

*MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO
INCREASE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY*

WELCOME ADDRESS

Discurso de Bienvenida

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I am delighted to welcome you to the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, the house of agriculture of the Americas.

We are greatly honoured to have the presence of the distinguished President of Costa Rica Dr. Abel Pacheco de La Espriella, of the Ministers and Secretaries of Agriculture and high level authorities of Science and Technology of Central America, United States, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

Nos sentimos honrados de contar con la presencia del Distinguido Presidente de la República de Costa Rica, Dr. Abel Pacheco de La Espriella, de los Ministros y Secretarios de Agricultura y de las altas autoridades de Ciencia y Tecnología de Centro América, Estados Unidos, México y República Dominicana.

It is with great pride that we are receiving in this house distinguished leaders, agricultural producers and entrepreneurs dedicated to the noble task of producing food and therefore contributing significantly to the common objective of alleviating rural and urban poverty.

I am delighted to welcome the many scientists, intellectuals and leaders of national and international organizations, who work to find the solutions for a more productive and competitive agriculture, that is environmentally friendly and that ensures a sustainable use of our precious natural resources.

Today is a historic day for our Institute. It was in 1942, 62 years ago, that Henry Wallace Secretary of Agriculture of the United States of America and subsequently Vice-President of this country, and the then President of Costa Rica, Rafael Calderon, laid the foundation stone in Turrialba to establish the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences and thus began a new chapter in inter-American cooperation on agriculture.

Today, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture is the successor institution.

The Institute is indeed honoured today to welcome again the President of Costa Rica and the Secretary of Agriculture of the United States of America in historic perspective.

President Pacheco, our Institute is grateful to the Government and people of Costa Rica for the support to this noble Institution, during these years since the laying of the first stone by President Rafael A. Calderon Guardia.

Es un honor para el Instituto poder brindar hoy nuevamente la bienvenida al Presidente de Costa Rica y a la Secretaria de Agricultura de los Estados Unidos de América en una perspectiva histórica.

Sr. Presidente, Abel Pacheco, nuestro Instituto agradece al Gobierno y al pueblo de Costa Rica por el apoyo brindado durante estos años a esta noble institución, desde que el Presidente Rafael A. Calderón Guardia colocó la primera piedra.

Madam Secretary of Agriculture, Mrs. Ann Veneman, your presence here today represents in our view a revitalization of the vision of Henry Wallace of fostering international cooperation in agriculture in the Western Hemisphere and we believe that your visit opens a new and strengthened chapter in the relationship between the Institute and the Government and people of the United States of America.

We greatly appreciate your visit and your agreement to declare open our Historic Gallery later today.

Our Institute is convinced that given the vision of Henry Wallace and the founding fathers of the Institute, the mandates which we have received from the Heads of State and Government of the Hemisphere and the leadership of the Ministers of Agriculture, the Institute must assume a new role of hemispheric leadership of agriculture in the Americas.

That role implies that we must:

- a. promote hemispheric and regional integration
- b. promote agribusiness competitiveness and global trade
- c. promote agriculture health and food safety
- d. strengthen rural communities
- e. develop human capital
- f. promote environmental management
- g. promote institutional modernization
- h. promote technological innovation and the incorporation of new technologies in agriculture

We are committed to these goals which are clearly expressed in our Medium Term Plan for 2002-2006.

It must be clear to all that a major challenge of our time is to provide for the comfort of the 800 million deprived citizens of our world who find it difficult to obtain food, shelter and adequate nutrition in a world of increasing material prosperity.

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.

This poverty expresses itself in unemployment, poor nutrition, violent crime, increases in antisocial and illegal activities and in the production and trafficking in illicit drugs.

It is clear that persistent poverty can be a serious threat to national social stability and the processes of democratic governance.

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

But the agricultural and rural sector cannot be improved and will not grow unless we recognize the fundamental role that agriculture plays in a country's socio-economic development.

We believe that agriculture must be valued for what it is: the bedrock of society and the cornerstone of any economy. Official statistics often show agriculture as contributing single digit percentages to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Our research suggests that when all the backward and forward linkages in the commodity chain are considered, agriculture's contribution to national development is 3 to 7 times higher than the percentages reported in national statistics.

For example, a recent study carried out by our Institute in Latin America showed that in Argentina the official statistics indicate that agriculture's contribution to GDP is 4.6% but when we consider all the backward and forward linkages this figure increases to 32.2%. In Brazil the figure grows from 4.3% to 26.2%, in Chile from 5% to 32.1%, in Mexico from 4.6% to 24.5%, and in Costa Rica from 11.3% to 32.5%.

In addition, these analyses demonstrate that approximately 74% of the primary products of agricultural production are inputs in to other sectors of the economy such as agro-industry, manufacturing, etc.

In Sacramento, California last year, Mrs. Veneman, whom I am honoured to welcome to IICA today, organized an international event to analyze the role of Science and Technology in the development of agriculture.

That important meeting has had a favourable impact. We applaud the leadership of Secretary Veneman, a tireless and distinguished professional, in her constant search for solutions to the global challenge of producing enough food for all.

Today, here in Costa Rica, we are gathered to follow up on the event held in Sacramento, thanks to an initiative of the Governments of Costa Rica and the United States.

The challenge we face is clear. As stated by the famous Peace Nobel prize winner and father of the green revolution, Dr. Norman Borlaug, about 85% of the necessary increase in food production must come from existing cultivated areas, as the land

available for cultivation is decreasing rapidly, and the world's population continues to grow.

Technology, according to Dr. Borlaug, is the most important instrument for increasing agricultural productivity.

But in order to achieve this goal of increased productivity, national regional and international agricultural research systems must be strengthened and horizontal cooperation between countries must be encouraged to facilitate the transfer of technology and knowledge.

This Conference today is a positive step in this direction.

I am confident that a renewed strategy for increasing regional technological and scientific capacity will have a lasting effect in the short, medium and long term for the countries of the region.

Ladies and gentleman, distinguished guests, from IICA's perspective, as the inter-American specialized organization in agriculture, we are at your complete disposal to facilitate this exchange, but also to support you in your deliberations and to assist in the implementation of the recommendations.

IICA's mandate is to deliver technical cooperation to its Member States based on their needs and demands. Therefore you may be assured of our deep commitment to serve you to the best of our abilities, in our efforts to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life of the population of the hemisphere.

It is a great honour for me to welcome you to IICA's headquarters.

You may count on all of us here at IICA for any assistance you may require to make your stay as comfortable as possible and facilitate a productive and effective conference.

We are grateful for the cooperation and support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Costa Rica's Ministries of Agriculture and Science and Technology, the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in the organization of this Conference.

I therefore welcome all to this important meeting and we look forward to playing our part to support technological developments in agriculture in Central America, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

Thank you.