

ELEMENTS OF A NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONSULTATIVE  
GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (CGIAR)  
AND COLOMBIA

1. COLOMBIA AND THE CGIAR

The relationship between Colombia and the CGIAR began in 1967, when the government invited CIAT to establish its headquarters in the country. This relationship has led to a tradition of mutual support and collaboration through several programs involving national institutions, CIAT, and some other CG centers.

In 1987 the Colombian Government signed an agreement with CIAT, which was later approved by the National Congress. Under this agreement, Colombia granted CIAT permanent residence, as a contribution from the Colombian state for the achievement of its objectives.

In 1994 the Colombian Government decided to strengthen the relationship with CGIAR through an investment of \$1 million in CIAT. This relationship was consolidated in 1995, with the signing of an agreement with CIAT for a 4 year period and a Colombian global contribution of US \$7.8 million.

Colombia has considered its contribution to the CGIAR through CIAT to be an investment, which gives a significant social yield. The country also expects CIAT's agenda to complement the agenda of the national research system. Colombia has thus become a new type of associate of the CGIAR, because it can be considered an investor and at the same time a client of the system. This opens the possibility for a new type of relationship between the CGIAR in general (and its centers in particular) with investor/client countries, whose interests are not investment should be based on national policy needs consistent with principles of the CGIAR.

The Colombian Government is interested in extending the agreement with CIAT for 4 more years after 1998 and also in continuing to be an investor/client member of the CGIAR. Toward this end, Colombia has been carrying out a series of activities with CIAT to reach agreement on an agenda of work that reflects the technology needs of Colombia.

The actions we are taken to support international agricultural research with clear national benefits underscore our interest in having access to the latest international technology developments that complement our national efforts. This should make our country more competitive in agricultural production and help reduce rural poverty.

2. CHALLENGES FOR THE CGIAR IN VIEW OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AND  
NEEDS OF TROPICAL AMERICA IN GENERAL AND COLOMBIA  
IN PARTICULAR

The globalization of economies, combined with rural poverty, pose a challenge for the CGIAR that should be designed to support the countries of Latin American in seeking solutions to their problems and in taking advantage of their opportunities.

In tropical America, the globalization of national economies has demonstrated the competitive disadvantages of some agricultural systems, particularly for the production of basic foods; cereals, and soybeans. In fact, Colombia has increased its importation of grains from 1million tons in 1992 to 6 million tons in 1997. A similar situation prevails in Ecuador and Peru. In that period, Colombia lost 700,000 hectares of annual crops, part of which was shifted to the production of perennial crops such as fruits and pastures.

However, according to forecast models of commercial liberalization, the countries of tropical America will not have any advantages in the production of agricultural commodities. Even so, it appears that liberalization will benefit those countries if they increase the production of tropical products such as wood, fruits, vegetables, fish, etc.

The problems associated with commercial liberalization in Latin America are aggravated by rural poverty. Rural areas show the worst indices of malnutrition, housing, sanitation, social security, education, and other conditions,

Technology and research, by themselves, have a limited capacity to confront rural poverty. However, they can help increase the impact of other, policy measures. One objective of agriculture research is to develop new production opportunities, especially for poor producers.

The tropical American countries have the opportunity to develop technologies for new products that can be easily marketed and allow producers to accumulate capital.

Given the situation described above and the need to reduce rural poverty and make agricultural production more competitive, producers are under pressure to change their production systems in two different ways that have strong implications for agricultural research: First, small farmers are moving gradually away from the production of commodities such as wheat, barley, maize, soybeans, potato, rice, etc. And second, they are shifting gradually to products with greater income elasticity, such as tropical fruits, vegetables, and others, that allow them to add value at the farm level and better utilize family labor. Meanwhile, commodity production is being assumed by large farmers who can compete with imports.

National and international agricultural research institutions have traditionally worked mainly on commodities that are now losing their place in the production systems of tropical and subtropical countries in Latin America. This strategy has been fully justifiable for the international system, first because of the need to maintain global food supplies and, second, because those commodities are produced mainly by small farmers in Asia and Africa. This strategy was designed to simultaneously increase the global supply of basic foods and to reduce rural poverty.

In Latin America the situation is somewhat different. On the one hand, the production of commodities has reached a high level of efficiency in the temperate countries of the South and North. On the other hand, small farmers in most tropical and subtropical areas are slowly moving toward the production of cash crops.

In the near future, the countries of tropical Latin America will continue with local production of commodities, but these will gradually lose importance in terms of their contribution to farm income and to global food supplies.

The overall problem in this situation is the lack of improved technology for the production of new cash crops. Herein lies the need for complementary research work between the national systems and the CGIAR centers.

Based on the analysis presented in this document. Colombia, as an investor/client of CGIAR, would like to propose that CIAT expand its mandate to include crops such as tropical fruits, vegetables, and other species that are important for tropical agriculture. In addition, it is important that CIAT help Colombia develop its biodiversity. This proposal would not require that CIAT abandon its current areas of work, but that it look to other areas, with a view to satisfying the demands of Colombia and other countries of tropical America within the new context of globalization.

Colombia presents this proposal and at the same time invites other tropical american countries to become investors/clients of the CGIAR through financial support for CIAT in the new areas of work proposed in this document.