



**T**he outlook for agriculture remains unpredictable; in particular, as a result of the high levels of volatility in the prices of the principal basic commodities or products.

Only a few months ago, the situation of high prices sounded the alarm in several public and private organizations about the role of agriculture and its importance for global food security, understood by IICA as “the existence of the necessary conditions for human beings to have physical and financial access, in socially acceptable ways, to food that is safe, nutritious and in keeping with their cultural preferences, so as to meet their dietary needs in order to live productive and healthy lives” (IICA 2008<sup>1</sup>).

Even though many international agencies have recognized the urgency of dealing with the issue and tackling the situation in the short term, IICA had already identified food security as one of its

strategic objectives and, today, it is one of the main institutional objectives included in the 2006-2010 Medium-Term Plan as a component of its vision. The Plan indicates:

“Limitations in access to food call for a coherent series of policies that encompass various sectors of the economy and that are designed to eliminate the structural barriers faced by different groups, especially the rural poor. Public policies designed to resolve the problems in the short term should not lose sight of the longer-term objective of achieving food security” (IICA 2006<sup>2</sup>).

Specifically, with regard to international food prices, the World Bank indicated in its recent report on Global Economic Prospects that, in 2009, average prices will be higher

1 Online. Consulted December 2008. Available at: [www.iica.int](http://www.iica.int).

2 The IICA 2006-2010 Medium Term Plan.

than those of the period 2000-2005, even though, according to the trend in the last months of 2008, it is anticipated that there will be an average annual decrease of -20.9% in agricultural prices and 27.7% in the price of grains.

Given that high prices can have a different impact on the productive sectors and on consumers, we need to differentiate their evolution on the international market from their behavior on domestic markets. IICA has always maintained that changes in international prices are not necessarily entirely or immediately transmitted to domestic markets. Any analysis carried out, especially in relation to food security, calls for an in-depth assessment of other indicators within the countries and the appropriate interpretation of information, so that clear policies and strategies for

future agricultural development can be defined.

The material in this special edition of **COMUNICA** invites reflection on agriculture, presenting the more recent statistics to which IICA has access and which the Institute considers important to share via country data sheets. These data, organized by the Institutional Modernization Unit of IICA, come from recognized international sources of agricultural information and paint a clear picture of where the agricultural sector stands vis-à-vis the challenge it faces in 2009.

This information is also available in the electronic version of the magazine, available on the IICA Web site ([www.iica.int](http://www.iica.int)), where it can be updated and continue to be of use to decision makers.