



Promoting Prosperity in the Rural Communities of the Americas

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**CALLS FOR MORE GROWTH IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR
AT MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**

“Sustainable growth of the agricultural sector holds the most important promise for alleviating rural poverty in our countries.”

CORONADO, COSTA RICA, May 10, 2004 –Addressing Ministers of Agriculture and Science and Technology from the Central American region, Mexico and the Dominican Republic; the Honorable Ann M. Veneman, Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); officials from the United States Department of State; representatives from the private sector; international and local organizations; academia and members of the press, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture’s (IICA) Director General, Dr. Chelston Brathwaite, stressed the importance of regional investment for improved technology in agriculture.

He said, “In spite of the progress in democratization carried out in the Americas in the last two decades, improvements in per capita income, increased respect for human rights, longer life expectancy and increased access to clean water, 200 million people in this hemisphere still live in poverty. More than half of this population lives in the rural areas,” advised Brathwaite, during the opening of its two day Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology at the institute’s headquarters in Costa Rica.

According to Brathwaite, the agricultural and rural sector cannot be improved and will not grow unless agriculture’s critical role in a country’s socio-economic development is fully recognized. IICA’s research suggests that agriculture’s contribution to national development is three to seven times higher than the percentages reported in national statistics.

A growing world population that is expected to reach 8 billion by 2025 demands new approaches to agriculture and food production in the 21st century. According to IICA, on average almost 40% of all increases in food production in the Americas during the last four decades has been due to the use of modern technology.

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Central to his message, and calling for stronger hemispheric leadership, Brathwaite said that it must be clear to all that a major challenge of our time is to provide for the basic needs of the 800 million deprived citizens of the world who find it difficult to obtain food, shelter and adequate nutrition in a world of increasing material prosperity.

Emphasizing the Institute's priority to support its Member States in their efforts to level the technological playing field, so that they may better compete in the agribusiness market, Brathwaite highlighted that this conference is serving as a hemispheric platform to foster international cooperation in agriculture in the Western Hemisphere, and promote the exchange of technological information between countries.

This conference is a follow-up to the Ministerial conference that took place in Sacramento, California in June 2003, and is a joint initiative among the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Ministries of Agriculture and Science and Technology of Costa Rica, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Agency for International (USAID), and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture.

ABOUT IICA

The Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture is the specialized agency for agriculture of the inter-American system. Its mission is to support the Member States in their pursuit of progress and prosperity in the hemisphere through the modernizations of the rural sector, promotion of food security, and development of an agricultural sector that is competitive, technologically prepared, environmentally managed, and socially equitable for the people of the Americas.

**For more information on the conference, please go to:
<http://www.iica.int/confministerial>**

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