

PRESS RELEASE

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Agriculture and carbon: Producers must feed a growing population; preserve the environment

SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL, OCTOBER 30, 2010 – The big challenge for agriculture in the 21st century is not only to meet the world’s growing demand, but to do so in an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable manner, concluded panelists at an international seminar on carbon standards in agricultural production and trade, held on October 26 at FIESP headquarters in São Paulo. IPC and FIESP, the hosts of the seminar, convened distinguished experts on agriculture, trade and environmental issues, agribusiness executives, and policy makers from around the world, to take stock of the increasing trend of measuring the carbon footprint of food and agricultural products.

Participants were welcomed by FIESP President Paulo Skaf, and Jose Gerardo Fontelles, Deputy Minister of Agriculture. IPC Vice Chairman, Marcelo Regunaga, Professor at Universidad de Buenos Aires and Universidad de San Andres and Former Secretary of Agriculture, who chaired the meeting, praised Brazil’s important contribution to global food security through impressive productivity growth, and its concomitant commitment to environmental sustainability.

The Honorable Tim Groser of New Zealand, the world’s only minister responsible for *both* trade and climate change negotiations, expressed his concern about the insufficient progress made in the WTO and UNFCCC negotiations. He emphasized in his keynote address that although it is in governments’ self-interest to proceed on both trade liberalization and greenhouse gas reductions, “progress made in international negotiations, will powerfully shape all future governments’ decisions.”

The technical complexity of measuring carbon was best exemplified by the discussion held on biofuels and indirect land use change (ILUC), during which Marcos Jank, President of UNICA and IPC’s newest member, pointed to “alarming differences over calculations.” EU and US speakers agreed that an international agreement on climate change is preferable, but that governments also needed to act by establishing sustainability criteria. European Commission representative Signe Ratso indicated that “transparency is very important as these efforts unfold.”

Scientists and economists are not only attempting to measure the relative carbon content of biofuels versus fossil fuels, but also undertaking sophisticated life cycle analyses on other food and agricultural products. IPC member Jason Clay, Vice President of the World Wildlife Fund, explained that

incorporating carbon in the value chain presents challenges, but also important opportunities to safeguard natural resources while contributing to greater efficiency and increased economic rewards for agricultural producers. Conference participants learned about a wide-ranging effort by the global dairy sector, to undertake a sector-wide analysis to determine the carbon footprint of dairy, and about Kenyan horticultural producers who have calculated life cycle analyses of their products in order to meet private carbon standards. Speakers emphasized that similar efforts are also being undertaken in order to calculate water embedded in agricultural products. “This is not just a passing fad,” stated IPC member Roberto Rodrigues, Coordinator of the Getulio Vargas Foundation Agribusiness Center and President of the Superior Council of Agribusiness at FIESP, “and we must ensure that we are using the best science in these efforts.”

Given the technical complexities involved in life cycle analyses, conference participants agreed that an international standard to help guide such calculations would be very useful, but acknowledged that this was not likely to be achieved soon. IPC member Pedro de Camargo Neto, Former Secretary of Agricultural Production and Trade, cautioned that “as governments impose sustainability criteria, they must be mindful of their international trade obligations.” Likewise, private sector and civil society efforts to establish carbon footprints must be undertaken responsibly: they should use the best scientific methods available, educate the consumer and help guide producers.

A webcast of the seminar can be viewed at www.fiesp.com.br/online.

All presentations made at the seminar are available at www.agritrade.org/events/SaoPauloSeminar.html

Minister Grosers’ keynote address is available at www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/address+international+food+and+agriculture+trade+policy+council+ipc+conference.

IPC Background Briefs prepared for the seminar are available at www.agritrade.org/events/SaoPauloSeminar.html

- *Counting the Carbon Emissions from Agricultural Products: Technical Complexities and Trade Complications* by Ronald Steenblik and Evodkia Moise
- *Indirect Land-Use Change from Biofuels: Recent Developments and Policy Landscapes* by Sonia Yeh and Julie Witcover

More information about the International Food & Agricultural Trade Policy Council can be found at: www.agritrade.org. More information about FIESP can be found at www.fiesp.com.br.