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Introduction

1. I am indeed pleased to be back in Washington and to have the opportunity to participate in the RIMSA 13. Last year was a historic one for our Institute. We celebrated our 60th anniversary, and in January I took office as its ninth Director General. My first task was to reposition IICA in the context of the 21st Century and formulate a new vision that promotes sustainable agricultural development, food security and prosperity for the rural sector of the Americas. This vision recognizes that, in any nation today, development of the agricultural and rural sectors cannot be seen only as an effort to help marginal poor farmers; rather, it must be seen as the development of a sector that is strategically important because of its contribution to national social stability, food security and the preservation of the environment for present and future generations. I believe that a new frontier of challenge and opportunity is upon us as we enter the third year of the 21st Century.

2. It is a new frontier of opportunity, characterized by global participation and partnerships, efficient communication and coordination of actions, and a conviction of the need for a coalition of efforts to tackle the most pressing problems of our times. It must be clear to all of you that one of the greatest challenges is to solve the problems of health, poverty, hunger and marginalization facing the 800 million souls who continue to live in poverty surrounded by a sea of global material prosperity. Some 177 million of these souls are in our hemisphere and about 90 million live in rural areas. We must help them enjoy some of the freedoms that we enjoy.

3. As I said in my Inaugural Address on January 15th 2002, our Institute must rise to the challenge and embrace a future fashioned by a resolve to achieve global cooperation and a respect for diversity; a future that reminds us of the limitless possibilities that exist when we challenge ourselves to be our best; a future where we begin to concentrate our efforts not so much on our rights, but on our responsibilities; a future where problems become possibilities and where we can rise above the narrow confines of individual and personal agendas to embrace the broader concerns of humanity; a future where we remember that intelligence is not enough, where we remember that education is not enough, where we remember that wealth is not enough and where we remember that, in the final analysis, what matters is character, commitment, responsibility, discipline and respect for humanity.

4. The contribution of the agricultural and rural sectors to overall economic output is often underestimated. A classic case of this was seen recently in El Salvador where official statistics informed that agricultural contribution to GDP was 12%, while an analysis of all the backward and forward linkages to other sectors of the economy indicated a contribution of 38%. The situation is probably similar in many other countries.

5. To better tackle the challenges of the new economy, IICA's mission today is to support Member States throughout the Hemisphere in their pursuit of progress and prosperity, through the modernization of the rural sector, the promotion of food security, and the development of an agricultural sector that is competitive, technologically prepared, environmentally managed, and socially equitable.

6. With the countries of the Americas on the verge of establishing the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the new mandate given to the Institute in the Third Summit of the Americas and the OAS General Assembly, IICA's importance as an institution promoting hemispheric integration of the agricultural sector takes on new significance.

7. In this new context, the Institute must focus its technical cooperation programme to provide the assistance required by the Member States. We have initiated a process of internal consolidation and a projection of an external vision through strategic partnerships with sister institutions of the inter-American system, the private sector and global partners in order to provide the support the rural sector of the Americas requires and deserves.

8. One of IICA's primary objectives is to become a true network for hemispheric cooperation: a network that facilitates access to information, technology and best practices for all countries of the Americas in support of hemispheric agricultural trade integration.

9. Our Medium Term Plan for 2002-2006 concentrates our efforts on promoting sustainable agricultural development, promoting food security and the promotion of prosperity in the rural communities of the Americas. We are fully aware however that achieving these objectives requires a multidisciplinary, multisectoral, holistic approach where education, health, the environment and the organization and governance of rural communities are critical inputs.

10. The importance of the agri-food sector, agri-business and trade cannot be overstated. In order to upgrade competitiveness and promote the development of a global agri-business environment, we must support the adoption of new technology and business principles that are sustainable and equitable.

11. Improved education, communications, and higher incomes have resulted in a greater awareness of the importance of adequate nutrition for good health and general well being. The demand for fresh fruits, vegetables, food high in fiber, processed foods, snack food and organic products has increased. In addition, food quality and food safety concerns are of growing importance in national and international food markets. The

challenge for agriculture in the future will not only be to satisfy consumer demand but, also, to ensure the safety and reliability of food supplies.

12. The negotiations under way to create the FTAA, and the negotiations related to bilateral and regional free trade agreements have all incorporated agriculture into their agendas, taking into account both the dimension of agri-food trade as well as social and environmental considerations associated with agriculture and the agri-food trade.

13. It is paramount that the ministries of agriculture of Latin America and the Caribbean reinforce their institutional capacity for international negotiations, not only to be able to act as legitimate spokespersons for this sector at negotiation tables, but also to enhance their capacity for analysis, consensus-building, proposal formulation and coordination, both with official bodies responsible for foreign trade and with representatives of production sectors.

14. One of the most critical issues in agricultural trade negotiations today is the question of food safety, as consumers demand food that is safe and nutritious. In recent years, we have seen increased attention being paid to food safety issues in all the countries of the hemisphere. This has led to plant and animal pest disease control methods coming under close scrutiny.

15. In 2001, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that 30% of all pesticides sold in developing countries do not comply with international standards. Also in this area, many countries have reorganized and restructured their food inspection facilities. The Canadian experience in establishing the Canadian Food and Inspection Agency (CFIA) is a model that has been examined throughout the Americas and has been adopted in some countries, such as Belize.

16. Only by modernizing food safety systems will it be possible to obtain more precise results when conducting risk assessments and when making policy decisions to control diseases and pests that affect production and threaten human health.

17. In the areas of agricultural health and food safety, institutions are increasingly involved in evaluating and facilitating a greater demand for imports —without jeopardizing, but rather improving, domestic agricultural health and national health standards.

18. The last decade has shown that the traditional approach to agricultural health is inadequate for meeting today's challenges. "Mad cow" disease in the European Union, dioxin in Belgium, and foot-and-mouth disease in the United Kingdom, are pathological problems that began with the introduction of adulterated food and feed, with serious consequences showing up in later stages of the agri-food chain.

19. Current circumstances demand that health and safety institutions operate with a broader international vision and a clearer mandate. The traditional organization of agricultural health in ministries of agriculture must be restructured to include closer alliances and greater integration with other ministries such as health, trade and foreign relations, among others.

20. The private sector must join forces with the public sector, and their complementary roles and specific responsibilities must be defined. Programs are needed that extend beyond the farm level to encompass the entire agri-food chain.

21. To be effective, health and safety institutions must include effective surveillance and response mechanisms to provide necessary warnings of adverse effects and harmful components introduced into animal and crop production, which might not otherwise become evident until the end of the chain.

22. In recent years, the size and budget of the ministries of agriculture in a number of countries in the hemisphere have been significantly reduced, largely due to structural adjustment programs. For agriculture to be competitive in a globalized world, the state must play a decisive role in defining policies and providing the regulatory framework for agriculture and its support services, such as research, extension and agricultural health.

23. Governments must establish the terms for a new relationship between health and agriculture as strategic partners in our quest to fulfill, in an integral and inter-sectoral manner, the many food safety and agricultural health responsibilities related to production, trade and the environment.

24. In this regard, the signing of this agreement with PAHO to ensure the incorporation of health in our rural development initiatives is important as we recognize that rural development without rural health is virtually impossible.

25. IICA and PAHO share common goals and have collaborated for many years on different activities related to public health, animal health and food safety. Both play critical and complementary roles in the areas of health and agricultural development that extend beyond those traditional fields of collaboration, and are essential for prosperity in rural communities. In addition, both organizations have a network of offices in Member States that facilitate joint action.

26. Two of the objectives of our agreement are to contribute to increasing and making better use of food production, and to improving health and rural life in their Member States. As partners, both our institutions face important challenges in this regard:

- At the political level, the two organizations serve as the secretariats of their respective ministerial meetings on health and agriculture and rural life. In addition, at the Third Summit of the Americas (held in Canada in April 2001), they were both called upon to support implementation of the Summit's Plan of Action.

27. IICA and PAHO fully support the commitment assumed by the Heads of State and Government in the Declaration of the Third Summit:

- To further efforts to reach international development goals, especially the reduction by 50% by the year 2015 of the proportion of people living in extreme poverty.
- To promote programs for the improvement of agriculture, rural life and agro business as an essential contribution to poverty reduction and integral development.

28. Accordingly, PAHO and IICA reaffirm the importance of pooling their capabilities in support of efforts to further development in their Member States, and their commitment to:

- the principle of Pan Americanism, which calls for cooperating with the countries of the Americas so that, in working together, they can promote their development;
- equitable development and the achievement of the objectives of health for all in the hemisphere, and the reduction of differences in health indicators among and within countries; and
- The promotion of prosperity in rural communities, including a reduction of inequalities among their inhabitants and, above all, increasing human freedoms.

29. IICA and PAHO will strengthen their joint technical cooperation actions, with a view to helping the countries of the Americas achieve health and prosperity in their rural communities. They will do this by supporting the efforts of the Ministries of agriculture and health, with the active participation of rural communities.

30. The *Plan of Action* sets the parameters for the cooperation, which will focus on actions in the following areas:

Animal Health, Public Health: Zoonoses and Food Safety

31. IICA and PAHO will exchange information, ideas and experiences in the respective areas of specialization. Also, they will carry out a number of actions in these areas whose results will have a favorable impact on the agricultural sector, nutrition and public health in rural communities and, consequently, on national economies.

32. These actions include:

- To strengthen the management skills of those who occupy executive or supervisory positions in national agricultural health and veterinary public health and food safety programs, with a view to making them more efficient and effective.
- To foster more active participation by the members of agrifood chains in agricultural health processes, in order to improve the safety of products and, as a result, public health and access to markets.
- To strengthen the use of information in agricultural epidemiological surveillance systems.

33. The Joint Actions within the Framework of the Summits Process includes the exchange of information and the participation of both organizations in preparatory activities and in the Ministerial meetings on health and agriculture and rural life. It also includes the exchange of information on progress in, and possible joint actions for, complying with the mandates of the Summits, including efforts to increase the participation of civil society, especially the private sector.

Actions undertaken so far in the context of the agreement:

- Joint FAO/PAHO/IICA work plan for strengthening the Agricultural Health and Food Safety (AHFS) system in Honduras.
- Development of a logical framework for the establishment of a national food safety system in The Bahamas.
- Assistance to the ministries of health and agriculture of Surinam, to revise AHFS legislation.
- Support for the exercises involving the simulation of sanitary and phytosanitary emergencies in Trinidad and Tobago.

- Cooperation with the National Agrifood Health, Safety and Quality Service (SENASICA) of Mexico, related to the implementation of the Food Safety Program.
- IICA and PAHO/Pan American Institute for Food Protection and Zoonoses (INPAZZ) are participating in the program to support native communities and in the healthy Municipal Districts Program in Argentina.
- The two organizations are working together to assist the National Agricultural Health and Food Safety Service (SENASAG) of Bolivia, to consolidate the food safety program.
- IICA and PAHO are working together on a bill for the National Health System of Ecuador.

Mechanisms for Planning, Programming, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Performance Management

34. This involves the exchange of experiences in these areas, and of information useful in developing the IICA evaluation system and the support instruments for managing organizational performance.

Exchange of Information and Experiences

35. This refers to exchanges of information, joint events using the infrastructure of both organizations, and collaboration in providing logistic support services for technical meetings and activities.

The Partnership challenge for agribusiness development

36. Changes in the environment, such as the loss of biodiversity and the contamination of food and water sources, also have a bearing on health and safety programs. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that 10% of all preventable diseases are due to the deterioration of the environment, and that the main causes of such diseases include the lack of sanitary measures, contamination of water sources, and unsafe foods.

37. Food safety for agribusiness development is of crucial importance. The challenges facing countries and the opportunities that can be tapped for food production and trade are directly related to the establishment of policies pertaining to and technological innovation in food safety. The need to be competitive affects not only public health and food quality, but also production, tourism, market access, food safety, the environment,

and so on. For developing countries, trade in fresh vegetables, fruits, meat, and seafood accounts for nearly half of all agricultural and food exports. This level of trade depends on the existence of clear policies and the application of food safety norms consistent with international agreements and standards of the WTO, Codex Alimentarius and the OIE.

38. Establishing a favorable environment and building capacity for agribusiness development, especially for small- and medium-scale producers, is a field of action where IICA intends to increase its current efforts by strengthening its relations with national organizations and by promoting foreign trade.

39. IICA has already acquired significant experience through programs to “create exporters” and to strengthen agribusiness networks. This will be enhanced with actions to upgrade agribusiness management capabilities, and to foster strategic alliances among private actors to boost their competitiveness in global markets.

40. Our proposal to establish a trade capacity building facility in Miami is currently being discussed by our stakeholders.

41. Strong leadership in food safety and the development of environmentally friendly technologies are necessary to bring together all the actors in the agri-food chain; their actions must be strengthened by clear policies and specific norms that are consistent with international agreements and standards.

42. Agricultural health and food safety institutions must adjust to allow for greater integration and information sharing among all players. Strategic partnerships with the public and private sectors are crucial for developing sustainable agriculture and agribusiness, be it in the Americas or anywhere else in the world.

43. In summary, allow me to underscore three conclusions:

- (a) Food safety is critical for the prosperity of rural communities and for the health of all nations.
- (b) Institutional arrangements for the management of food safety institutions must be revised and modernized.
- (c) Investment in agricultural research and technology will continue to be critical for agricultural and rural development in the Americas.

44. These actions are undertaken as our world faces unprecedented challenges. Perhaps every generation sees their future in this way. As PAHO celebrates 100 years, the velocity of change, its magnitude, scope, and the real possibilities to fundamentally alter the human condition do create special circumstances for us today. This is especially

true in agriculture and health. Advances in science and technology are blurring traditional fields of study and demanding that people and institutions collaborate in new ways. The Americas hemisphere is steward to over 40% of the world's fresh water resources and produces most of the world's food. It is witness to the possibilities of globalization and trade to enrich human lives. But more needs to be done. More can be done. More must be done. And to do it we have to learn how to work together: better, smarter, more effectively.

45. "We need vigorous science based public sector institutions, clear cut health and trade policies, precise standards, technical audit and inspection mechanisms, quarantine controls and disease and pest eradication measures are needed to address these issues." (USAID)

46. Our Institute in its Medium Term Plan 2002-2006 has clearly defined Agricultural Health and Food Safety as a priority area of work in which we have identified five strategic institutional actions namely:

- I. Application of the sanitary and phytosanitary agreements of the WTO and FTAA, as well as the sanitary and phytosanitary standards of international reference organizations (CODEX, OIE and IPPC); provide information to the countries on the development of said agreements and standards, as well as on important events; strengthen national and regional capacity in critical disciplines such as equivalence, regionalization, risk assessment, traceability, and harmonization.
- II. Enhance agricultural health and food safety systems in order to facilitate market access, interaction with the private sector, technical capacity and human and financial resources; support the countries' efforts to articulate and develop specific technical assistance regarding regulatory mechanisms, science-based technical capacity and institutional sustainability.
- III. Strengthen the Member States' ability to respond in a timely manner to emergencies and emerging issues in agricultural health and food safety; assist countries with early recognition of emerging issues that put at risk animal, plant or human health, or that offer new opportunities for enhancing the level of competitiveness or access to new markets; facilitate the provision of limited resources for tackling unforeseen emergencies.
- IV. Support food safety strategies and policies in the Member States for developing standards and regulations, leadership capacity and technical capability throughout the entire agri-food chain; adopt initiatives that encompass the agri-food chain, strengthen leadership and political determination, encourage shared responsibility from the producer to the consumer, enhance food safety standards and norms,

improve the ability to assess and manage risk, and promote education and information outreach.

- V. Capture timely and relevant information on the multiple roles of agricultural health and food safety; generate value added information for different levels of decision makers and professionals in the public and private sectors; provide timely information and support to build alliances in areas of potential impact including production, competitiveness, trade, tourism, bio-security, public health, food security and the environment.

47. Partnership is listed as the last of the eight Millennium Development Goals; a clear recognition that only by working together can we achieve prosperity for all. All international agencies agree that collaboration, coordination and joint action is the way to go. We are making progress; albeit slowly. I believe that we can accelerate the pace of institutional reform necessary for us to work more effectively together. Yes, I do believe we each must change how our institutions work so that we can work together. I also believe in the fierce urgency of now. Poverty and hunger threaten our children and social stability every day. In Latin America and the Caribbean I am convinced that through greater hemispheric solidarity we can surpass the Millennium Development Goals in all of our nations.

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