

# Agriculture, science and technology: an alliance for competitiveness

*Under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Costa Rican government and IICA the Ministers of Agriculture and top officials in the areas of science and technology from Central America, Mexico and the Dominican Republic will meet in May to discuss strategies to promote greater agricultural productivity and competitiveness.*

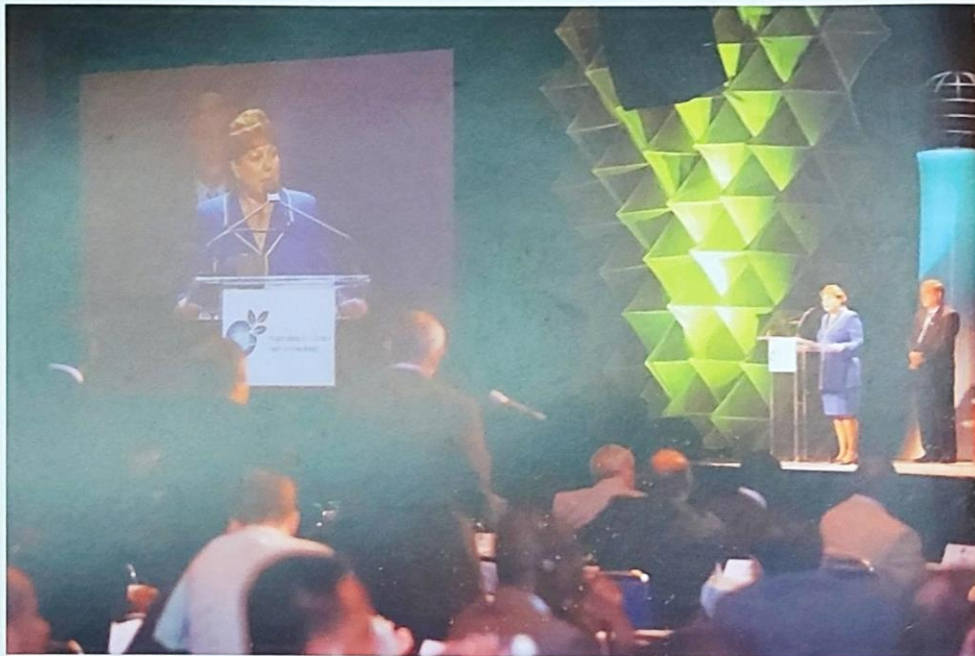
The "Ministerial Conference on the Use of Science and Technology for Improving Competitiveness in the Agricultural Sector" will be held this May in Costa Rica. The Conference will focus on strengthening or creating mechanisms to narrow the technological divide, improve productivity and increase trade.

The Conference will bring together top policymakers in the fields of agriculture, science and technology from the seven countries of Central America, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. It is scheduled for May 10-12 and will be held at the Headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), which serves as Secretariat for the meeting.

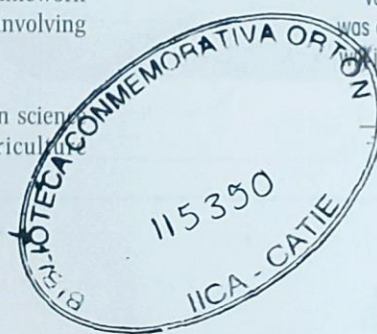
Current conditions in the agricultural sector show that technological innovations are not shared with the different participants along the agrifood chain of producers, processors, packers and distributors. Consequently, it is difficult to compete on increasingly open regional and international markets.

It is hoped that this meeting will lead to the development of a regional framework for cooperation, and constitute a first step in building an alliance involving agriculture, science and technology among these countries.

Efforts will also be made to promote a regional system for cooperation in science and technology between the public and private sectors to make agricultural



After the Sacramento Conference convened by US Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman, it became apparent that there was a need for regional meetings. The first to involve the Central American countries, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.



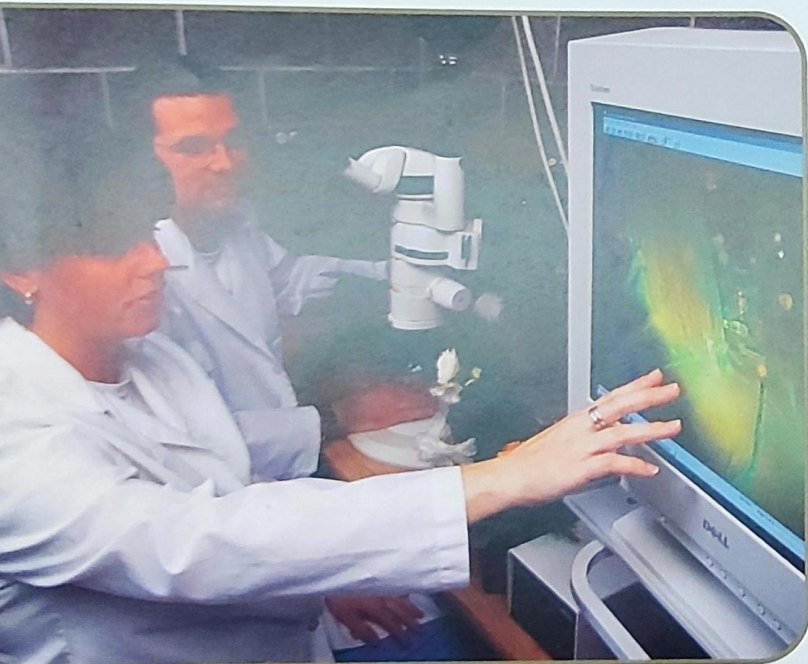
sustainable and competitive, raise international quality standards, and increase trade with other countries.

## From a regional perspective

In June 2003, in keeping with a U.S. commitment to strengthen food security worldwide, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman convened the "International Conference and Expo on Agricultural Science and Technology" in Sacramento, California. Sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development and the U.S. Departments of State and Agriculture, the meeting was attended by ministers from some 180 nations.

The Conference provided a forum to discuss the proposal Secretary Veneman put forth at the World Food Summit (June 2002), calling for donors and developing countries to work together to increase agricultural productivity for improving nutrition and ending hunger. The Sacramento Conference also afforded ministers from all parts of the world an opportunity to voice the needs of developing countries in the area of new food and agricultural technologies.

The need to further discuss this topic at the regional level led Secretary Veneman to propose a conference for the countries of Central America. As members of CORECA, invitations were also extended to Mexico and the Dominican Republic.



In addition to the ministers of agriculture and high-level government officials in the areas of science and technology, delegates from the public, private and academic sectors will also be in attendance.

The Costa Rican Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock, and Science and Technology will host the event, with IICA serving as the facilitator. ■

## The agenda

The Conference will take place on May 10 and 11. On Wednesday, May 12, participants will have the opportunity to participate in several different field trips.

Three Joint Sessions have been planned. After each, two parallel breakout sessions will take place, led by renowned international specialists.

### First Joint Session:

The role of science and technology in the economic growth of the rural sector.

Breakout sessions:

- Raising agricultural productivity in Central America through the adoption of conventional and emerging technologies.
- Utilizing biotechnology in Central America to increase agricultural productivity.

### Second Joint Session:

Policy design and institutions to increase access to science and technology.

Breakout sessions:

- Policies and institutions to promote technology development.
- Mechanisms to improve technology dissemination.

### Third Joint Session:

Toward an integrated regional innovation system.

Breakout Sessions:

- Regional priorities for agricultural R&D in Central America.
- New developments in science and technology. Funding: lessons learned and future perspectives.

A keynote address will also be included, and will analyze new trade opportunities for Central American agriculture.



# Advancing toward accountability

Chelston W. D. Brathwaite  
Director General



One of the main areas in which the Institute must make progress in 2004 is accountability at the regional level.

It will mark another step forward in the process begun in 2002, at the start of my administration. At that time we set ourselves the goal of strengthening relations with the Member States and created a participatory methodology for this purpose, for preparing the national technical cooperation agenda. We then organized consultations with the public, private, academic, and non-governmental sectors. A second step, once the national agenda had been determined, was to ensure that IICA kept the same local actors well informed of the progress being made in implementing it.

In 2003 we consolidated the process, by both updating the agendas and giving a full account of our actions. Today at IICA we realize that transparency and accountability are not an option. They are an obligation.

Not satisfied simply with submitting our reports to the Organization of American States once a year, and to the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA) every two years, consensus-building with the 34 Member States to set the priorities for cooperation, transparency, and accountability now form part of a permanent, continuous, and fluid process.

We have modernized ourselves, repositioning the Institute to meet the challenges of the 21st century, and to support the countries of the Americas by providing them with first-rate services.

I said at the outset, this year we intend to advance even further. The experience gained over the last two years makes it easier for us to undertake consensus-building and accountability efforts at the regional level. The first step will be the next meeting of the Southern Agricultural Council (CAS), due to be held in March in Montevideo, Uruguay. The CAS, which is used to discuss common concerns in the agricultural field, is composed of the ministers of agriculture of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

In Panama, during the Second Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life and the Twelfth Regular Meeting of the IABA, I had the valuable opportunity to take part in a working breakfast with the ministers who make up the CAS. There we agreed to meet again soon to discuss IICA's regional agenda in those nations. The Director of Regional Operations for the Southern Area, IICA's Representatives in the countries concerned, and our regional specialists, will all be taking part in this dialogue with the ministers.

I regard the meeting with the ministers of the Southern Agricultural Council as a matter of the greatest importance, since we will be able to lay the groundwork for increasing accountability at the regional level. We shall then endeavor to replicate the experience with the other regional-level ministerial bodies. ■

## The CAS meets in Uruguay

The Southern Agricultural Council (CAS), comprising the ministers of agriculture of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, will be holding its Third Regular Meeting March 25-26, in Montevideo, Uruguay.

During the meeting, the Ministers will decide on the action to be taken with regard to various matters in the agricultural sector. The delegation from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), headed by the Director General, will be presenting its Regional Cooperation Agenda to the ministers.

Aware that its regional actions must meet its Member States' needs and priorities, the Institute promoted a wide-ranging process of national, regional and hemispheric consultations, dialogue and consensus-building. The results of that process are set out in the respective technical cooperation agendas at each level.

The Regional Agenda will be presented to the CAS to initiate an open-ended dialogue, based on the cooperation proposals presented, and thus ensure that they are consistent both with IICA's Medium Term Plan, and the objectives and concerns of the individual countries and the region as a whole.

Uruguay currently chairs the CAS, which was created in April 2003 as a ministerial-level forum for discussing and coordinating regional actions.

During its First Meeting, in Brasilia, IICA was asked to serve as the Council's Technical-Administrative Secretariat, and a number of mechanisms for coordinating regional actions in the agricultural sector were established or strengthened. ■



# The OAS recognizes IICA's contribution to the Summits of the Americas process

*It points up the reengineering efforts aimed at enabling the Institute to play a full role in the process, the effective mobilization of the ministers of agriculture, and the technical support provided.*



In the Declaration of Nuevo Leon the Heads of State and Government of the hemisphere endorsed implementation of the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan of Action.



Prepared by the Summit of the Americas Secretariat, the Summit Report 2001-2003, "Advancing in the Americas: Progress and Challenges," acknowledges IICA's contribution to the process.

In his Summit Report for 2001-2003, "Advancing in the Americas: Progress and Challenges," presented to the Special Summit of the Americas, OAS Secretary General Cesar Gaviria recognized IICA's efforts in the process.

In the document presented to the hemisphere's Heads of State and Government, Gaviria stated that the Institute had "undertaken a reengineering process in order to be able to participate actively in the Summit process, bringing the ministers of agriculture together to develop a coherent vision of needs, design plans and secure resources for their implementation, generating a clear consensus on the actions needed to create opportunities for agricultural producers, improve food security and open up to external markets."

In summarizing the chief accomplishments in implementing the mandates related to agricultural and rural development of the Third Summit of the Americas (Quebec 2001), the Secretary General highlighted the agriculture

ministers' direct involvement in achieving the Summits' objectives by means of hemispheric-level ministerial meetings, and technical support from IICA.

In the Declaration of Nuevo Leon, signed at the Special Summit, the leaders endorsed implementation of the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan of Action, adopted at the Second Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life, held in Panama in November last year. IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite, who took part in the Special Summit, underscored the strategic importance of this backing at the highest political level.

The AGRO 2003-2015 Plan of Action charts the course for agriculture and rural life, so as to realize the vision for 2015, and contains a hemispheric agenda for promoting prosperity in rural communities, food security, poverty alleviation and the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural milieu.

In their Declaration, the leaders called upon eight international and regional organizations, including IICA, "to strengthen their coordination, and to continue deepening their support, through their respective activities and programs, and committing appropriate resources to implement and conduct follow-up on the Plans of Action of the Summits of the Americas, and this Declaration, and to assist in preparations for the Fourth Summit of the Americas in 2005."

In its capacity as the Secretariat of the Ministerial Meetings on Agriculture and Rural Life, IICA has worked closely in recent years with the countries of the hemisphere to implement the Summit mandates related to agricultural and rural development, in collaboration with the actors in agriculture and related sectors.

At the Special Summit, the IICA Director General was accompanied by Lizardo de las Casas, director of the Institute's unit at its Headquarters, located in Costa Rica, in charge of follow-up to the Summits of the Americas process. ■

## Support for the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan of Action

*We commit to maintain a sustained effort to improve living conditions for inhabitants of rural areas, by promoting investment and creating a favorable environment to achieve sustainable improvements in agriculture that will contribute to social development, rural prosperity, and food security.*

*In that context, we support the application of the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan of Action for Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas.*

*Declaration of Nuevo Leon*

### IICA News

is a publication of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) produced by the

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