



Promoting rural prosperity in the Americas

Hemispheric agricultural information service celebrates tenth anniversary

Agricultural information specialists from the hemisphere to meet in Costa Rica

San Jose, Costa Rica, July 2009 (IICA). The Agricultural Information and Documentation Service of the Americas (SIDALC), which operates a mega database comprising more than 2 million entries, brings together some 300 information specialists in a virtual community and receives 25 thousand hits on its Website every day, will celebrate its tenth anniversary this year.

SIDALC is an international agricultural, livestock, forestry and environmental information service which enables institutions in 20 countries of the hemisphere to share information services and provide access to their repositories of knowledge for others outside the region.

The Service, administered by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and coordinated by the Orton Commemorative Library, operates the AGRI2000 mega database, which contains specialized collections on agriculture and related sciences from 162 information centers throughout the hemisphere and provides access to other internationally renowned libraries.

SIDALC is also a community of practice that enables 300 information specialists to share experiences, discuss technical problems and develop or propose methodologies or procedures to be implemented in the different information units.

According to the Head of IICA's Documentation and Publications Unit, Federico Sancho, "In these ten years, SIDALC has acquired a reputation as a very unique service, one that links sources of information in all parts of the hemisphere, and has become the most important platform for dialogue in the field of agricultural information."

Another accomplishment of the Service is the increase in the number of visits to its Website, thanks to digitization by Google, the search engine that controls 64% of the search market worldwide (Newsweek 2009). As a result of this partnership, visits rose from 3000 in 2007 to more than 1.2 million in July of this year, he added.

Through SIDALC, IICA fulfills its mission of improving agriculture and rural life in the Americas, given that the management of information and knowledge is a basic input for decision making and in the fields of education, training, research, innovation, competitiveness and sustainable development.

"Today, our most important challenge is to ensure that these accomplishments reach the final user: the producers, who are the decision makers in rural territories and do not necessarily have access to computers," he noted.

With that objective in mind, specialists from throughout the hemisphere will meet in Turrialba, Costa Rica, on September 24-25 to reflect on what SIDALC should become over the next ten years.

Participants in the meeting, entitled “SIDALC 10: The future of agricultural information services and professionals in the Americas,” will analyze the current state of the Service, learn about the experiences of the member countries since they joined SIDALC, and discuss new trends and tools in the management of information worldwide.

In addition, actions will be proposed to strengthen information networks and services in the countries and to encourage the development of policies and on-line national agricultural catalogues.

“We want to position SIDALC, in the medium term, as the principal point of access to information on agriculture and the environment in the Americas,” Sancho stated. To this end, mechanisms will be proposed at the meeting to ensure an efficient exchange of information among its members and that the needs of users are met.

In conjunction with the meeting, a course will be held from September 21-23. It will focus on training the personnel of libraries specializing in agriculture and the environment in Latin America and the Caribbean to use Web 2.0 applications to manage information and knowledge.

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