



Sustainability challenges require carefully considered responses

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In its fall seminar on 'Sustainability in the Food and Agricultural Sector - The Role of the Private Sector and Government' held in Stratford-Upon-Avon on October 14-16, IPC assembled an international group of farmers, agribusiness executives, retailers, government officials, and academics to examine the challenges facing the food and agricultural sector and explore solutions for meeting these challenges.

The world's population is expected to double by the year 2050, with most of that growth taking place in developing countries, and income growth will further increase the demand for food. A growing share of agricultural commodities is being used as feedstocks for biofuels. Farmers are faced with the need to more than double production but will have fewer resources at their disposal, as both arable land and water supplies are shrinking at alarming rates. The specter of climate change, already felt in increased climatic variability, adds further constraints and will have the most negative impact on developing countries in the South.

The increased demand for agricultural commodities has lifted their prices to a historically high level, which presents opportunities for farmers, but also puts more people at risk of food insecurity. This situation places considerable stress on the global food and agricultural system. With grain stocks at an all-time low, the system is particularly vulnerable to potential disruptions.

"The private sector, governments, and the consumer all have a role in addressing these challenges," stressed Piet Bukman, IPC Chairman, "and there is a need for deliberate action based on sound analysis."

Trade liberalization is an excellent response to both the demand and sustainability challenges, as it allows market forces to respond to higher demand, and leads to sensible production and trade patterns. A successful conclusion of the Doha Round and ongoing multilateral trade liberalization are particularly important to create trade flows that promote sustainability.

Considering the need to increase agricultural yields with fewer inputs, governments and the private sector should step up their investment in research and development. Innovation has always played a vital role in ensuring that agricultural and food productivity rises to meet the world's needs.

Retailers and food companies can assist in the adoption of sustainable practices, and they are re-examining production and supply chain patterns. Seminar participants urged companies to base their measures on a careful consideration of environmental, social, and economic impacts. IPC Vice Chairman Marcelo Regúnaga emphasized that "we should never lose sight of the fact that equitable economic growth and poverty reduction in developing countries is one of the most important ways to respond to promote sustainability."

For more information, please contact:

Charlotte Hebebrand +1 202 328 5056, hebebrand@agritrade.org

About IPC The International Food & Agricultural Trade Policy Council (IPC) promotes a more open and equitable global food system by pursuing pragmatic trade and development policies in food and agriculture to meet the world's growing needs. IPC convenes influential policymakers, agribusiness executives, farm leaders, and academics from developed and developing countries to clarify complex issues, build consensus, and advocate policies to decision-makers. More information on the organization and its membership can be found on our website: www.agritrade.org.