



Promoting Prosperity in the Rural Communities of the Americas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**EDUCATION IS KEY TO COMBATING
POTENTIAL THREAT OF AVIAN FLU IN THE AMERICAS, SAYS IICA**

IICA's Deputy Director General briefs OAS on avian influenza activity

WASHINGTON, D.C., Wednesday, November 14, 2007 – The potential threat of Avian Influenza was again center stage today as the Organization of American States (OAS) brought together international agencies, government officials and representatives from the private sector to address activities around potential pandemic concerns for the region.

Moderated by the OAS Department of Sustainable Development, representatives from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Department of Homeland Security, State University of New York at Buffalo Medical Director Ecology and Environment, Inc., the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and the National Council for Science and the Environment, came together to discuss the potential social, health and economic impact, should avian influenza reach the Americas.

Emphasizing the need for greater communication and strengthening of regional capacity, IICA's Deputy Director General, Jim Butler, called for stronger awareness and enhanced national veterinary services. According to Butler, the changes taking place in global food trade and the new trends in consumer preferences combine to promote the formulation and application of needed food safety policies. He also emphasized the influential role the private sector and consumers play in determining market characteristics and in the development of standards. He said, "In the Americas there are \$125 billion in agricultural exports and \$85 billion in imports facilitated by animal health and food safety regulations, standards, norms or actions such as inspection."

In collaboration with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and PAHO, IICA has developed an instrument known as Performance, Vision and Strategy (PVS). It is intended to help characterize the performance of national veterinary services. Currently applied in 13 countries, the PVS instrument helps countries establish the level of performance of the organization, promotes a vision common to the private and public sectors, defines well grounded priorities and facilitate strategic planning.

According to Butler, even though the Institute has focused on upgrading technical expertise and promoted the development of human and financial capital, there is still the need to bring awareness in order to recognize the potential risk a pandemic due to novel influenza viruses, such as the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of avian influenza, would pose to our societies and citizens.

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This potential threat carries severe consequences for animal and human health, the global economy and stability. Underscoring international partnerships, he said, “We must continually work together in combating avian and pandemic influenza and to identify priority areas for further action so that we can develop regional avian and pandemic influenza preparedness and response plans.”

ABOUT IICA

IICA is the specialized agency for agriculture and the rural milieu of the Inter-American System, whose purpose is to provide innovative technical cooperation to the Member States, with a view to achieving their sustainable development in aid of the peoples of the Americas. Its vision is to be the leading agricultural institution in the Americas and the partner of choice by virtue of the quality of the technical cooperation it provides in response to the needs of Member States, and its contributions to sustainable agricultural development, food security and rural prosperity.

For additional information, please go to: <http://www.iica.int>

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