



PRESS RELEASE

Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology

To Increase Agricultural Productivity

San José, Costa Rica, May 10-11, 2004

## **Agricultural sector/science and technology alliance a necessity**

- *In Central America, investment in agricultural research applicable to production amounts to less than one third of the average for Latin America.*

**Costa Rica, May 5, 2004.** Today, the Ministers of Agriculture and Science and Technology of Costa Rica, Rodolfo Coto and Fernando Gutierrez, respectively; the Charge d'Affaires of the United States Embassy in Costa Rica, Douglas Barnes; and the Director General of IICA, Chelston Brathwaite, met and agreed on the importance of investing in technology intended to increase agricultural productivity.

Meeting with the press, they referred to topics that will be discussed during the Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology to Increase Agricultural Productivity, scheduled for May 10 and 11 in Costa Rica.

The Conference is being sponsored by 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 (IICA).

The Ministers of Agriculture and top officials in the areas of science and technology from Mexico, the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic will participate in the event. The delegation from the United States will be headed by Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Venneman.

According to the Second Report on Human Development in Central America and Panama for 2000, cited by Minister Gutierrez, agriculture provides employment for some 31% of the economically active population (EAP) of Central America. Brathwaite added that the per capita amount of land available for agriculture in the region is rapidly shrinking thanks to a burgeoning population.

All three agreed that the Ministerial Conference would provide an excellent opportunity for representatives of governments, the private sector, academia, international organizations and non-governmental organizations from Central America, Mexico and the Dominican Republic to reflect on some of the major challenges that lie ahead.

### **More investment needed now**

The contribution of agriculture to economic and social development depends heavily on both investment and technology. These two factors are interdependent: technology is a prerequisite for attracting investment in agriculture; at the same time, investment is a prerequisite for the development of technology.



In the case of Costa Rica, some 20% of the EAP works in agriculture. Last year alone, more than 4 million kilos of organic products, valued at US\$36 million, were sold.

Minister Gutierrez noted that the Ministry of Science and Agriculture collaborates with universities and other ministries in the implementation of programs aimed at ensuring that knowledge and technology transferred actually reaches small- and medium-scale producers.

How much investment is needed? The Director General presented data prepared by IICA which revealed 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 with 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 participating in the Ministerial Conference 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. Some 85% of all investment in agricultural research is in the countries of the Southern Cone.

Minister Coto pointed to a successful effort to increase coffee production, which should be applied to other crops. Costa Rica is, today, the largest producer of coffee per hectare. "This was accomplished after a long scientific process, but we must do the same with other products if we are to achieve food security," he said.

It was Minister Coto who, following up on an initiative from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman, worked to ensure that this meeting would be held in San Jose.

At the Ministerial Conference and Exposition on Agricultural Science and Technology, held in Sacramento, California, last year and hosted by Secretary Veneman, the Costa Rican minister was among those most interested in tapping the potential of science and technology to help the agricultural sector grow.

The Charge d'Affaires of the United States Embassy in Costa Rica, Douglas Barnes, ensured that Minister Coto's enthusiasm was one of the many reasons Costa Rica was selected as the venue for the follow-up conference.

In referring to the visit of Secretary Veneman, Barnes said "From the time of her appointment to his position, Mrs. Veneman has been committed to issues related to food production and strengthening agriculture."

For further information: <http://www.iica.int/confministerial/>