



FAO calls for collaboration and innovation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Regional Conference kicks off virtually with focus on COVID-19 responses and strong political support and participation from Members

19 October 2020, Managua/Santiago/Rome – The 36th session of FAO’s [Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean](#), hosted virtually by the Government of Nicaragua, started today with Members exchanging their experiences, strategies and ideas on the fight against COVID-19 pandemic, while the FAO Director-General QU Dongyu stressed the importance of strengthened collaboration and innovation, particularly to support the most vulnerable people highly affected by the pandemic.

From the outset, the Director-General praised the efficient response of the region so far to keep food supply chains working amid the impacts of the pandemic.

“I have seen that your countries adopted a slogan in this pandemic: Agriculture will not stop!” Qu said. “I pay tribute to the millions of farmers, entrepreneurs, food processors, workers, traders and merchants, who made sure that every single day food was available in every city, town and village from the Rio Bravo to the Patagonia,” he added.

Qu noted, however, that Latin American and Caribbean countries need to strengthen their efforts as COVID-19 continues its rampage, mainly affecting the poorest and most vulnerable people. “Over 34 million jobs have been lost in this region, and the UN projects that up to 28 million people could fall into extreme poverty, which means a high likelihood of also suffering severe food insecurity,” he said.

In this context, Qu highlighted how FAO has been at the forefront of addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic through the [COVID-19 Response and Recovery Program](#), aimed at preventing a global food emergency, while strengthening the resilience and inclusiveness of food systems and livelihoods. “The Program enables donors to leverage the Organization’s convening power, real-time data, early warning systems and technical expertise to direct support where and when it is needed most,” he said.

The Director-General also referred to the [Hand-in-Hand Initiative](#) as a new approach and platform to promote enhanced collaboration among national and local authorities, the private sector, civil society scientists, NGOs, and many others.

“It is a new business model for collaboration, which uses a broad spectrum of partnerships and leverages the technical and data capacity of the Organization, to determine the best options to reach the most vulnerable and have the greatest impact on poverty and hunger,” he said.

Qu noted that the region is a pillar of global food security and encompasses a very large share of the world’s biodiversity, forests, water and productive soils and has pioneered important policies to eradicate poverty and reach zero hunger.

To unleash the region’s full potential in terms of food and agriculture, the Director-General called on Members to promote innovation and digital technologies; create new opportunities for rural people by taking advantage of the new demands of urban consumers; and expand trade and access to markets for farmers and agri-food entrepreneurs, through science-based and fair multilateral rules.

The FAO Director-General also stressed that the UN agency is making profound changes to address the global challenges of food and agriculture. As an example, he mentioned the establishment of a dedicated Office for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and noted that 18 of the 33 countries in the region belong to one or more of the aforementioned groups. Qu also spoke of the new FAO Office for Innovation and the Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment.

A historic Regional Conference

The first virtual Regional Conference in Latin America and the Caribbean kicked off with an unprecedented level of political support and participation. More than 50 ministers are registered to participate – including all the region’s ministers of Agriculture – 40 vice-ministers and 360 other delegates, as well as observers from civil society, the private sector, the scientific and academic worlds, the Parliamentary Fronts against Hunger, and 37 sister organizations of the United Nations system and the inter-American system.

Denis Moncada, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the host country Nicaragua, spoke on behalf of President Daniel Ortega and expressed the hope that the region’s economies and agricultural sector make a fast recovery after the impact of the pandemic. The Chairman of the Conference and Minister for Agriculture of Nicaragua, Edward Centeno, highlighted the key role that the Regional Conference plays in the region’s efforts towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Among high-level participants in the first day of debates, the Prime Minister of Haiti, Joseph Jouthe, praised FAO's assistance in supporting Haiti's food security and nutrition policies, and its climate change adaptation plan.

The First Lady of Colombia, Maria Juliana Ruiz, emphasized the need to drive innovation and technology to improve nutrition throughout the region, while ensuring the protection of its invaluable ecosystems.

The Vice-President of El Salvador, Félix Ulloa, highlighted the FAO [Hand in Hand Initiative](#) as a proactive response to the pandemic, and noted how El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele has put forth an ambitious plan to reactivate the agricultural sector and boost Blue Growth with FAO's support.

In his intervention, Khalid Mehboob, Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, underscored how Latin America and the Caribbean was the first region to commit to completely eradicating hunger by 2025, and eight of its FAO member nations have managed to fully eradicate hunger. However, he also noted that the region has seen a rise in hunger in the past few years, with the number of undernourished increasing by 9 million between 2015 and 2019.

For his part the FAO Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean, Julio Berdegué, warned that: "Agriculture must be sustainable or it will have no future." FAO, he noted, will strive to support the region's countries to make agriculture more sustainable and resilient, reducing its environmental footprint, and emissions of greenhouse gases. "This change will be an engine of innovation, new investments, and new and better jobs", he said.

FAO Members in Latin America and the Caribbean meet every two years to discuss issues of common concern, define priorities and guide FAO's work in support to the region's food and agriculture.

Press contacts and interview requests

To request an interview with the FAO Representatives, with the ministers of the countries that will participate in the Conference, or with experts, observers or other participants of the Conference, please write to:

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