



The international agencies that provide cooperation in agriculture have been impacted greatly by the global phenomenon known as the “crisis” or “boom” in food prices. This multi-factorial phenomenon has made it necessary to reflect on the current situation in agriculture and rural life, and to define the measures needed in the short and long terms to take advantage of the opportunities it has created, while successfully addressing possible negative impacts on developing countries.

Inasmuch as the situation in agriculture and the rural milieu is dramatically different from that of only a few months ago, and given the fact that the elements of the situation are different but complementary in nature, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) believes

is it is important to share the views of our specialists on the subject, especially as regards possible effects, new technologies, innovative projects and institutional modernization. It is hoped that these views will help our readers understand more clearly the opportunities and challenges created by the phenomenon, and answer three hypotheses on its causes:

- a) If the “crisis” or “boom” can be attributed to an *improvement in the incomes and purchasing power of thousands of people who used to be mired in poverty*, it will be necessary to provide the governments and production sectors of their countries with support in tapping this large new group of consumers, whose demands and consumption patterns have changed. This involves improving food productivity in our countries

and ensuring the socioeconomic sustainability of these new consumers so that they can lift themselves even further out of poverty and improve their living conditions.

- b) If the rise in prices is due to the *changes in the price of oil and oil by-products, and their impact on the transportation and inputs sector*, we must help find more creative, efficient and innovative solutions in terms of institutional, trade-related and technological services, so as to ensure competitiveness throughout the agrifood chain. In addition, we must weigh carefully any decision to use land for the production of biofuels rather than food.
- c) Lastly, if the current situation is due to *a deterioration of the environment and its effects on the availability of food*, it is imperative to move forward with the application of the concepts of sustainable agriculture and place greater emphasis on environmentally friendly growth, in order to avoid an expansion of the agricultural frontier biodiversity.

All of these intertwined hypotheses create a critical environment for analyzing and envisioning the future of agriculture in the Americas, which, from our perspective of cooperation, demands new and better technical solutions.

In this edition of **COMUNICA**, readers will find different perspectives on the rise in food prices, the goal being to provide an overview of the situation and its possible impacts on different agricultural activities. Another article focuses on a very important project (Pro-Huerta Program) under way in Haiti, aimed at improving food security for the rural poor.

Another on nanotechnology describes a relatively new field of research and industrial materials development based on the creation of new classes of novel molecular structures. It could lead to advances in agricultural research and food safety diagnostic methods, new environmental remediation procedures, energy applications, etc. However, as stated in the article, more research and regulation are needed, given its potential impact on the environment.

Lastly, an article deals with the adoption, by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (MAPA) of Brazil, of programs for strategic management based on the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) method, as a means of integrating assets for an institutional reform and, in this way, meet the growing demands of agriculture.

COMUNICA, as an instrument for knowledge management, provides scientific-technical information through articles, serial publications or monographs on topics of importance to agriculture in the hemisphere, for decision makers in the Americas. The present edition, the first in 2008, is also available in electronic format at www.iica.int.