



In a presentation to the Mexican Senate, the Director General called for support for innovation in agriculture

Víctor M. Villalobos took part in a forum held at Mexico's Senate entitled "The kind of country we want and the countryside's role in building it."

"How are we to feed such a huge global population?" That was the question that the Director General of IICA, Víctor M. Villalobos, put to his audience in the Senate. His answer? **"Innovation.** In other words, we need to do things differently and better than we have been doing them for the last four decades."

The Director General was a special guest at the forum "The kind of country we want and the countryside's role in building it."

During his presentation, entitled "Innovation for the development of the agricultural sector," Villalobos said agriculture was at the mercy of developments in other areas that were beyond its control. The price volatility of recent years was an economic problem, and increasingly frequent natural disasters were the product of climate change.

Agriculture was also dependent on macroeconomic and trade policies, the Director General said.

“Our response to the situation should be to develop State policies, decided by each country based on its particular characteristics, laws and political, social and economic context. The important thing is to institute long-term policies designed to achieve high-impact objectives and agreed upon by the different stakeholders, so they are sustainable over time,” Villalobos added.

He said IICA had identified **four issues and objectives that all the countries needed to focus on**, which were the same goals as those of the technical cooperation that his institution provided:

- Raise productivity and make the agricultural sector more competitive.
- Enhance agriculture’s contribution to the development of rural territories and the well-being of rural dwellers.
- Improve agriculture’s capacity to mitigate the effects of climate change and adapt to them, making better use of natural resources.
- Increase agriculture’s contribution to food security.

“Furthermore,” he said, “there is a key element we must consider if we want to tap the **agricultural sector’s potential to generate economic growth and social well-being: innovation.**”

“We need to promote the national innovation systems by instituting public policies to foster innovation and investing the resources required to do so – resources that may be available in the countries themselves.”

Villalobos believes that institutional support is vital and urgently needed for the **two pillars** of innovation systems: **research** and development, and **human capital formation**.

“The NARIs, created as they were in the 1960s, are not equipped to meet the research needs of 21st century agriculture. The financial and opportunity costs involved in maintaining them are very high, while their productivity is very low. We urgently need to rethink the way they are structured and operate and, of course, invest in them,” the Director General continued.

In concluding his remarks, Villalobos urged the lawmakers of both houses of congress and the business and rural leaders present to consider the potential of agriculture, which could become an “engine for development” because it played such a key role in many different areas:

- In the energy field, because it consumes a great deal of energy but is also a source of environmentally friendly alternatives.

- In financial markets, because we have already seen the global consequences of the volatile prices of raw materials, food and inputs for agricultural production.
- In environmental matters, because agriculture is both a cause of climate change and a solution to the problem, and has an important role to play in the use and conservation of natural resources for future generations.
- In many other fields, such as employment, health, education and, of course, food. Poverty is such an important issue and is concentrated in rural territories. A number of studies have shown that the growth of the agricultural sector does more to reduce poverty than the growth of any other sector.

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IICA delivers message from ministers of agriculture to preparatory meeting for the next Summit of the Americas

The Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) is meeting in the U.S. capital.



IICA presented the results of the recent Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas to the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG), which is meeting in Washington, D.C.

Representatives of the 34 Member States that make up the SIRG are meeting to prepare the text that the leaders of the hemisphere will sign at

the Sixth Summit of the Americas (Colombia, April 2012).

The ministers of agriculture gathered in San Jose, Costa Rica, on October 19-21 of this year to attend the Ministerial Meeting, the motto of which was “Sowing Innovation to Harvest Prosperity.” At the close of three days of dialogue, they approved a declaration in which they underscored the importance of increasing investment in agriculture as a means of reducing hunger and poverty and, in this way, helping to improve social stability in the hemisphere.

The Ministerial Declaration was delivered to Colombia, the country that is chairing the SIRG and will host the Sixth Summit. The goal was for the Heads of State and Government accept the document and renew their commitment to promoting agricultural and rural development.

IICA presented the declaration to the SIRG at the request of the Chair of the Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas, Gloria Abraham, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock Farming of Costa Rica.

Addressing the SIRG, Hector Iturbe, Special Advisor to the Director General of the Institute, underscored the key role innovation can and must play in making agriculture more productive, sustainable and inclusive. **Only through innovation can food security in the region be improved**, he affirmed.

In April 2012, the 34 Heads of State and Government of the hemisphere will attend the Sixth Summit of the Americas “**Connecting the Americas: Partners for Prosperity**” The most pressing challenges will be addressed from the perspective of four sub-topics: poverty and inequity, citizen security, natural disasters and access to technology.

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Latin America and the Caribbean need a new type of extension

IICA is focusing on this area once again, as part of its interactive vision of innovation.

Extension once again features on the technical cooperation agenda of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). Today, however, it is viewed differently, as part of the Agrifood Innovation Systems of the countries.

The issue has assumed crucial importance following a long period in which many countries in this region dismantled their agricultural extension systems.



“Today, extension should be used to provide solutions not only for production but also for other areas of agricultural management, based on a broader vision of agriculture that places emphasis on the adoption of the chain and territorial approaches, adapted to the situation in each particular area. Extension should be seen as an integral part of agricultural innovation processes,” said Manuel Miranda, a specialist in

Agricultural Extension Management, during a recent technical forum organized by the Institute on the subject.

The agricultural context, marked by growing technological globalization and the consolidation of the information society, on the one hand, and challenges such as climate change and food security, on the other, calls for a new type of extension that **takes the discipline beyond the linear approach to knowledge transfer** (researcher-producer), offering a single technological solution to different problems.

The type of extension that IICA now advocates **is based on multiple models** keyed to the situation of specific producers, territories and production chains. These models also include other components designed to make it possible to:

- plan differentiated and participatory intervention strategies, based on users' needs;
- monitor and evaluate the actions undertaken;
- underpin efforts with communications tools, to facilitate the flow of information and interaction among all the stakeholders, using customized models for work with producers that make the task of extension workers easier; and, especially
- enhance the capabilities of producers, extension workers and the staff of the institutions that support them, so they can adopt, adapt, learn and change practices.

Miranda remarked that, although a new approach had been adopted, the extension workers and interdisciplinary teams involved in extension activities **should never lose sight of the importance of expertise related to agronomy, veterinary medicine and/or animal husbandry, or of the need to incorporate it into their work**, because the solutions they offered producers for improving their practices had to be technically sound.

As part of its efforts to make extension part of its cooperation portfolio, IICA has now become a member of the Steering Committee of the Latin American Rural Extension Network (RELASER) and will be taking part in the next world conference on the subject, due to be held in Nairobi, Kenya.

Examples from around the world

Two of the participants in the technical forum, Laurens Klerkx, of the University of Wageningen, in the Netherlands, and Mark Bell, of the University of California (Davis), explained the different ways in which the new approach to extension could be implemented.

Klerkx described the evolution of innovation, research and extension in his country, with the traditional approach being replaced with one based on a national innovation system involving both the public and private sectors, and with consumers heavily involved.

Bell spoke about the extension model of the University of California, which also included both the public and private sectors, linking the university with the producers and

industries of the different counties of the State of California, and working with producers of various kinds.

Both these examples incorporate the components of the approach proposed by IICA, although they do so in different ways. In each case, the system is geared to the activities of its users, harnesses information technologies (ICTs), trains producers, and certifies extension workers.

Furthermore, the extension work does not take place in isolation but as **part of an innovation system**, contributing to its strengthening and continuous improvement.

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IICA becomes a member of the Steering Committee of the Latin American Network of Rural Advisory Services

The network will work on extension issues related to the institutional framework and the relationship of public and private stakeholders; innovation; demand and the market; and small-scale agriculture and food security.



IICA is to be a member of the executive committee of the Latin American network of rural advisory services. The decision was taken at the Second Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on Rural Advisory Services, held in Managua, Nicaragua.

The network's aim is to provide a platform for the exchange **and discussion of experiences with advisory and related rural services**, to

promote changes in the field of extension in the organization's member countries.

The network will focus on four main areas of rural advisory and extension services, namely: the institutional framework and the relationship of public and private stakeholders; innovation; demand and the market; and small-scale agriculture and food security.

The Second Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on Rural Advisory Services was coordinated by the [Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services \(GFRAS\)](#), the Centro

Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (Rimisp), and the Research and Development Institute of Central American University.

Seventy people from 17 countries in the hemisphere took part, including representatives from Panama's Ministry of Agricultural Development, Argentina's INTA, Mexico's Rural Development Secretariat, Bolivia's Continuous Innovation Program, Belize's Ministry of Agriculture, and FAO, among others.

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IICA: European crisis to have greater effect on net food importing countries in the Americas

An economic crisis in Europe and the United States would push international food prices down in the short term, but they would continue to be high in the medium and long terms due to factors such as low interest rates, variations in exchange rates and uncertainty in the markets.

The heavy indebtedness of several European countries and their inability to honor these debts, in addition to the weak economic growth in the United States, could lead to a **recession that would have repercussions in Latin America and the Caribbean in the short term**, especially in net food exporting countries, with the impact being even greater in net food importing countries, in the medium and long terms.



This opinion was stated in a technical note distributed by the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Victor M. Villalobos, to agricultural authorities throughout the hemisphere.

The note reads “**Not all countries of the region have the same capacity to respond to a crisis**; some are more vulnerable than others because of their heavy dependence on food and energy imports, low monetary reserves and high levels of indebtedness and fiscal deficit.”

According to the note, in the last two years the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have enjoyed a strong recovery following the crisis of 2008, thanks to capital

flows, record prices for commodity exports, sound policies and steady growth in domestic credit, all of which resulted in 6% economic growth in 2010, which, according to the International Monetary Fund, is expected to be 4.5% in 2011.

The note adds “It is reasonable to expect that the slowdown in the world economy, and a likely recession, **will make it difficult for the countries of the region to maintain the current level of economic growth; indeed, it may below 4.5%.**”

There are five channels of transmission through which the heavy indebtedness of several European countries and weak economic growth in the United States could impact several member states of IICA:

- Decline in imports in the developed countries;
- Low interest rates, which discourage production, pushing the prices of agricultural goods upwards;
- Swings in the dollar exchange rate, which cause variations in international prices and the introduction of speculative capital;
- Oil prices and their effect on other raw materials;
- A global context characterized by risk and uncertainty.

The situation in Europe and the United States also creates challenges and opportunities for agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to the note, which must be addressed with effective, comprehensive policies. These challenges are:

- To avoid trade distortions, which can increase domestic prices and affect food and nutritional security in the countries.
- To prevent increases in the international prices of food from increasing inflation at the national level.
- To strengthen domestic markets in light of the possible decline in exports to Europe and the United States.
- To address the imperfections in the market that prevent lower international oil prices from being transmitted to other products and inputs.
- To respond promptly to declines in agricultural demand in other nations, such as China, and promote intraregional trade.
- To encourage domestic production of food, in particular in those net importing countries in a vulnerable macroeconomic position.

“It is time to take advantage of the strengths of the region, designing policies aimed at lowering transaction costs, promoting more efficient and sustainable use of natural resources, improving infrastructure and investing in human capital and in innovation, which are more long-term proposals, to enable agriculture to contribute to food security and efforts to reduce poverty in the hemisphere,” said Villalobos.

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IICA and Israel share experiences in agricultural innovation and development

An official delegation from Israel visited IICA Headquarters to explore similarities between actions within the agricultural industry of that country and the technical cooperation that the Institute provides in the Americas.



A desire to find ways **to collaborate with the countries of the Americas**, especially in the area of transferring agricultural innovations to farmers, prompted the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Israel to seek a meeting with IICA authorities.

An official Israeli delegation, headed by Minister Orit Noked, visited the Headquarters of IICA in Costa Rica, to explain how research and development has transformed agriculture into one of the most productive sectors in her country, outpacing even commerce and transportation.

James French, Director of Technical Cooperation at IICA, stated that the growth of agriculture in Israel is based on strategic decisions taken years ago, such as to increase the budget earmarked for innovation and the transfer of knowledge from the laboratory to the countryside.

Mr. French, accompanied by managers and coordinators of IICA's cooperation programs, **outlined the manner in which the Institute provides technical cooperation** in agriculture to the countries of the Americas.

“We have Offices in 34 Member States, and specialists in different disciplines in each one, who share their knowledge via thematic networks,” he said.

Also participating in the meeting were the Israeli Ambassador to Costa Rica, Daniel Saban, and the Agricultural Attaché of the Israeli Embassy in the United States, Zvi Herman, who suggested three possible areas for collaboration with IICA: to **identify agribusiness opportunities in international markets**; to provide support in complying with trade requirements for exporting to the U.S. market; and to strengthen those extension services that share innovations in agriculture with producers.

“The missions of IICA and the Ministry of Agriculture of Israel are very similar in that are aimed at making agriculture competitive and sustainable and improving the quality of life in rural territories,” said Minister Noked.

Ambassador Saban invited the specialists from IICA and its member countries to participate in the Agritech Fair, to be held in Tel Aviv in May 2012, where the more recent technological advances in the Israeli agricultural sector will be on display.

“Thanks to research and development, the agricultural extension services of Israel are now of the highest quality. As a result, in contrast with what is happening in other countries, young people in Israel are attracted to agriculture, finding it challenging and sophisticated,” said Zvi Herman.

The delegation called attention to successful cases of cooperation with China, India and several countries in Africa, where agricultural techniques developed in Israel have been applied.

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Youth Panelists Call for Increased Support for Agricultural Development from Governments

“In Canada, a large majority of the population lives in urban areas so the voice of the 2% of farmers in the rural areas can sometimes get lost,” said Heather Fulton, a youth representative from Canada’s Young Farmers Forum and one of four young entrepreneurs who participated in the 6th Annual ‘**IICA DAY**’ celebration entitled, ‘**The Impact of Youth and Innovation in Agriculture in Latin**



American and the Caribbean (LAC).’ “Provincial and national governments play a large role in helping youth advancement in business,” she continued.

The event was organized by IICA and hosted by the Secretariat for External Relations of the Organization of American States (OAS).

During the two hour session, **youth panelists from Canada, Jamaica, Peru, and Uruguay** involved in agriculture, shared challenges and rewards encountered in growing their agribusinesses. Key note speakers included UNESCO’s Senior Program Specialist

for the Regional Office in Uruguay, Ernesto Fernandez Polcuch, who linked agriculture, innovation, education, culture and youth as key pillars for UNESCO and also Gustavo Manrique, President of Soluciones Ambientales Totales (SAMBITO, S.A.), Ecuador.

“UNESCO’s Youth Program aims to help empower young people, reaching out to them, responding to their expectations and ideas and fostering useful and long-lasting skills, to name a few,” explained Polcuch.

“Agriculture should be incorporated into the science and technology agendas within UNESCO”, he added. Polcuch also made reference to the report prepared by UNESCO-IICA-FAO which highlights **the importance of education for the rural communities in the Americas.**

Gustavo Manrique, a graduate of EARTH University in Costa Rica, President of SAMBITO, underlined three agents of change – the sustainability of our planet, the fight to combat hunger and the struggle to secure the well-being for the millions of inhabitants of our nations. Manrique called on governments to increase support for investments in agriculture development. He said, “We need our governments to understand the benefits and impact of addressing environmental concerns including the reduction of carbon emissions, reforestation and global warming.”

During his brief remarks, the IICA Representative in the United States, David C. Hatch, reminded the audience of the significance of youth development for the future of our planet. “Just the day before yesterday we passed 7 billion people on earth with another 2 plus billion expected in the next 40 years or so - Yet, the average age of farmers today in this region is between 50-55 years old.” He posed the following questions, “Who will grow the food to meet the needs of our population and who will help us preserve and protect the environment as we meet the food needs of this world?”

Moderated by OAS Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Albert Ramdin, discussions focused on themes including: How best to mold youth as agents of change; Importance of social networks; Access to resources and; Policies and capacities necessary for long term youth involvement in agriculture development.

For Jorge Alamo Torres, an agronomist and entrepreneur from Peru, innovation and attitude are key. He is the founder of a group of young scientists. The group, J2XN, investigated the industrial use of the rice husk, discovering that it could produce an alcohol that could also be used as bio-fuel. “We found out that different uses and qualities can be used, including applying it towards medicine for cancer treatment,” he explained. In concluding remarks, Torres stressed that youth should be taken more seriously. “We are the present and future of national economies and local governments should make better efforts to understand and have faith in today’s youth.” He continued, “Our generation is forced to deal with the current environmental concerns.”

Heather Fulton who represented the Young Canadian Farmers Forum explained that she is currently working on her parents’ farm and also going through the process of succession

to purchase her parent's business. As a young female entrepreneur, Fulton feels that her generation is the best equipped to tackle today's world problems. "My generation seems to be the most optimistic about the future of agriculture and the most open minded to change and new ideas."

According to Martin Duran, an agronomist and technical specialist, his passion is influencing government policy for agriculture development in his country. He stressed that, "today's youth are stronger, more adaptable and committed to their future than ever before." He also said, "Youth voices in politics need to be heard and supported because their perspectives are essential to our future."

For Junior Ebanks, an agribusiness entrepreneur in Jamaica, even though the effects of climate change can deter interest in agriculture, it was access to modern technology that drove his desire to pursue agriculture. "After I introduced the process of fertigation (using water pressure to distribute fertilizer) to the 235 members of the water users group I'm responsible for we eventually saw a peak of up to 50 percent increase in youth engagement."

Ebanks called for government officials to help empower youth. He said, "**Governments should provide youth with the resources they need to succeed, build capacity and lead in the development of new technology.**" He continued, "At the end of the day, our environment is very crucial and important to the development of agriculture in the region."

Additional topics discussed included: The need for incentives to attract youth to agriculture; the importance of private sector partnerships for sustainable development; increased natural disasters and the need for risk management tools such as agriculture insurance; the need for more direct access to markets; improved gender related policies; leveraging technology to provide extension services; and the use of innovative technology to generate increased interest and involvement among youth in agriculture development.



Regional knowledge management strategy to be developed for research and innovation in the agricultural sector

The strategy is an initiative of the Central American System for the Integration of Agricultural Technology.

The members of the Central American System for the Integration of Agricultural Technology (SICTA) are to devise a regional knowledge management strategy to **facilitate research and innovation in the region's agricultural sector.**



Representatives of the national agricultural research institutes (NARIs) of the Central American countries and Mexico met at IICA to begin the process of designing the regional strategy, and to draft work plans related to knowledge management for their respective organizations.

“Knowledge management is one of the SICTA’s components. The members of the different networks need to be able to access and transfer the knowledge generated by the efforts to widely disseminate innovation experiences, and make such knowledge useful and available in production chains,” said Francisco Enciso, Executive Secretary of the SICTA.

International knowledge management specialist Edgar Cateriano was on hand to assist the participants with the creation of the regional strategy.

“For the strategy to work, it has to be promoted by the senior management of the institutions involved. This workshop is part of a major effort to make knowledge management an integral part of the SICTA,” Cateriano explained.

As part of the efforts to enhance the management of knowledge for agricultural research and technological innovation, **IICA’s Inter-American Information and Editorial Production Center has been monitoring the NARIs’ information services** with a view to promoting improvements.

“One of the most important components of knowledge management is the management of content and information. For that reason, since 2007 **we have evaluated the information services of the NARIs in Central America, the Dominican Republic and Mexico.** We have analyzed variables such as the availability of information other than what the institutions produce themselves, and the quality of their websites in terms of user-friendliness, ease of navigation, graphic design and content,” said Federico Sancho, Head of the Inter-American Information and Editorial Production Center.

The Central American System for the Integration of Agricultural Technology (SICTA) is a regional organization, created in 1996 by the Central American Agricultural Council, to contribute to the integration of the region by promoting technological change in agriculture.

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Leadership and citizen participation contribute to success of territorial rural development

As part of efforts of ECADERT, specialists from Central America, Brazil and Spain share experiences on way to increase impact of territorial action groups on quality of life in rural areas.

In January and February 2001, two earthquakes struck El Salvador, resulting in the loss of more than a thousand lives and major damage to housing and agricultural infrastructure. In the Department of Usulután however, all was not negative. Out of the tragedy emerged groups determined to work together to rebuild what had been destroyed. Today, these same groups are focusing their efforts on improving the standard of living for a portion of the population.



Luis Calles, Coordinator of the FUNDAMUNI projects (Foundation in Support of the Municipalities of El Salvador), explained that the activities of these groups also generated an additional benefit: **increased citizen participation in collective decision making**, which that would have been unthinkable before the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992.

“One objective of the participatory processes is to foster leadership among the people,” said Calles, who was in Costa Rica to attend an international methodological workshop on experiences in territorial rural development, held at the Headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

Meeting in San Jose, **specialists in the field from Central America, Brazil and Spain shared their success stories and discussed the obstacles that territorial action groups (GAT) face** in improving well-being in rural areas, where agricultural activities are usually both a source of food and the basis for business opportunities such as agroindustry and agrotourism.

Sona, in Panama, fits this description, according to Susana Morales, representative of the Local Management Center (CEGEL). In this district of the Province of Veraguas, the involvement of political authorities has also been key to achieving results, such as the existence of university extension services in the district so that young people can study without having to travel to the provincial capital.

However, as a result of this interaction with government bodies, community leaders sometimes become involved in political parties, according to Jose Luis Cardenas, Coordinator in Central America for the ETEA Foundation for Development and Cooperation of Spain. **“Those involved in territorial rural development must put electioneering, but not necessarily politics, aside,”** he said.

Systematization, the first step

How these participatory processes operate, and their impact on decision making, is unique to each rural territory. Therefore, the methods used to promote them vary, even within the same country.

This, according to Mario Samper, an IICA Rural Development Specialist , means that the **processes must be systematized**, which involves documenting and interpreting the experiences, actions and results of the GAT in order learn what does and does not work in territorial management, with the participation of social and institutional stakeholders in the territories.

These experiences, once systematized, **can be important for other groups** pursuing the same objective. “They become a tool for capacity building,” he added.

According to Jose Antonio Herrera, Manager of the *Medios de Vida* (livelihoods) Area the Catholic Relief Services Agency, for example, in Chalatenango, El Salvador, the systematization of the actions of the Jesucristo Campesino church in the 1990s served as the basis for formulating the territorial rural development strategy, especially the identity-related component.

The participants in the methodological workshop identified three of the challenges the countries participating in the Central America Strategy for Rural-Area Based Development (ECADERT) must still meet: **to ensure the more active and long-term involvement of all the pertinent state institutions**; to do more to empower women and increase their leadership skills; and to mobilize resources with which to promote citizen participation.

The meeting was organized by IICA and the Regional Platform for Technical Support to Territorial Rural Development, with support from the Spain-SICA Fund and collaboration from the ETEA Foundation, the Secretariat of Rural Development of Brazil and the Executive Secretariat of the Central American Agricultural Council (CAC).

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IICA supports biotechnology development in Paraguay

The country released a living modified organism for the first time and is preparing to launch a master's degree program in biotechnology.



Paraguay has approved the release of a living modified organism for the first time in its history, thanks to the implementation of the “National Agricultural and Forestry Biotechnology Policy and Program of Paraguay,” drawn up with IICA’s assistance.

The National University of Asunción is also set to launch a master’s degree program in biotechnology in March 2012 that will enable the country to reap

the benefits of this discipline for the development of production. The master’s degree program is also being consolidated with cooperation from the Institute.

The firm Monsanto Paraguay S.A. will be able to release MON531, known commercially as Bollgard cotton, following its recent approval by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

Approval was granted after the Agriculture and Forestry Biosafety Commission (COMBO) determined that MON531 did not pose a significant threat to the environment or to human or animal health, and that it produced higher yields than its conventional counterpart.

The National Biotechnology Policy and Program is designed to ensure that the country has access to the knowledge and technologies it needs, and that the productive sectors can make use of them.

Development of professionals

Creating a master’s degree program in biotechnology is a vital step in the development of this discipline in Paraguay. That was the conclusion reached by the participants in a series of meetings held on the subject, who included IICA officials, senior staff of the National University of Asunción and private sector representatives.

The graduate program is expected to be up and running by March 2012.

IICA specialists in biotechnology and biosafety have held meetings with officials from the university to define the curriculum, approach international agencies for scholarships, and assess the state of laboratories, among other activities.

The Institute will also assist with the hiring of the faculty for the course and the selection of students.

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IICA project to help Central American producers take better advantage of trade agreements

It is one of the first projects to be financed by the General Directorate's Competitive Fund. The Fund was created to encourage the Offices in the countries and the Institute's technical concentration programs to work together more closely.

A team of IICA specialists is working on the creation of a **tool that will provide** Central American agro-entrepreneurs with information about the **terms and conditions negotiated for their products** under various trade agreements.



Targeted primarily at small and medium-scale producers in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras, the tool **will provide access to information about the level of market access** achieved by those countries in the free trade agreements (FTAs) they have signed, including details of tariff preferences and non-tariff requirements.

The core objective is to enhance the institutional capabilities of the four countries mentioned, so they can take better advantage of the FTAs they have negotiated. A better understanding of the regulations and conditions agreed upon will also facilitate the taking of decisions about incentives for exports or investment.

This project is **one of the first to obtain financing from the General Directorate's Competitive Fund for Technical Cooperation Projects (FonDG)**, launched in 2011 to promote joint work by the Institute's Offices in its 34 Member States and the thematic networks of its six technical programs.

Juana Galván, a policies and trade specialist with IICA's Center for Strategic Analysis for Agriculture, says that some Central American agricultural producers and exporters have made only limited use of the FTAs because of their limited knowledge of the scope of the

treaties concerned. Hence, the need to devise a tool that provides clear and pertinent information.

The tool **will be based on product-specific digital data compiled previously by IICA** for the trade agreements of Costa Rica and Panama, which contains details of the market access conditions negotiated for certain agricultural products and other requirements for exports.

The tool will be updated continuously and, according to Galván, could be used with any FTA.

In addition to the Central American countries, it could be applied in any nation that has negotiated access to its markets, making the tool an international public good offered by IICA to its Member States.

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On-line training course on agro-ecotourism for English speakers under way

It is the first time that the course, developed by the OAS and IICA, has been held for English speakers.



“Agro-ecotourism: basic elements for implementing an innovative tourism project” is the name of the on-line course for which **48 participants** from the Caribbean countries **have signed up**, including owners of small or medium-sized farms and other people interested in agro-ecotourism as an option for the economy of their families.

The objective of the course is to enable the participants to acquire the theoretical and practical knowledge required to plan, coordinate and implement agro-ecotourism projects, so they can use the methodological tools available to solve the problems involved in the development of such enterprises.

The course focuses on rural tourism and presents agro-ecotourism as a potential source of alternative income in agricultural areas and a further option for domestic tourism industries.

During the **ten-week course**, the participants will study nine modules that will walk them through the process of developing and preparing a project suited to their local conditions, so that by the end of the course they will be equipped to design a new tourism enterprise. The course will end on March 12, 2012.

The topics covered include the tourism economy, the design of projects, the study of the agro-ecotourism market, the marketing of agro-ecotourism projects, the regular activities of an agro-ecotourism operation, human resource management in agro-ecotourism enterprises, and the financial feasibility of such undertakings.

This on-line course, which is being held **in English for the first time following seven similar activities in Spanish**, is an initiative of the Organization of American States (OAS), through the Educational Portal of the Americas, and IICA, through its Distance Education Center (CECADI).

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IICA organizes basic Spanish course for its staff in the Caribbean

The training activity is the brainchild of IICA's Directorate of Management and Regional Integration and its Association of International Professional Personnel.

A Course in Basic Spanish, targeted at Institute officials in the Caribbean countries, got under way on November 15. The objective is to enable **English-speaking IICA officials** to communicate better with their Spanish-speaking counterparts.



Promoted by IICA's Directorate of Management and Regional Integration (DGIR) and Association of International Professional Personnel (APPICA), the initiative is drawing on the technological infrastructure and methodological strategy of the Distance Education Center (CECADI).

By the time that the participants have completed the **28 live sessions and 20 additional hours of work**, they should be able to communicate in Spanish in everyday situations,

using common expressions and basic grammar. The topics covered include personal and family information, interaction in the workplace and details of the participants' countries.

The course will include live teaching sessions, using virtual meetings and lessons, and a series of complementary activities that students will carry out with technical and professional support from the facilitator. The course **will end on March 20, 2012.**

Officials from Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago are taking part in the initiative.

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