



Forty-first Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee

**Report of the 2021 Regular Meeting of the Special Advisory
Committee on Management Issues (SACMI)**

IICA/CE/Doc. 729 (21) - Original: Spanish

San Jose, Costa Rica
28-29 June 2021

Introduction

The Regular Meeting of the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI) was convened on 22 April 2021 at 8:32 a.m. (Costa Rica time), via videoconference, pursuant to Resolution IICA/CE/Res. 580 (XXXIII-O/13).

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 of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Member States about initiatives involving administrative, budgetary and strategic technical cooperation issues, with the aim of building a consensus on these matters prior to meetings of the Executive Committee (EC) and the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA).

He mentioned that the SACMI 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 indicated that the following IICA member countries were also in attendance on that occasion: Antigua and Barbuda, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Annex 1 includes the list of participants.

Remarks by the Director General

The Director General welcomed the representatives of the countries, expressing satisfaction at the extensive participation of the Member States in the meeting.

He began his message by expressing solidarity with the government and people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for the tragedy caused by the La Soufrière volcano eruption, which had displaced thousands of people and severely impacted the agriculture sector. He remarked that the tragedy had demonstrated the extreme vulnerability of that country and the Caribbean region, which was something that merited attention. He also advised the meeting that the Institute was mobilizing human and financial resources to contribute to maintaining agricultural activity in the country, thus supporting food and nutritional security.

He then mentioned IICA's activities in relation to the UN Food Systems Summit, to be held at the beginning of November. He explained that the Summit would be preceded by the Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas and the Twenty-first Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA) on 1 and 2 September – events that would assist in consolidating the position that the Americas would adopt at the Summit.

He underscored the importance of utilizing the term “agrifood systems”, rather than “food systems”—a move that would be of tremendous strategic relevance in the global and hemispheric

spheres, particularly for farmers in the Americas. He also highlighted the fact that agrifood systems in the region account for more than 25% of international trade.

He drew attention to the Institute's participation in the Champion's Network, an important support mechanism for the Summit, in the framework of which numerous national, regional and hemispheric dialogues had been held, addressing various issues from the perspective of agriculture in the Americas, while also emphasizing that without agricultural production, there would be no raw materials to transform into food, which would further aggravate food insecurity.

He mentioned that the growing interdependence of production and consumption had made it clear that the desired transformation in agrifood systems should include production efficiency, human health and environmental and social sustainability.

The Director General also announced that in the coming days, the governments, ministries and secretariats of agriculture would be provided with a conceptual document outlining the vision regarding the future of agrifood systems in the Americas, with information compiled from bilateral and regional discussions with multiple public, private and civil society actors. He also added that the Institute was in the process of preparing eleven technical documents aimed at fostering joint action with a view to the Summit.

He emphasized that the future of these systems should be based on consolidating a new vision of rurality and more transparent and fair agricultural trade, in which agricultural productivity and sustainability are an indivisible part of new sustainable development strategies.

He confirmed that IICA had organized independent dialogues on matters related to the Summit, such as trade, gender and youth, tropical agriculture, sustainable livestock, digital agriculture, cooperatives and the "One Health" approach, among others. He reiterated the Institute's offer to support the Member States in national dialogues about the transformation of agrifood systems.

He indicated that IICA was offering the governments of its member countries access to the results of the dialogues it had organized, as well as technical documents in relation to the development of institutional frameworks, capacity building, the creation of coordination mechanisms between public and private sector entities throughout the production chain, and the strengthening of national science, technology and innovation systems that are mechanisms with a tremendous transformative capacity and that promote agricultural practices that are compatible with environmental and ecosystem health.

He said that the countries of the region should improve their capacity to increase production volume and efficiency, by adopting an inclusive approach aimed at producing nutritional food and adding value. He revealed the Institute's desire to serve as the voice of agriculture of the Americas, with a view to asserting the sector's important role in resolving problems.

Statement by the Minister of Agriculture of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

The Minister of Agriculture of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines greeted the Member State delegates present at the meeting. He referred to the natural disaster that had struck his country with the eruption of La Soufrière Volcano, causing significant disruption in the agriculture sector and severely impacting food security. He thanked all the countries for their expressions of solidarity and support to tackle the humanitarian issue, as well as IICA for the technical assistance it had been providing to the country.

He advised them that in two weeks a platform would be launched for the purpose of rebuilding the agrifood sector, which would require the support and solidarity of all the country's partners. The Minister explained that, according to a preliminary assessment of the catastrophe, the damages exceeded approximately USD 150 million, which would impact the productivity of small farmers and the contribution of agriculture to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). He asked the Director General to mobilize resources to support the farmers, promising to present a proposal on the initiative to the Institute in the next 14 days.

The Director General expressed IICA's full commitment to undertake the necessary actions to support the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in tackling the catastrophe and restoring the functioning of the country's agrifood systems. He then thanked the Minister of Agriculture of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for participating in the SACMI meeting.

2022-2023 Draft Program Budget

The Director of Corporate Services listed the criteria on which the Institute's 2022-2023 Program Budget was based: a) the Program Budget is the instrument that funds the Medium-term Plan (MTP); b) the Regular Fund is financed by Member State quotas and miscellaneous income generated; c) the Program Budget is aligned with the Institute's strategic planning and programming; d) there had been a 28.57% reduction (USD 1,000,000) in miscellaneous income compared to the amount in 2019, which was USD 3,500,000; and e) IICA's quota scale is based on the percentage structure approved by the Organization of American States (OAS).

He noted that the income budget for the 2022-2023 biennium was USD 32,074,100, made up of USD 29,574,100 from quotas and USD 2,500,000 from miscellaneous resources. He then indicated that the percentage of resources of the Regular Fund allocated to each of the budget chapters was as follows: a) direct technical cooperation services: 88.9% in 2022 and 89.1% in 2023; b) management costs: 6.1% for the biennium; c) general costs and provisions: 4.3% in 2022 and 4.1% in 2023; and d) renewal of infrastructure and equipment: 0.7% for the biennium. He stressed that the Program-Budget was seeking to strengthen direct technical cooperation at the national, regional and hemispheric levels, as it had in recent years. Finally, he presented the detailed expenditure budget of the Institute, by programming center and by major object of expenditure.

Report on the collection of quotas

The Financial Manager presented the report on the collection of Member State quotas, corresponding to the end of 2020 and to 2021 (as of April 20). She made reference to Article 23 of

the Convention on IICA and Resolution No. 414 of the IABA, “Revised Measures for Collecting Quotas Owed to the Institute,” which indicate that Member States shall contribute to the maintenance of the Institute through annual quotas established by the IABA, in accordance with the OAS system for calculating quotas.

She indicated that as of December 2020, 16 countries were up to date in their payments, 15 were in regular status (owing payments for two years or less) and 3 were in arrears (owing payments for more than two years). She advised the meeting that as of 20 April of the current year, USD 21 million had been collected and explained that should no further payments be received by 1 July of the current year, 4 countries would be up to date in payments, 26 would be in regular status and 4 in arrears. She emphasized that receiving the projected level of resources was critical to enabling the Institute to effectively execute its technical cooperation plans.

Analysis and comments by Member States

The Representative of Canada expressed solidarity with the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, given the emergency unfolding in that country, due the eruption of La Soufrière Volcano. He thanked IICA for the Program Budget presentation and the report on the collection of quotas. The Representative underscored the value of the Institute’s response to the challenges in the region ensuing from the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, in particular its technical cooperation actions and organization of multiple dialogues with ministers, technical councils and other forums of relevance to agriculture. He also stressed the important role that IICA is playing in ensuring that the voice of the hemisphere will be heard at the upcoming United Nations Food Systems Summit and highlighted the value of science and technology in achieving a sustainable agriculture sector. Finally, he urged Member States to honor their institutional quota commitments.

The Representative of Mexico extended warm greetings to and expressed solidarity with the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, with the wish that the country would quickly recover from the catastrophe. She thanked IICA for the presentation of the 2022-2023 Draft Program Budget, which, she said, clearly demonstrated the Institute’s efforts to reduce costs, optimize the use of financial resources and continue the institutional transformation process. She expressed an interest in the document that the Institute was preparing on agrifood systems, stating that it should emphasize the pivotal role of agriculture.

The Representative of the United States of America thanked IICA for the presentations that were made. He indicated his agreement with the points raised by IICA with respect to the Food Systems Summit, while expressing his country’s willingness to working together on the proposed issues. He stated that he recognized and supported the efforts of the Director General and his team in preparing a Program Budget that is results-oriented and that aligns the Institute’s strategic objectives with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals. He indicated that his country was up to date in its quota payments and he committed to timely payment of the next disbursement, scheduled for October of that year. The Representative of the United States then reiterated his appreciation to the Director General for his technical and administrative leadership.

The Representative of Argentina expressed his country’s support for the Director General’s management of the Institute’s finances. He pointed out how important it would be for the countries

of the Americas to work together to tackle common challenges, in preparation for the Food Systems Summit. Thus, he stressed the Institute's role in coordinating the efforts of the countries to align around a common vision that takes into account the quality and safety of food production, hand in hand with the achievement of environmental sustainability. He also advised the participants that his country agreed with the proposal to conduct meetings of the governing bodies and the corresponding elections, by virtual means.

The Representative of Brazil reiterated his country's support for IICA's coordination of forums and meetings that emphasize agriculture's importance to food systems, which would assist in positioning the Americas as a region of major global strategic importance. The Representative also conveyed his country's agreement with conducting the IABA meeting by virtual means, as well as with the use of electronic voting in the election of the Director General. Finally, he commended the Draft Program Budget, while highlighting the challenges faced by the Institute in its efforts to implement an architecture that would ensure financial sustainability.

The Representative of Colombia made special mention of IICA's technical work in preparation for the Food Systems Summit. She indicated that her country's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development had also been preparing assiduously for the event and she thanked the Institute for its support in that effort. She also underscored the Ministry's belief in the importance of ensuring that farmers have the raw materials to facilitate production of healthy and high-quality food, both for Colombia's people as well as for the entire region.

The Director General thanked the delegates for their show of support. He pledged that his administration would continue to enhance the application of austerity measures and the efficient use of resources, and by doing so to ensure that IICA would become increasingly efficient in providing first-class technical cooperation. He also said that the aim was to lay the foundation to make IICA an institute of the XXI century – one that does more with less, while offering high-impact technical cooperation. He thanked the representatives for their support for the Institute's efforts in preparation for the Food Systems Summit.

Preparations for convening the Forty-first Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee and the 2021 Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas – Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA), by virtual means

The Technical Secretary recalled that in the previous meeting of the SACMI, it was proposed that this year's meetings of the governing bodies should be conducted virtually, and the corresponding elections undertaken by electronic means. He explained that further to that proposal and pursuant to Articles 93 and 94 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Committee, letters were sent to the current 12 members countries of that governing body, namely, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Suriname and the United States of America, requesting their approval, by correspondence, for the virtual processes.

He mentioned that the member countries of the Executive Committee had been asked to approve each of the following four proposals:

- a) To conduct the Forty-first Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee, using the virtual platform.
- b) To elect a member of the Audit Review Committee (ARC), via the most effective electronic platform that would guarantee that Member States are able to cast their votes by secret ballot. IICA would provide access to the platform in a timely manner.
- c) To modify the method of selection of tellers established in Article 83 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Committee, to accommodate the virtual format of the meeting.
- d) To begin the necessary consultations with the 34 Member States of the Institute with respect to: (i) convening a virtual Twenty-first Regular Meeting of the IABA; (ii) conducting the election of the IICA Director General for 2022-2026, using the most effective electronic platform that would ensure a vote by secret ballot; and (iii) adjusting Article 75 of the Rules of Procedure of the IABA about the method of selection of tellers to accommodate the virtual format of the meeting.

In response, he indicated that only 7 of the 12 members had submitted votes, meaning that there were still not enough votes for the necessary approval (which would require two-thirds of the votes, that is, 8 members). He stated that the remaining votes were expected in the upcoming days, after which the Institute would send a request to the 34 Member States to approve the proposals regarding the IABA, by correspondence.

The Technical Secretary then spoke about the use of the virtual election system that would facilitate a secret, transparent and trustworthy voting process. He explained that the Institute had undertaken exhaustive research on virtual voting systems available on the market that would satisfy high standards of trustworthiness, neutrality, transparency, information security and technical quality. He also stressed that the system would have to ensure an autonomous process, guaranteeing the secrecy of the vote, as established in Article 106 of the Rules of Procedure of the IABA, as well as Articles 82 and 83 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Committee.

He announced that the company EVoting had been selected, given that it provides a platform designed for voting, which had been used in conferences, shareholder meetings and meetings of boards of directors and cooperatives in various spheres. He stated that the company, which had been established more than seven years ago, provided a confidential and reliable voting process, a secure platform and an auditable system. He indicated that EVoting offers a user-friendly system, which can accommodate IICA's four official languages, as well as an integrated direct assistance service during voting. He also highlighted the fact that the company would offer prior training and testing, as well as a recording of the voting, for the Institute to retain in its records.

The Director General mentioned that the EVoting proposal was analyzed by IICA's Information and Communication Technologies and Digital Agriculture Division and indicated that various simulation exercises had been conducted to verify the security of the system, which had determined that the system is simple, efficient and safe. He explained that based on a cost-benefit assessment, the EVoting proposal was the best possible alternative on the market. He invited the members of the SACMI to make further queries about the selection.

Analysis and comments by Member States

The Representative of Argentina confirmed his country's agreement with the holding of virtual meetings and the use of electronic voting to elect a member of the ARC and the Director General. He confirmed that the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of Argentina had already sent a formal response.

The Representative of Canada also indicated agreement with both proposals. He requested clarification as to whether or not it would be necessary to confirm support by way of an official letter.

The Technical Secretary explained to the Representative of Canada, that in accordance with the rules of the IABA and the Executive Committee regarding the process to vote by correspondence, for now the request had only been sent to the member countries that are part of the 2021 Executive Committee and would later be sent to the 34 Member States of the IABA.

The Representative of the United States of America thanked IICA for the efforts undertaken and expressed support for the holding of virtual meetings and the electronic election process.

The Representative of Brazil confirmed agreement with the use of virtual platforms to conduct the meetings and voting, both for the Executive Committee and for the IABA.

The Representative of Costa Rica expressed support for the Institute's holding of virtual meetings in 2021 and applauded the fact that technology would facilitate the process to conduct high-level meetings of the Institute, as well as of the Executive Committee and the IABA. He also thanked the Director General for the austerity policy that he had been implementing at IICA.

The Representative of Mexico expressed satisfaction at the technological option available to conduct the elections established in the regulations of the Institute in virtual form. She also indicated that her country had sent its response to the request for a vote by correspondence.

The Director General thanked the delegates for the support received for conducting virtual meetings of the Executive Committee and of the IABA, as well as for the electronic election processes. He commented that this approach would ensure that the meetings would not endanger the health of the participants. He mentioned that IICA stood ready to support, clarify and provide more information about these processes to any country that so requested it.

He then invited the Deputy Director General of the Institute to inform the meeting about the webinar on "The Role of Grains and Oilseeds in Sustainable Food Systems: The Western Hemisphere's Perspective Ahead of the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit".

The Deputy Director General stated that the event would take place on 23 April 2021, with a view to disseminating the latest knowledge and proven concepts about the role of grains and oilseeds in a sustainable food system. He explained that the webinar would facilitate the sharing of current scientific expertise and the perspective of various experts about the important role of cereals and oilseeds in a sustainable food system, while also exploring future opportunities and challenges.

He went on to disclose that, with the support of the United States of America, IICA would soon conduct three webinars to enable the region to arrive at a consensus with respect to the joint position that the countries of the Americas would adopt at the Food Systems Summit.

The Director General also indicated that IICA would organize four dialogues for late April through early May, focusing on: a) the bioeconomy, b) digital agriculture, c) cooperatives and family farming, and d) soils and trade. He emphasized that IICA is working assiduously with its member countries to ensure that the voice of agrifood systems of the Americas is heard at the Summit. Finally, he thanked the Member States once again for their support and for their commitment to support the transformation of the Institute.

Close of the session

At 09:49 a.m. in Costa Rica, on 22 April 2021, having completed the analysis and discussion of the items proposed, the Director General thanked the members of the SACMI and the other countries present at the meeting for their participation and declared the meeting closed.

Annex No. 1
List of participants

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