

Agriculture, science and technology strengthen the bases of productivity

The Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology held at IICA Headquarters provided an opportunity to discuss, at the regional level, the global dialogue begun at the Ministerial Conference and Expo on Agricultural Science and Technology.

The ministers of agriculture and top-level science and technology officials from Mexico, Central America, the Dominican Republic and the United States met on May 10-11 in Costa Rica. The aim of the event was to arrive at a common vision that would make it possible to find solutions and tap opportunities for applying science to real problems in agriculture.

Participants included the ministers that make up the Regional Council for Agricultural Cooperation (CORECA), who represent the seven countries of the Central American isthmus, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic.

More than 100 participants from the research, academic and private sectors, as well as civil society and international cooperation agencies, participated in the Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology to Increase Agricultural Productivity, which was held under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the government of Costa Rica, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

This regional conference was an initiative of U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Ann M. Veneman, who proposed same to Costa Rica's Minister of Agriculture, Rodolfo Coto Pacheco, during the Ministerial Conference and Expo on Agricultural Science and Technology, held in Sacramento, California, in June 2003.



For the first time, the ministers of agriculture of Central America, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and the United States met with their counterparts in science and technology to discuss topics of common interest.





The President of the Republic of Costa Rica, Abel Pacheco, (third from the left), inaugurated the Ministerial Conference.

Secretary Veneman headed her country's delegation to the regional Conference, which she co-hosted with Costa Rican Ministers of Agriculture and of Science and Technology, Rodolfo Coto Pacheco and Fernando Gutierrez, respectively.

Over 40 leading experts spoke during the two-day Conference in Costa Rica on a variety of issues during three plenary and nine breakout sessions. The aim was to answer three important questions:

- ▶ What is the status of agricultural technology in the region?
- ▶ What mechanisms are available for mobilizing science and technology to benefit the agricultural sector?
- ▶ What is the region doing to meet the challenges of boosting food production and improving its participation in an increasingly open economy?

Unprecedented meeting

In her opening remarks, Secretary Veneman asked, rhetorically, why everyone was at the meeting. Replying for herself, she said it was because the countries were all close neighbors in the hemisphere, united by strong cultural and trade ties, and believed strongly in freedom and democracy. All of the countries at the meeting valued agriculture and recognized the importance of having an efficient food system. They also realized that their agricultural sectors were faced with increasingly complex issues.

She called upon the ministers present to consider that, as leaders of a dynamic activity, it was up to them to find successful ways of tackling the issues, working together and sharing their knowledge and experiences.

The President of Costa Rica, Abel Pacheco, inaugurated the Conference. He noted that, for centuries, the only things needed to farm successfully were fertile land and good seed. Today the situation was different, however. In addition to good land and excellent seed, agriculture required adequate financing, timely and reliable information, good infrastructure, fair marketing and, unquestionably, an increased and intensive use of scientific knowledge and technological breakthroughs.

The Conference provided an opportunity to continue the global dialogue begun in June 2003 in Sacramento. That meeting was organized by the U.S. Department of

Agriculture and was attended by 119 ministerial-level representatives from 117 countries.

Positive outcome

In the closing session, Minister Coto underscored the presence of a buoyant private sector, one that believed in research and invested in it, achieving excellent results. He cited the coffee, milk and sugarcane industries as examples.

Minister Gutierrez spoke of science and technology's key role as a driving force for technical change, higher productivity, and the progress of the agricultural sector, a role that should be performed jointly by the countries and institutions comprising the various innovation systems.

Gutierrez characterized the Conference as a success, stating that it had pointed the way for science and technology to contribute to creating a more promising future for millions of small farmers in Central America, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. He went on to say that it was up to the participants to see that the pertinent recommendations were implemented.

U.S. Undersecretary of Agriculture Jim Butler also took part in the closing session. He said that countries that invest in raising agricultural productivity have the capacity to increase their revenues, participate in global markets, reduce hunger and poverty, and improve the quality of life of their citizens.

IICA honors its past

The United States Secretary of Agriculture and IICA's Director General inaugurated the Institute's Historical Gallery.



Henry Wallace's vision was recalled during the inauguration of the Historical Gallery.

Highlights of the first 62 years of institutional life of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and of how it has evolved and adapted to changes in the global context, are on display in the Historical Gallery inaugurated recently at IICA Headquarters by the United States Secretary of Agriculture, Ann M. Veneman, and the Director General of IICA, Chelston W.D. Brathwaite.

The inauguration took place within the framework of the Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology to Increase Agricultural Productivity, and was attended by the ministers of agriculture and top science and technology officials from Mexico, Central America and the Dominican Republic. A special guest speaker was IICA Director General Emeritus, Martin E. Piñeiro.

The Gallery was created to call attention to the history of the Institute, and to give recognition to its three founders, its Director Generals, 34 Member States, Associate Country (Spain), 17 Permanent Observers, strategic partners and Institute staff.

The materials on display show how the focus of the Institute's work has changed over time, and how it has evolved and adapted to changes in the global setting in order to be able to continue encouraging, promoting and supporting the efforts of its Member States to achieve agricultural development and rural well-being.

Secretary Veneman stated that she was honored to participate in the inauguration because she "had a long history with IICA."

"Throughout the years, IICA has concentrated on improving agricultural policies and trade, science and technology, natural resources, agricultural health, rural development and training and education. This new Historical Gallery is part of an overall strategy that will provide the basis on which to build the IICA of the 21st century," she said.

In her remarks, she spoke of Dr. Henry Wallace, the former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture who co-founded IICA. It was Wallace who said that in order to obtain freedom from want, the theory of sustained yields and the free exchange of products among nations must be accepted and followed.





He added that agriculture would continue to be the cornerstone of Central America's economies. The two-day meeting had made it clear that the use of scientific knowledge to increase agricultural productivity in an environmentally sustainable way would continue to be a priority.

The Director General of IICA, Chelston Brathwaite, said the discussions at the Conference showed how investment in technology was essential to raise agricultural productivity and, as a result, to help reduce poverty.

On average, almost 40% of all increases in food production in the Americas over the last two decades have been achieved by using modern technology to improve, for example, seed varieties and agronomic information.

At present, differences in productivity in the countries is the result of uneven development of research and extension and transfer capabilities.

The relatively more developed countries usually invest between 1.5% and 2.5% of their Agricultural Gross Domestic Product in agricultural technology. For most Latin American and Caribbean countries, this figure is no more than 0.4%. However, some countries, such as Costa Rica, have gradually increased their investments aimed at improving agricultural technology.

IICA figures show that, on average, Latin America and the Caribbean must double investment in agricultural research, from US\$1 billion to US\$2 billion, if it is to catch up to the annual average in other developing regions of the world. He said it would be necessary for some countries (except Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) to double current levels of investment if the region is to match the amounts invested by countries in Africa and Asia in which agriculture plays an equally important role in the economy.

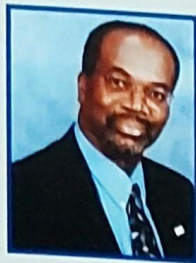
The countries of Central America will have to make the greatest effort. In these countries, investment in agricultural research applicable to production amounts to less than one third of the average for Latin America.

Trade-related figures presented by Glenn Anders, USAID Mission Director for Central America, support this statement.

Anders ensured that agriculture continues to be the driving force behind basic economic growth in Central America, taking into consideration production per se and all businesses related to production, in industry and the services sector. Agriculture generates more than one half of the gross domestic product of the region. Growth in international trade provides more opportunities for the Central America countries to make improvements in agriculture, increasing productivity and specializing in order to capture a larger share of the global market. In 2003, nearly 83% of the exports from Latin America, worth some US\$176 billion, were shipped to the United States, where they entered duty free.

The presentations and additional information can be found at:
<http://www.iica.int/confministerial/> ■

In order to move forward...



Chelston W. D. Brathwaite
Director General

We must look to the past if we are to understand what we are today and what we should be in the future.

It was for this reason that we decided to build the IICA Historical Gallery, which traces the history of the Institute during its first 62 years of existence, and recognizes its founders, Director Generals and past and present staff.

We also wanted to recognize our 34 Member States, Spain (Associate Country), our 17 other Permanent Observers, our strategic partners and, of course, Costa Rica, which has been home to IICA Headquarters for all these years.

In remembrance of the vision Dr. Henry Wallace, former United States Secretary of Agriculture, we were honored that Ann Veneman, current U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, was able to participate in the inauguration of this Gallery.

Her presence rekindled Henry Wallace's vision of fostering international cooperation in agriculture in the Western Hemisphere, which led to the creation of what is now the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture.

For IICA, the Gallery is of great importance because it highlights key moments in the history of the Institute and in its efforts to serve the peoples of the Hemisphere. IICA is committed to promoting discussions on and exchanges of experiences in the use of science and technology to increase agricultural productivity and reduce poverty in the Americas.

This Gallery is also of great importance to us because it encapsulates the long history of partnership and commitment that IICA and Member States have shared throughout the years.

The creation of this small gallery marks the first step in our efforts to preserve the history of the Institute. In the near future, we will take the next step by creating an Historical Library. ■

IICA in the OAS General Assembly

A delegation from the Institute, headed by the Director General, Chelston Brathwaite, will participate in the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) to be held in Quito, Ecuador, on June 6-8.

IICA is part of the Inter-American System of the OAS. In April of this year, Brathwaite presented the Institute's 2003 Annual Report to the OAS Permanent Council. This report summarizes the activities carried out and the results achieved in the 34 Member States during the year. Also, for the first time, he presented the Ambassadors with specific annual reports on IICA's activities in their respective countries.

During the General Assembly in June, the Permanent Council will make recommendations and comments concerning the annual reports submitted by the different agencies of the Inter-American System.

After Brathwaite's presentation, numerous delegates commented on the reports they had received. Panama, for example, called attention the Second Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life, held in Panama in November 2003. During that meeting, a very important document was signed with IICA's support: the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan of Action for Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas.

The United States' delegate stated that the Institute is modernizing, refocusing its efforts and is now results and goal oriented.

Paraguay praised the report prepared on its country, which highlights activities IICA has carried out not only with governmental organizations, but also with universities, agriculture and livestock entrepreneurs, and production cooperatives.

While attending the OAS General Assembly in Ecuador, IICA officials will meet with national authorities to discuss the upcoming meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture and the Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life held within the Summit of the Americas process, both to be held in that country next year. ■



He also said that strength and happiness have a common denominator in adequate diets. This is a direct reference to food security, which is one of the focuses of IICA's work today.

According to the Secretary, "This new gallery showcases many of IICA's accomplishments throughout the years, from its origins and acceptance into the Inter-American System during the 1940s, through the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, to its present role in the improvement of agriculture and rural life in the Americas."

In turn, the Director General of IICA stated that Mrs. Veneman's presence at the inauguration represented a revitalization of Henry Wallace's vision of fostering international cooperation in agriculture in the Western Hemisphere, which led to the creation of what is now the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture.

In explaining the reasons for building the Gallery, he said that it is important to look to the past if we are to understand what we are today and what we should be in the future.

Dr. Martin E. Piñero also addressed the gathering, noting that Secretary Veneman had been associated with the Institute for more than 10 years, and that she had participated in the first meeting of ministers organized by IICA outside the Americas, in 1991, in Madrid, Spain.



Martin E. Piñero, Director Emeritus, thanked Secretary Veneman for her support of IICA.

Piñero congratulated the Director General on creating the Gallery, noting that, for him, the ceremony had special significance since some of the best years of his life were spent at the helm of the Institute. Speaking to Secretary Veneman, he thanked her for her unwavering support of the Institute.

Photographs of the Historical Gallery can be seen at: <http://www.iica.int/confministerial/photogallery/>

The founders

IICA's origins date back to 1942. The Institute was created thanks to the visionaries Henry Wallace, then U.S. Secretary of Agriculture; Ernesto Molestina, Director General of Agriculture of Ecuador; and Mariano Montealegre, Minister of Agriculture of Costa Rica.

Wallace came up with the idea for such an institution; Molestina presented the resolution calling for its creation; and Montealegre succeeded in ensuring that the headquarters of the Institute would be located in Costa Rica.

Directors General of IICA

Earl N. Bressman	United States	1942 - 1946
Ralph H. Allee	United States	1946 - 1960
Armando Samper	Colombia	1960 - 1969
Carlos Madrid	Colombia	1966 - 1967
		1969 - 1970
Jose Emilio Araujo	Brazil	1970 - 1982
Francisco Morillo	Venezuela	1982 - 1986
Martin E. Piñero	Argentina	1986 - 1994
Carlos E. Aquino	Dom. Republic	1994 - 2002
Chelston W.D. Brathwaite	Barbados	2002 - 2006

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