

Following the recent economic crisis, at the close of 2009, most of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean reported a decline in terms of production, investment and consumption compared with the early years of the present decade. Agriculture, however, was able to survive the crisis because important production sectors benefitted from higher prices for their commodities. In addition, others, seeing potential risks, reassessed their business models and production and marketing practices in attempt to make their business more profitable. This shows that change, as a result of opportunity or need, promotes new ways of thinking and acting.

Following a crisis, many lessons are learned and many possible courses of action may open. The full complexity is felt when it comes time to make decisions, coordinate efforts and take action; this falls to both the private sector and, as the source of support for domestic production, the public sector.

We will have to live with the fact that agriculture will continue to be vulnerable for many years to come, especially in food importing countries. In addition, polarization is increasingly evident in

the hemisphere's agricultural sector. All over the world, some gain greatly from agriculture, while others in the same sector have come to a standstill or have lost sight of the future of agriculture and its farmers. In this scenario of instability and diversity, the net consuming countries are exposed to levels of food insecurity and poverty that will have an irreversible effect on the health and education of their inhabitants.

Unfortunately, ongoing concerns regarding a world facing hunger and undernutrition have not been reason enough to give agriculture the importance it deserves. Other crises, such as the energy and climate crises, will do little to convince decision makers of the urgent need to adopt a comprehensive approach to the problem of food security, unless concrete actions are taken: investing more, developing more knowledge and modernizing institutions.

Agriculture, considered a priority in solving these problems, must be approached from a new, modern and comprehensive angle that is in keeping with our realities, which have changed significantly. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a new paradigm, one that can effectively meet the needs of agriculture today and in the future.



We must not lose sight of the fact that rural territories are where the highest levels of poverty are found and where there are true prospects for sustainable development.

Accordingly, IICA is beginning a new administrative term with a very realistic view of the challenges facing agriculture. Above all, it is time to take action: modernize institutions, adopt better food security strategies and social protection systems, provide new services for farmers, increase the generation and sharing of technical-scientific knowledge, increase the number of sustainable agribusinesses, promote agricultural innovations and patents, and provide better services to everyone in the sector, including entrepreneurs and the operators of small- and medium-scale enterprises.

The present edition of **COMUNICA** displays this trend toward new ways of seeing agriculture, going beyond the conventional views that have been around for decades. It discusses a number of issues that will be coming under IICA's lens and presents an overview of the impact left by the recent crisis in the global economy and in agricultural markets.

These pages describe the experience of IICA in strengthening the agribusiness skills of small-

and medium-scale producers. Such programs have increased the number of agrifood exporters, diversified market offerings, and boosted the value of agrifood exports by taking them into new markets. This type of work is also illustrated with an experience from Brazil under the Program to Strengthen Family Agriculture (PRONAF), which could serve as a model for providing new alternatives to consolidate agriculture based on the rural communities of the Americas.

Together with these interconnected issues that lie at the heart of the new paradigm for agriculture, this edition also introduces discussion of agricultural and rural entrepreneurship. It is an approach designed to motivate production sectors and inspire institutional support mechanisms to forge sounder strategies and visions and ultimately take concrete actions that will benefit small- and medium-scale farmers.

COMUNICA, also available at www.iica.int, is a forum for presenting new proposals, experiences and inspiring ideas so that decision makers in the hemisphere can have useful and up-to-date tools regarding agriculture, competitiveness and the sustainable development of their peoples.