



Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI)

**Report of the First Extraordinary Meeting
of the 2021 SACMI**

San Jose, Costa Rica
15 March 2021

Introduction

An Extraordinary Meeting of the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI) of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) was convened on 15 March 2021 at 8:33 a.m. (Costa Rica time), via videoconference, for the purpose of discussing matters regarding the convening of the Forty-first Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee and the Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas – 2021 Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA).

The Technical Secretary briefly explained the origins, objectives and duties of the SACMI. He stressed the importance of the Commission's role in facilitating regular interaction between the Director General and the Member States about initiatives involving management, budgetary and strategic technical cooperation issues, with the aim of establishing a consensus on these matters prior to meetings of the Executive Committee and the IABA.

He mentioned that the Commission is comprised of nine Member States: six permanent members—Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, the United States and Venezuela—and three Member States selected for one-year periods, with Colombia, Costa Rica and Saint Kitts and Nevis having been appointed for the year 2021.

He advised the participants that the following Member States were also in attendance at the meeting: The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay. Annex 1 includes the list of participants.

Remarks by the Director General: The Road to the Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas – 2021 Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA)

The Director General of the Institute welcomed the participants to the First Extraordinary Meeting of the 2021 SACMI, expressing satisfaction at the extensive participation of the Member States.

He gave an overview of IICA's situation, highlighting the following aspects: a) the Institute successfully maintaining close contact with Member States and offering support during the severe socioeconomic crisis triggered by the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, through the provision of first-class technical cooperation services to respond to the major needs expressed by the countries; b) the strengthening of the foundation of the institutional business model in alignment with IICA's 2018-2022 Medium-term Plan, through the streamlining of human and financial resources; and c) the administration's appreciation of Member States' efforts to pay their quotas, with payments amounting to USD 28.3 million at the end of 2020, thereby surpassing the projected amount of USD 20 million. Most notable was the contribution of the Government of Canada, which had paid its 2021 quota in advance.

He then listed the institutional meetings that were scheduled for 2021: the First Extraordinary Meeting of the 2021 SACMI on 15 March; b) the Regular Meeting of the SACMI on 22 April; c) the Forty-first Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee on 28 – 29 June; and d) the

Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas – 2021 Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA) on 1 – 2 September.

He also advised that, in addition to these meetings, two major multilateral events would be held in 2021: the United Nations Food Systems Summit, scheduled for September in New York, United States of America, which was the reason for convening the IABA at an earlier date; and the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), to be held in Glasgow, Scotland in November.

He referred to five action tracks that will guide the discussions at the Food Systems Summit, which are as follows: 1) ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all, 2) shift to sustainable consumption patterns, 3) boost nature-positive production, 4) foster equitable livelihoods and 5) build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress. The Director General expressed his concern that the United Nations debate may focus exclusively on consumer interests or on radicalized positions about environmental issues, while also maintaining that, from IICA's perspective, agricultural production and the environment should have a synergistic relationship, which was an approach it had adopted in its programs on Bioeconomy and Production Development and Climate Change and Natural Resources.

He mentioned that the key messages promoted by IICA at the Summit will be based on the following three principles: a) we cannot think about food systems without first thinking about agricultural producers, b) science is a fundamental input for the generation of public policies and c) agriculture is part of the solution and not of the problem. Otero indicated that the region of the Americas is a key guarantor of the food and nutritional security of the planet, not to mention its environmental sustainability.

He explained that the Institute was preparing and positioning itself to facilitate the participation of the countries of the Americas in the Summit, through: a) its inclusion in the Multi-Actor Food Systems Champions Network, a privilege that the Institute shares with approximately 100 other organizations; b) participation in and cooperation with national dialogues; c) promotion of regional dialogues, including the establishment of the Andean Agricultural Forum in coordination with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which is headed by the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development of Colombia; d) the promotion of technical debates on relevant issues to be discussed at the Summit; and e) the coordination of discussions at the hemispheric level.

He announced that Peru's Ministry of Agricultural Development and Irrigation, in collaboration with the FAO, would soon convene the third hemispheric meeting of Ministers of Agriculture to discuss the current situation with a view to the future. He mentioned that the United States of America had requested that these regional and hemispheric discussion forums with all the Member States be encouraged, in order to arrive at a joint and harmonized regional position for the pre-Summit meeting, to be held in July 2021.

The Director General then provided details on the technical documents that IICA was preparing for submission at these two major events. He indicated that the first document would speak to research and development, underscoring the fact that the countries were investing less than

USD 1 in agriculture for each USD 100 produced in the sector and thus agendas in this area would have to be reviewed and private sector linkages encouraged.

He advised that the second document would focus on living soils – an extremely important issue, given the alarming process of soil deterioration in Mesoamerica. This document, he explained, was the product of a partnership with Dr. Rattan Lal, winner of the 2020 World Food Prize and Director of the Carbon Management and Sequestration Center (CMASC) at Ohio State University.

The Director General remarked that the third document would address the topic of digital agriculture and the need for the digital inclusion of rural communities, warning that it was critical that certain issues be considered, such as the digital divide and digital skills, which are key to the future of agriculture.

He explained that the fourth document would be on tropical agriculture, focusing on the importance of productivity for all production chains, and advised that International Tropical Agriculture Week, which would begin on March 22, would convene qualified stakeholders and partners of the Institute.

He said that the fifth topic would discuss sustainable livestock production and he outlined technical actions undertaken in this area in 2020, most notable of which were two meetings that demonstrated how appropriate livestock management was part of the solution to climate change.

The Director General mentioned that the sixth document would deal with health, focusing on the interconnection between animal, environmental and human health and the design and implementation of research-based policies and programs, in coordination with multiple sectors, to improve public health.

The seventh document, he explained, would refer to the role of cooperative enterprises, emphasizing the importance of associative efforts, as a key element for the management of production chains and agrifood systems.

The Director General then advised that documents eight, nine, ten and eleven would deal with international trade, the bioeconomy, gender and youth, as well as agriculture in the Caribbean, respectively.

He indicated that in the coming weeks, the Institute would begin a consultation process to ensure that the documents reflected the vision of the 34 Member States, in view of the two aforementioned events. He also said that IICA was in constant dialogue with Dr. Agnes Khalibata, Special Envoy of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General to the Food Systems Summit, who was leading the coordination efforts for this event.

He remarked that, given the risks and logistical limitations arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Executive Committee and IABA meetings should be held virtually, to safeguard the health of the delegations of Member States and the staff of the Institute. He also pointed out that the 2020 Executive Committee was successfully held, using the virtual platform.

In conclusion, he explained that the election of the Director General for the 2022-2026 term, even if it were held by virtual means, would be transparent, neutral, effective and technically reliable, through the use of an electronic tool that would allow the Member States to be assured that the process was secure and legally sound.

Analysis and comments

The Representative of Brazil thanked the Director General and the IICA team for their efforts in preparation for the United Nations Food Systems Summit and the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), given the importance of positioning agriculture as part of the solution and presenting a joint position among all countries of the Americas at both events. He expressed concern about the risk that the event would propose a partial solution, based on the situation in other regions, for example Europe, where some entities advocate that regulations be biased in favor of consumers, while disregarding scientific principles. He advised the meeting about several high-level meetings held with Argentina, the United States of America and Brazil, as well as within the framework of the Southern Agricultural Council (CAS). He mentioned the importance of properly coordinating actions to ensure that the voice of the Americas would be heard at the Summit.

He confirmed that Brazil endorsed the proposal that meetings of the Institute's governing bodies be held virtually, since the world had not yet overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and the health of the members of delegations should be protected.

The Representative of Canada thanked the Director General for organizing the meeting and for informing those in attendance about IICA's participation in the Summit and the process to elect the Director General for the 2022-2026 term. He congratulated the Institute for its inclusion in the Multi-Actor Food Systems Champions Network and for its actions to enhance food security, trade and the sustainability of farmers in Member States, particularly during the pandemic.

With respect to the Summit, he stressed IICA's role in promoting science-based regulations, which would allow the region to drive sustainability in the coming years, when faced with the challenge of feeding a growing population.

He commended the leadership displayed by the Institute in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that had threatened food security and the functioning of the region's food systems. He expressed support for efforts to ensure that the voice of the Americas was heard at the Summit, while endorsing the proposal that this year's meetings of IICA's governing bodies be held virtually, using virtual voting mechanisms. The Representative also highlighted the Institute's efforts in recent years, under the leadership of the Director General, particularly with respect to technical cooperation and institutional modernization, amidst a difficult economic climate.

Finally, he asked the Director General for further details about the third meeting of Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas, scheduled to be held in April, under the leadership of Peru.

The Representative of Mexico noted that, as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the upcoming Summit would seek to reassess the way the world produces,

consumes and thinks about food. She considered that agriculture should be given greater prominence at the Summit because it is the foundation of agrifood systems. She added that, during the event, it would also be important to shine the spotlight on the role played by producers, especially the poorest ones. She also expressed support for IICA's participation at the Summit, where it would draw on its experience and capacity to share the countries' proposals regarding agriculture as a fundamental pillar of food systems.

The Representative of Argentina thanked the Director General for the Institute's efforts to coordinate a regional position ahead of the Summit. He informed the participants that CAS was working to define certain policy principles that would allow for highlighting the region's work in the field of climate change. He considered it important to let the voice of Latin American countries be heard at the Summit and to give greater visibility to the good practices that are being carried out in the region to solve the issue of climate change. He stressed the importance of consolidating those policy principles through the technical proposals being developed by IICA, to ensure that the countries that have affected the region's environmental quality and ecosystem services are held accountable.

He noted that the meetings that Mexico had held with Brazil and the United States had been very productive, as had been the meetings held within the framework of CAS, which had brought to light common challenges and concerted tools for improving agriculture in the region. Lastly, he expressed support for the proposal to hold the upcoming meetings of the Executive Committee and the IABA virtually.

The Representative of the United States of America thanked the Director General for his presentation and congratulated the Institute on becoming a member of the Multi-Actor Food Systems Champions Network. He stated that the United States supports the UN Food Systems Summit and the fulfillment of its objectives to improve the sustainability and resilience of food systems and to promote safe, healthy, nutritious and affordable food for all populations.

He pointed out that agrifood systems are the result of joint efforts that should foster the use of good practices, innovative science-based approaches and cutting-edge technologies. He added that greater emphasis should be placed on the application of science-based policies to guide decision making regarding social, environmental and human well-being, and to foster the inclusion of women, people living in extreme poverty, small-scale producers, youth, marginalized communities, indigenous peoples and small and medium-sized businesses. He also underscored the need to improve agricultural employment opportunities, skills for modern economic management and access to credit, funding and market information.

He highlighted the importance of ensuring that all countries in the Americas agree on a solid, unified position regarding the topics that would be addressed at the Summit and stated that he looked forward to working with IICA and the countries to achieve that goal.

The Representative of Paraguay congratulated the Director General and the Institute on the activities described and reported on the work that CAS was carrying out to position the agriculture sector. She requested that the Institute participate in the management of funds related to climate change, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF), with

a view to incorporating agrifood systems into the initiatives of those funds. In that regard, she commented that Paraguay was pursuing resources from the GEF, the GCF and the Adaptation Fund, and had received payment for the results of REDD+ strategy actions. However, she considered that the agriculture sector's standing with respect to those funds had grown weaker, and therefore emphasized the need to strategically showcase the good practices being implemented by countries with sustainable production models.

The Director General thanked the members of the SACMI for their support and recommendations. He considered that agricultural producers and the rural population should be the protagonists of the Summit. He acknowledged the need to address matters related to consumers and the environment, both of which are closely tied to agricultural production, and considered that IICA and its Member States should share their wealth of experience in this area. He reiterated the Institute's proposal to serve as a means of showcasing technical actions based on science and best practices. He noted that, over the next two months, IICA would be undertaking intense efforts to develop technical inputs to be made available to its Member States.

He reiterated the Institute's intention to strengthen support for national and regional dialogues and for the hemispheric meeting of ministers of Agriculture, to be held on April 15. In response to Canada's query, he clarified that responsibility for coordinating the hemispheric meetings was rotated between the Institute and FAO, and that the upcoming meeting was being organized by the latter organization. He added that he would request the agenda for the meeting and share it with all the Member States of IICA.

In response to Paraguay's request, he announced that the Institute would soon become accredited by the Green Climate Fund, which would enable it to provide greater support for actions aimed at achieving sustainability in agriculture and strengthening synergies between the environment and production systems. He concluded his remarks by emphasizing his commitment to ensuring that the voice of the Americas is heard at the Food Systems Summit.

Meetings of the governing bodies

The Director General requested that the Technical Secretariat explain the legal aspects that should be taken into account to hold virtual meetings of IICA's governing bodies and to elect the Director General for the period 2022-2026.

The Technical Secretary explained that, because the emergency situation triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic was still unfolding, the Institute proposed holding the next meeting of the IABA virtually and implementing that modality for the Executive Committee meeting for the second time. He added that the Director General of IICA for the 2022-2026 quadrennium would be elected during the IABA meeting, noting that delegates must vote by secret ballot, in accordance with Article 106 of the Rules of Procedure of the Board. Similarly, the Executive Committee must elect, by secret ballot, a member of the Audit Review Committee (ARC), as provided for in Articles 82 and 83 of the Rules of Procedure of the Committee.

With respect to the nominations for Director General, he indicated that the call for nominations had already been sent to the ministries of Foreign Affairs of the countries, with a copy to the ministers

and/or secretaries of Agriculture. He reported that, at that time, only the official nomination of Dr. Manuel Otero, on behalf of the Government of Argentina, had been received. He clarified that, in accordance with the Institute's Convention, a Director General could only be reelected once. He noted that the Member States had been duly informed of the proposal submitted by the Government of Argentina. He mentioned that the Institute would await any additional nominations, which it would immediately share with the countries. He reminded the participants that nominations could be submitted up to 45 days before the IABA meeting during which the election would be held, meaning July 16 of the current year; however, he added that it was possible to submit a nomination after that date, provided that it was accepted by a majority vote of the Member States in attendance at the Board meeting.

He informed the participants that, in order for a virtual meeting of the IABA to be legally viable, it would be necessary to request that the 34 Member States cast a vote by correspondence to accept or reject the proposal to hold the meeting in this manner. He added that two thirds of the Member States of the Board, that is, 23 countries, would have to vote in favor of the proposal for it to be approved. In the case of the Executive Committee, the Director General would need to request countries to vote by correspondence and obtain approval from 8 of the 12 Member States sitting on the Committee.

Next, he referred to the legal and operational viability of voting by secret ballot during the virtual meetings. He recalled that current rules and regulations only accounted for in-person voting with physical ballots being placed in a transparent ballot box and counted by tellers selected by the Chair of the IABA. He noted that technological advances made it possible to cast votes by secret ballot through electronic means, and that the Institute was in the process of identifying a system that was technically reliable and that would ensure transparency of the voting process, neutrality with respect to the candidates of the election, and the legal certainty of the result. He added that the methodology for selecting tellers would need to be temporarily adjusted in keeping with the virtual modality of the meeting.

Lastly, he highlighted the fact that support from the Member States would be required in order to: a) hold the meetings of the IABA and the Executive Committee virtually in 2021; b) utilize an electronic means to vote by secret ballot in the cases stipulated in the rules and regulations of the Institute (election of the Director General by the IABA and of a member of the ARC by the Executive Committee); c) modify the rule governing the procedure to appoint tellers for the abovementioned voting processes; and d) proceed with voting by correspondence, as soon as possible, as set forth in the rules and regulations of IICA, in order to obtain the respective authorization from the Member States.

The Director General reiterated the proposals for which support from the countries would be required and announced that the Institute was searching for potential suppliers of electronic voting systems. He mentioned that a highly prestigious company with the appropriate technology had been contacted, and that it charged USD 98,000 for that type of system. The Institute was also exploring other options by reaching out to other organizations that had had to utilize this type of mechanism in 2020, such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Organization of American States (OAS).

The legal advisor of the Institute's governing bodies commented that, in cases where an election must be carried out during an IABA or Executive Committee meeting, the Chair of the governing body must appoint two tellers from countries that have not submitted nominations for the corresponding position, who are responsible for counting the physical votes cast by the Member States. He acknowledged the fact that, under a virtual or electronic modality, this duty would be more difficult to perform; therefore, the Institute was seeking alternatives for appointing tellers and for the duties they must carry out.

Analysis and comments

The Representative of Mexico expressed support for the proposal to hold the meetings of IICA's governing bodies virtually in 2021. She suggested two different ways to cast a vote. One possibility was the vote by correspondence, as stipulated in the rules of procedure of the Executive Committee and the IABA, which resembled the procedure implemented in Mexico to elect the President of the Republic; however, she warned that this would require extensive follow-up based on established principles. She mentioned that another option would be to cast a vote using an electronic system with the necessary characteristics.

The Director General thanked the countries for their support on the issues discussed. He reiterated his commitment to presenting a concrete proposal at the next SACMI meeting regarding how to conduct electronic voting at the meetings of the Executive Committee and the IABA. He added that progress achieved in preparing the technical documents for the Food Systems Summit, as well as the proposed 2022-2023 Program Budget, would be shared during the SACMI meeting.

Close of the session

At 10:11 a.m. in Costa Rica, on 15 March 2021, having completed the analysis and discussion of the items proposed, the Director General thanked the members of the SACMI and the other participants and declared the meeting closed.

Annex No. 1
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