gathered will be shared with other ministries and international organizations. With support from FAO, the mission will be distributing basic items, including food and water, among the staff of Haiti's Ministry of Agriculture and the IICA Office. The merchandise will be transported in three trucks supplied by the SEA and one contributed by IICA.

The second mission will also be used to lay the groundwork with the Ministry of Agriculture for a short-term plan containing a strategy for land preparation, production with a short growing cycle and marketing channels.

In the weeks ahead, IICA will continue to coordinate closely with Haiti's Ministry of Agriculture, pool efforts with other international technical cooperation and funding agencies, and organize a third support mission.

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