



Agriculture and the new challenges of development¹

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Summary

The information presented in this article was taken from the report “The State of and Outlook for Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas, 2007: Agriculture and the new challenges of development.” That document assesses the progress made in the hemisphere in achieving the four strategic objectives that the Ministers of Agriculture set in the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan, related to competitiveness, equity, sustainability and democratic governance. It also describes the main challenges facing agriculture in the hemisphere in light of the new conditions with which development efforts now have to contend.

The report concludes that, in economic and social terms, the hemisphere’s agricultural sector is performing better than it has for the last 25 years, with major growth in agricultural production and trade, progress in reducing poverty, improvements in income distribution in some countries and falling unemployment rates. The outlook is positive, especially given the upturn in the international prices of core commodities, the alternative uses being made of agricultural production and promising market niches. However, there are still concerns regarding social conditions, the environmental situation and governance in rural territories.

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Overarching global and regional trends: challenges coupled with opportunities

Agriculture has played an important role in recent years, not only because it is a way of life for millions of people in the Americas but also because it is a strategic sector that contributes to the economic, social, environmental and political development of the countries.

Globalization and change. Like every other productive sector, agriculture finds itself having to operate within an increasingly globalized and changing environment. This context is determining the performance of agriculture and rural life, increasing access to knowledge and shortening the distances between markets. Furthermore, it is promoting the consolidation of a multilateral institutional system and creating opportunities and posing challenges for the economic agents involved.



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Trade liberalization. As a development strategy, over the last two decades this has helped expand the markets of some productive sectors and given consumers access to a more diverse basket of goods. The outcome of the multilateral negotiations

within the framework of the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization (WTO) remains uncertain and the countries have turned to bilateral agreements instead. However, when negotiating bilateral agreements countries have to address the economic and social differences that exist between them as well as the social and environmental challenges posed by globalization.

From commodities to processed products. The food market is increasingly promoting the consumption of processed products instead of commodities, quality and specialized segments such as healthy, wholesome foods (low in fats and calories), denominations of origin and prepared or convenience foods. A case in point is the global organic products market, whose sales top US\$30 billion, with some 1500 articles available and nine percent annual growth. This trend is a great opportunity. On the other hand, the biggest challenges are posed by the small number of actors - mainly large supermarket chains that are imposing new and greater demands in terms of volumes, deadlines, deferred payment, price setting, labeling and packaging - and the need to integrate small and medium-scale producers effectively into value chains so they can take advantage of market niches.

Technological change is providing new opportunities. The intense use of know-how is the chief characteristic of the current paradigm. The most striking development is the growing use of genetically modified

organisms (GMOs) and their impact on certain crops such as grains and oilseeds. Another major development is the emerging use of agriculture as an alternative source of energy, with sugar and grains being used to produce ethanol and biodiesel. In both cases, production could be increased and more income generated in rural areas, but a number of important factors must also be taken into consideration:

- a. Health and the ecological balance,
- b. The effects on the prices of inputs and food,
- c. Food security and crop substitution, and
- d. The inclusion of the production of family agriculture.

The danger of countries becoming ungovernable. The growth of international drug trafficking and its adverse effects on economic, social and political life are fueling corruption and undermining governability. The continued existence of rural poverty in most of the less developed countries, the poor quality of the jobs available and the difficulty of improving the distribution of wealth increase the risk of countries becoming ungovernable. Migration is on the rise as people seek to escape from poverty and a hand-to-mouth existence in the rural milieu. On the other hand, migrants are sending growing amounts of funds back to their places of origin. This income is helping to improve the situation of many rural households but efforts are

needed to promote the use of this capital for productive investments, mitigating the problems of family disintegration and generating dignified jobs that discourage people from migrating.

Environmental degradation is increasing. There is evidence of a serious deterioration in natural resources. Climate change is having a big impact on agriculture, biodiversity and human health. Greenhouse gas emissions have not been controlled and the pollution of drinking water is on the increase. The manifestations of climate change (variations in temperature, precipitation, water levels and the increasing number of extreme events such as hurricanes, droughts and floods) will have a serious effect on agricultural competitiveness. The danger of forest fires is increasing, soil erosion is intensifying and supplies of freshwater are at risk (increasing the likelihood of more desertification). Achieving sustainable development calls not only for greater awareness of the need to manage natural resources and the environment correctly but also the adoption of good productive practices in expanded agriculture.

The recent performance of agriculture and rural life measured in terms of the conceptual framework of the AGRO Plan

The conceptual framework of the AGRO Plan and the approach it adopts for the region provide the frame of reference for analyzing the recent performance of agriculture in the Americas and the impact of global trends.

The Third Summit, held in Québec (2001), was a defining moment for agriculture and rural life in the Americas. In the Declaration adopted at the Summit, the Heads of State and Government acknowledged that agriculture was a way of life for millions of rural dwellers and a strategic sector of the socioeconomic system that generates wellbeing.

In preparing the 2007 report, the production-trade, ecological-environmental, socio-cultural-human and political-institutional dimensions were adopted as categories of analysis in assessing the degree of progress made in achieving the strategic objectives of agriculture and rural life (Table 1).

In response to the mandates issued by the Heads of State and Government in the summit process, the ministers of agriculture adopted the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan, thereby placing agriculture and rural life on the inter-American agenda and providing a guiding framework for determining national and regional strategies and analyzing the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural milieu.

Production-trade dimension

Production is growing, driven by the Southern Region. Agricultural production has continued to rise at the hemispheric level, although the rate of growth was slower in 2004-2005 than in 2003, which was a particularly good year for agriculture

Systemic Concept	Rural Territories	Agricultural Production-Trade Chains	National and International Context	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
Sustainable development approach				
Production – Trade	I. Promoting competitive rural enterprises	II. Integrating chains and strengthening their competitiveness	III. Promoting an environment conducive to competitive agriculture	→ Competitiveness
Ecological – Environmental	IV. Being environmentally responsible in the rural areas	V. From farm to table: promoting integrated environmental management	VI. Participating in building an institutional environmental framework	→ Sustainability
Sociocultural – human	VII. Quality of life in rural communities: creating know-how and opportunity	VIII. Advancing learning and expertise in the chain	IX. Promoting policies to create capabilities and opportunities for the rural communities	→ Equity
Political – institutional	X. Strengthening public and private sector participation and coordinated action between them in the territories	XI. Strengthening dialogue and commitments among actors in the chain	XII. Promoting national policies and regional and hemispheric cooperation for agriculture and rural life	→ Governance
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Rural Prosperity – Food Security – International Positioning			OVERARCHING GOAL: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL MILIEU

Table 1. Conceptual framework of the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan for agriculture and rural life

Source: Hemispheric Ministerial Agreements (2005).

in every region except the Caribbean (Cuba, Haiti and nine of the 13 countries of the Caribbean community - CARICOM).

In 2005, the agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) of Latin America and the Caribbean rose by 2.2%. Although growth was weaker than in previous years (it topped 4.1% in 2003 and 3.7% in 2004), it was less volatile and the positive medium-term trend was maintained. The sustained upward trend in agricultural production in LAC is due mainly to the rapid economic growth of the Southern Cone countries. Given the size of their agricultural sectors, those countries now account for an increasingly large share of Latin America's agricultural GDP (Figure 1).

Agrifood exports are growing but now account for a smaller share of the global market.

The Americas continue to be the world's leading net exporter of agricultural products, followed by Oceania. It is interesting to note that Africa, historically a net importer of agricultural products, has had a surplus since 2004. The other regions of the world continue to have a negative agricultural trade balance.

The hemisphere's share of global agricultural trade has been declining since 2000. This is because its agricultural exports have grown more slowly than those of the rest of the world. While global agricultural exports grew at an annual rate of 10.5% between 2000 and 2005, this hemisphere's agricultural exports rose by only 7.1% per year.

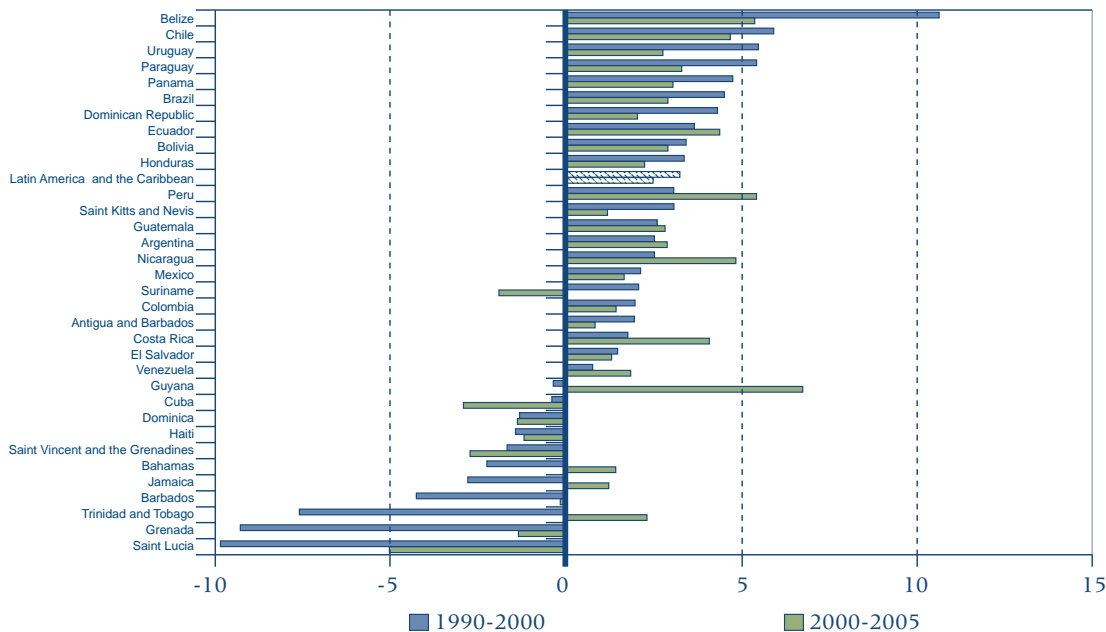


Figure 1. LAC countries: Average growth of agricultural GDP (average annual rate expressed as a percentage)

Source: FAO 2007.

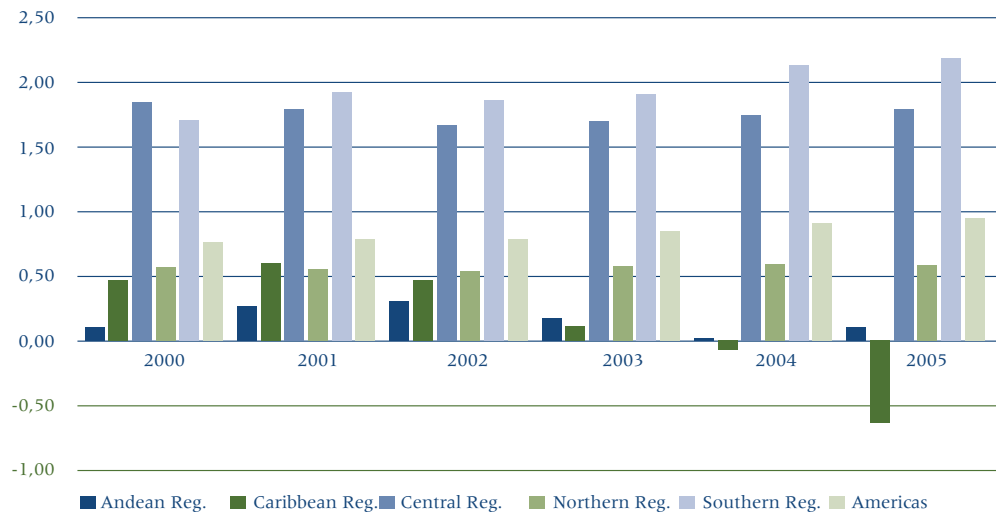


Figure 2. The Americas: Revealed comparative advantage of agricultural trade (2000-2005)

Source: Information compiled from the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics database.

While the share of agricultural commodities in world trade has fallen, down from 13% in 1995 to 7.2% in 2005, the share of processed products has risen 10.8% per year since 2002. The Americas mainly exports commodities, with soybean leading the way (8.5% of all agricultural exports). On the other hand, the region mainly imports processed agricultural products, a trend that has become more marked in recent years.

Agriculture in the Caribbean is becoming less competitive. Measured in terms of its revealed comparative advantage (RCA), the competitiveness of the hemisphere's agricultural trade was positive and improved during the period 2000-2005. This was mainly due to the sustained increase in the

agricultural RCA of the Southern Region, since it remained unchanged in three of the other regions (Northern, Andean and Central) and fell in the Caribbean, where it actually dipped into negative territory in 2004 (Figure 2).

Spike in international prices. During the same period, international prices of agricultural products rose sharply, by an average of 6.5% per year, reversing the trend of low prices seen in previous years. With the exception of cocoa beans, the international prices of all the main commodities rose (coffee and sugar prices alone increased by over 13%). (See Table 2). Since the prices of tropical products increased the most, the outlook for further growth in the demand for food is positive.

	Periods		
	1992-1997	1997-2002	2002-2007
Agricultural products (Foods and Beverages)	3.6%	-4.8%	6.5%
Cereals	5.4%	-3.4%	7.7%
Meats	0.3%	0.9%	4.3%
Oils	6.0%	-7.3%	4.2%
Other products:			
• Sugar	3.8%	-6.5%	13.6%
• Coffee	18.3%	-23.5%	13.7%
• Bananas	2.0%	2.0%	7.6%
• Oranges	0.9%	5.0%	6.5%
• Cocoa (Beans)	7.9%	-3.0%	-2.6%
• Soybean	5.7%	-7.9%	2.4%
• Wood	2.1%	-2.5%	5.7%

Table 2. International prices of agricultural commodities (average annual growth rate for selected periods)

Source: Information compiled from data published by the International Monetary Fund.

Food health and safety are key elements of competitiveness. As already mentioned, quality products are now required to meet tougher standards. In 2005, nearly US\$190 billion in agricultural exports and US\$130 billion in imports had to meet a sanitary or phytosanitary standard of some kind.

The competitiveness of specific agricultural products could be affected by the impact of problems such as foot-and-mouth and mad cow disease, resulting in the loss of markets and jobs, falling consumption,

lower prices for producers, etc. Therefore, it is important for countries in the Americas to focus on sanitary issues (Table 3).

Although LAC invests over US\$10 billion per year in science and technology, it is not enough, because the technological gap between LAC and the rest of the world is widening. For example, yields per hectare in LAC remain lower than those of the industrialized countries and emerging regions such as East and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina,

Diseas	Status	Países
Foot-and-mouth	Countries free of foot-and-mouth disease without vaccination	Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, USA, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama
	Countries free of foot-and-mouth disease with vaccination	Paraguay, Uruguay
	Countries with an area free of foot-and-mouth disease without vaccination	Argentina, Colombia, Peru.
	Countries with an area free of foot-and-mouth disease with vaccination	Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)	Member countries recognized as free of BSE	Argentina, Uruguay
	Member countries recognized as temporarily free of BSE	Chile, Paraguay
Rinderpest	Countries free of rinderpest infection	Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brasil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, USA, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, Uruguay, Venezuela

Table 3. Sanitary status of three diseases

Source: Based on resolutions adopted by the International Committee of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

Chile, Venezuela and Cuba account for 96% of the region's investment in science and technology and LAC's limited efforts to develop and incorporate new technologies are geared toward traditional products.

► *Agroenergy production, agrobiotechnology and agrotourism are enhancing agriculture's role as a driving force for growth in rural territories and as an agent of economic change.*

Production of non-traditional items is increasing due to the incorporation of new farmland, a trend that cannot be sustained over the medium and long terms.

Although LAC is trying to incorporate alternative production methods (such as direct planting and precision and organic agriculture), it remains a long way behind other regions of the world. Other opportunities such as agroenergy production, agrobiotechnology and agrotourism are enhancing agriculture's role as a driving force for growth in rural territories and as an agent of economic change. For example, the growing use of genetically modified varieties in this hemisphere and other parts of the world has

shown that it is possible to increase yields and lower costs. It is up to the countries to ensure that producers and consumers enjoy the benefits of biotechnology, not only the developers of the technology. The pertinent regulatory frameworks must also be created and precautions taken to prevent possible risks.

With fossil fuel prices expected to continue to rise, driven by the growing demand for energy worldwide, the countries are promoting the production of fuels from agricultural products. Although many countries are endorsing these initiatives (with the United States and Brazil most committed), the impact on agricultural prices, crop substitution, food security, feed for animals and other issues remains unclear.

Furthermore, the increased demand for raw materials used in the production of biofuels is expected to alter the terms of trade for many agricultural commodities.

Sociocultural-human dimension

Poverty and extreme poverty in rural areas decreased during the first half of this decade. In 2005, for the first time in 25 years the rates for both dipped below 1980 levels.

Although LAC continues to be the most inequitable region in the world in terms of income distribution, between the end of the last decade and the middle of this, the situation in rural areas improved in 11 of the 13 countries for which information is available. The gaps between poverty and

extreme poverty in rural and urban areas narrowed.

Paraguay, El Salvador, Mexico and Brazil made the biggest strides in reducing poverty during that period. Uruguay, Brazil, Mexico and Panama were also on track to achieve the poverty reduction target set as part of the Millennium Goals, which only Chile has met so far.

Not only are poverty rates higher in rural areas than in urban areas, the incidence of rural poverty is also higher among self-employed agricultural workers. This suggests that, as an economic activity, agriculture needs to focus on poverty alleviation strategies, because it has the greatest potential for raising the incomes and improving the quality of life of the poor.

In 2005, the remittances that migrant workers sent back to LAC had a significant effect in reducing poverty, as they totaled US\$48.3 billion. Mexico receives the largest slice of these resources (US\$21.8 billion per year), followed in the region by Colombia and Brazil. Remittances play a particularly important role in other Central American and Caribbean countries.

Ecological-environmental dimension

Environmental degradation is continuing and vulnerability is increasing. LAC has 915 million hectares of forests (23.2% of the world total) but 4.3 million hectares are lost every year. The United States, Chile, Uruguay, Costa Rica and Cuba are the only countries whose forest cover has increased.

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Enormous biodiversity and genetic riches exist but habitat destruction is leading to the extinction of a growing number animal and plant species. Marine resources are being overexploited and desertification and the degradation and loss of soils are on the rise, due to inappropriate practices, deforestation and climate change.

The Americas contain 45% of the world's entire supply of freshwater (43,750 Km³/year). Despite its relative abundance, however, water is a very threatened resource (agriculture uses nearly 69% of the total).

In recent years, the region has become increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters, with the poorest segments of the population and rural areas hardest hit. The Andean Region accounts for over 50% of the deaths caused by natural disasters in the Americas, with floods posing the biggest threat to human life. The Central and Caribbean regions are next in importance.

The pressure to meet the dietary needs of a population that has doubled in the last 50 years has led to nearly 37% of all land being used to grow crops, with most production systems geared to the non-sustainable use of natural ecosystems. The environmental costs have been huge in terms of the degradation of water resources, the non-sustainable use of aquifers, the loss of forest cover, desertification and the release of large quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. In general, economic development is being achieved at a burgeoning environmental cost.

Climate change is impacting the region's agriculture. The effect of climate change on agricultural production will vary from

one area to another, since some developed countries at mid and high latitudes, especially in the Northern Hemisphere, could actually experience net gains, while many developing tropical countries could face even bigger problems related to climate change and the increasing unpredictability of rainfall levels.

Political-institutional dimension

Governance in the LAC countries has been strengthened. This has occurred thanks not only to increased citizen involvement in the formulation and execution of development policies, but also because the markets are helping to achieve social objectives such as the reduction of poverty and inequity. However, the social divide threatens governance in many rural territories in LAC.

The countries are opting to negotiate bilaterally. With the Doha Round stalled and the negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) suspended indefinitely, the LAC countries have opted to strengthen their respective regional trading blocs and/or negotiate bilateral or regional free trade agreements with the United States and other major economic powers (mainly the Asian economies).

And reducing the amount of resources they allocate to the countryside. Finally, the amount of public funds allocated to the rural milieu has decreased substantially. Average per capita spending on rural areas in LAC fell by over 36% in real terms over the



last two decades, and total public spending in rural areas continues to be considerably less than the contribution that agriculture makes to economic development.

Four challenges facing agriculture and rural life

a. Making agriculture more competitive

In an environment of globalization and opening, the agricultural sectors of the LAC countries have to become more competitive. To do so, agriculture must produce more efficiently, increase the productivity of the factors of production, generate higher quality products, and have better institutions and human resources and more effective public policies geared to agrifood chains and rural territories.

To produce more efficiently, with higher yields and productivity of the factors of production, efforts are needed to reorient and speed up technological change and innovation in agriculture. More and better agricultural entrepreneurs are also

required, as well as a more skilled workforce and improved delivery of the services that agriculture needs to compete in more open and competitive markets. There is an urgent need to increase investment in agricultural research and development and speed up the incorporation of modern technologies into agriculture and agribusiness. The challenge facing agriculture in our countries is complicated, as we must produce more food and raw materials while at the same time conserving the forest cover and ecosystems.

To turn out quality products and compete successfully, the countries must make agricultural health and food safety (AHFS) a key element of their agrifood chains. This calls not only for improved national services but also for a new technological infrastructure and consensus with private sector organizations and actors on long-term agendas.

Formulating and implementing more effective policies in support of agriculture calls for the production of public goods and the creation of the conditions needed for them to operate properly (infrastructure, information systems, legal framework, financial system, logistical system, trade treaties, etc.). At the same time, efforts must be made to improve the integration of small producers and the family economy into agrifood chains and international markets.

b. Achieving greater equity in agriculture and the rural milieu

This calls for corrective actions to improve the traditional performance of the actors in agriculture and the rural milieu (enhancing



capabilities, increasing investments and promoting institution building).

Such corrective actions should form part of policies designed to promote rural prosperity that focus on four areas: agrifood chains (creation of agribusinesses, greater inclusion and job creation); rural territories (systemic competitiveness, reduction of transaction costs and generation of social income); institutional innovation (participatory and inclusive policy management); and the development of strategic capabilities (effective implementation of policies).

Food security must also be made one of the key objectives of poverty alleviation strategies, technological innovation processes, international trade negotiations and the orientation of development aid.

c. Making the transition to a more sustainable paradigm

To meet this challenge, LAC countries must review and change the ways that soils and forests have traditionally been used for agricultural activities, and then develop competitive business strategies that attach value to, and recognize the importance of, sound environmental management and promote equity for rural actors.

The use of agriculture as an alternative source of energy could stimulate the creation of agribusinesses, jobs and income in many rural territories. It could also reduce environmental pollution, striking a balance among the need to produce food, the expansion of agroenergy crops and the pressure on forests and protected environments.

The strong growth of organic production could also make an important contribution to the transition to a sustainable development paradigm.

The countries should also take advantage of the benefits of environmental functions and services such as integrated landscape management, promoting intersectoral and participatory approaches to territorial management, facilitating economic mechanisms whereby a fair price is paid for the functions of ecosystems and fostering comprehensive territorial management.

It is also imperative to tackle the challenges posed by global climate change by adopting the following practices:

- Actions and policies that promote the generation of accurate scientific information
- Analysis of the opportunities and risks for agriculture and the rural milieu
- Greater control of polluting emissions
- Analysis and assessment of the positive and negative impacts of producing biofuels

Although all nations will be affected, the tropical countries and their poor rural inhabitants are the most vulnerable in terms of potential victims and capital

losses. It is essential, therefore, that agricultural producers adapt and the national authorities prepare the rural population for the challenges posed by climate change.

d. Promoting governance in rural territories

To strengthen governance in rural territories, the countries need to bolster the market as a mechanism for growing the agricultural and non-agricultural rural economy. At the same time, they should enhance the capabilities of agroindustrial producers and family farmers so they can integrate better into international markets. Agriculture and the rural milieu will then be able to obtain greater benefits from trade and from the emergence of new market niches.

Furthermore, mechanisms need to be developed to improve the distribution of profits throughout agrifood chains and promote a fair return for each factor of production. The citizenry should play a bigger role in both the formulation and/or implementation of public policies designed to strengthen rural territories, and the search for solutions to local problems.

Final thoughts

The role that agriculture has played in reducing poverty in recent years is a reaffirmation of the concept that IICA has been promoting since the turn of the century, namely that agriculture is important not only because it is a way of



life for millions of people in the Americas, but also because it is a strategic sector that contributes to national economic, social, environmental and political development, and in some countries is still the main driving force of the economy.

Agriculture's true contribution to economic development in the hemisphere is enhanced when the region's favorable agroecological conditions are underpinned by public policies that make its products more competitive, promote trade negotiations that guarantee improved market access and make it possible to take advantage of new market niches. Also needed are more effective public policies that guarantee product quality and safety, allocate more

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resources to investment in science and technology and promote equity and sustainability. Actions of this kind are essential if agriculture is to be the catalyst for translating the current sustained economic growth in the developing countries into significant reductions in poverty and hunger.

The increased liberalization of agricultural trade and the expected growth in the global demand for food are a great opportunity for the region's agriculture to make an even bigger contribution to the development of the countries of LAC.

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Résumé / Resumo / Resumen

L'agriculture face aux nouveaux défis du développement

Cet article est un extrait du rapport intitulé « Situation et perspective de l'agriculture et de la vie rurale dans les Amériques en 2007 : l'agriculture face aux nouveaux défis du développement », qui permet d'évaluer les progrès réalisés dans le Continent américain vers la réalisation des quatre objectifs stratégiques retenus par les ministres de l'agriculture dans le Plan AGRO 2003-2015 : la compétitivité, l'équité, la durabilité et la gouvernance démocratique. Il décrit également les principaux défis qu'affronte l'agriculture du Continent américain du fait des nouvelles conditions du développement contemporain. Il conclut que l'agriculture américaine obtient les meilleurs résultats économiques et sociaux de ces 25 dernières années, avec une croissance importante de la production et du commerce agricoles, des progrès en matière de réduction de la pauvreté, une meilleure répartition des revenus dans certains pays et une baisse du chômage. Les perspectives sont donc favorables, spécialement compte tenu de la remontée des cours internationaux des principaux produits de base, des utilisations alternatives de la production agricole et de l'exploitation de créneaux de marché prometteurs. Cependant, des préoccupations persistent en ce qui concerne les aspects sociaux et environnementaux des territoires ruraux ainsi que leur gouvernance.

A agricultura em face dos novos desafios do desenvolvimento

Este artigo constitui um extrato do relatório "Situación y perspectivas de la agricultura y vida rural en las Américas 2007: La agricultura frente a los nuevos retos del desarrollo", no qual é possível analisar o progresso alcançado no Hemisfério nos quatro objetivos estratégicos estabelecidos pelos ministros da agricultura no Plano AGRO 2003-2015, quais sejam, a competitividade, a equidade, a sustentabilidade e a governabilidade democrática. Também apresenta os principais desafios que a agricultura do Hemisfério enfrenta em função das novas condições do desenvolvimento contemporâneo.

A conclusão a que se chega é que a agricultura do Hemisfério experimenta o seu melhor desempenho econômico e social dos últimos 25 anos, com um crescimento importante na produção e no comércio agrícolas, avanços na redução da pobreza, melhoras na distribuição da renda em alguns países e redução do desemprego. As perspectivas mostram-se favoráveis, especialmente pela recuperação dos preços internacionais dos principais produtos básicos e pelo aproveitamento de usos alternativos na produção agrícola, bem como em face de nichos de mercado promissores. No entanto, ainda há preocupação quanto aos aspectos sociais, ambientais e de governabilidade nos territórios rurais.

La agricultura frente a los nuevos retos del desarrollo

El presente artículo constituye un extracto del informe "Situación y Perspectivas de la Agricultura y la Vida Rural en las Américas 2007: La agricultura frente a los nuevos retos del desarrollo", el cual permite evaluar el avance alcanzado en el hemisferio en los cuatro objetivos estratégicos planteados por los Ministros de Agricultura en el Plan AGRO 2003-2015: la competitividad, la equidad, la sostenibilidad y la gobernabilidad democrática. A la vez se exponen los principales desafíos que enfrenta la agricultura del hemisferio producto de las nuevas condiciones del desarrollo contemporáneo.

Se concluye que la agricultura del hemisferio presenta su mejor desempeño económico y social de los últimos 25 años, con un crecimiento importante en la producción y el comercio agrícola, avances en la reducción de la pobreza, mejoras en la distribución del ingreso en algunos países y disminución del desempleo. Las perspectivas se presentan favorables, especialmente por la recuperación en los precios internacionales de los principales productos básicos, el aprovechamiento de usos alternativos para la producción agrícola y de nichos prometedores de mercado. Sin embargo, persisten preocupaciones en lo social, ambiental y gobernabilidad en los territorios rurales.