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International Workshop to Discuss Improving Market Access and Strengthening Production and Trade Capacity for African Food and Agricultural Products

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An international workshop focusing on strengthening and widening markets, and overcoming supply side constraints for African agriculture will be held in Lusaka, Zambia on June 3-5, 2007 at the Taj Pamodzi Hotel. The workshop is being hosted by the International Food & Agricultural Trade Policy Council (IPC), in conjunction with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Zambian Ministry of Agriculture, and the US-based Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa (PCHPA).

Agriculture is the key economic sector in the COMESA region, accounting for more than 30% of Gross Domestic Product, 65% of foreign exchange earnings, and providing a livelihood for about 80% of the labor force. The sector is critical for promoting food security, economic growth, and poverty alleviation on the continent. Under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), an initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), African governments are committed to improving agricultural productivity growth to 6% per year, and will increase their budget allocations to the sector. Various donors have also pledged support to implementing CAADP and investing in Africa's rural development efforts through the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development.

Recognizing the importance of agriculture and increasing the productivity and competitiveness of the sector to meet Africa's development needs, the workshop will focus on two strategic issues:

1. An increased African capacity to engage in local, regional, and global markets, and;
2. Targeted efforts to address supply-side constraints that limit Africa's ability to enjoy the benefits from new market opportunities.

"The goal of this workshop is to arrive at solutions for linking African producers to markets within Africa and beyond; we are eager to examine how to make "Aid for Trade" but also "Investment for Trade" work concretely and effectively," said Piet Bukman, Chairman of the International Food & Agricultural Trade Policy Council (IPC), and also formerly the Dutch Minister of Agriculture and Trade, and Minister of Development Cooperation.

Participants include key public and private sector representatives from the COMESA region, other parts of Africa, Europe, the US, Argentina, the Philippines, and from international organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and private foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation.

The discussions will also focus on how best to implement the WTO's "Aid for Trade" initiative and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)'s Pillar II agenda, which seeks to improve Africa's infrastructure and trade-related capacities for market access.

In addition to creating a forum where participants can come to a consensus on trade policy options and negotiations, and identify and prioritize coordinated efforts to address supply-side constraints, the workshop will also enable participants to build relationships and explore ways to collaborate and advocate for stronger and more vibrant agricultural markets in Africa.

All key development stakeholders agree that for Africa to attain the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on reducing hunger and poverty, current efforts to improve Africa's agricultural productivity and its share

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of global agricultural and food trade must be sustained. To do this, however, greater efforts and coordination are necessary to strengthen Africa's capacity to close the gap between Africa's current agricultural production and participation in the global economy, and where it needs to be in the future.

COMESA CAADP Overall Coordinator Cris Muyunda noted that, "COMESA Ministers of Agriculture at their meeting in March 2007 in Khartoum, Sudan, declared that there was need to develop strong partnerships with various stakeholders in order to address the many constraints that affect the agricultural sector in the region. The upcoming meeting in Lusaka forms part of the strategy of strengthening collaboration with various actors to partner the public and private sector in COMESA in their quest to raise the competitiveness of agriculture in the region."

More information on this international seminar, along with presentations given by featured speakers, will be available online at http://www.agritrade.org/events/strengthening_african_markets.html.

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About IPC: The International Food & Agricultural Trade Policy Council (IPC) pursues pragmatic trade and development policies in food and agriculture to meet the world's growing needs. IPC accomplishes its mission by convening influential policymakers, agribusiness executives, farm leaders, and academics from developed and developing countries to clarify complex issues, build consensus, and to advocate policies to decision-makers.

About COMESA: the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa is Africa's largest economic grouping comprising 20 African member States with the key objective of promoting regional integration through trade and investment. A key area targeted for investment and development in the COMESA treaty is agriculture. In this regard, COMESA has fully embraced the vision of the African Union of addressing all constraints that hold back the competitiveness of the agricultural sector through the dedicated implementation of CAADP.

COMESA was established in 1994 with the main objectives of creating a Free Trade Area among member States (achieved in the year 2000); establishing a Common External Tariff among member States by the year 2008 and facilitating the removal of structural and institutional weaknesses of member States to enable them attain collective and sustained development.

About PCHA: The Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa carries out independent, research-based advocacy to increase the level and effectiveness of U.S. investments in Africa's agriculture and rural sectors and energizes African initiatives by connecting countries, regional organizations, associations, firms and individuals. Founded in 2001 by senior U.S. policymakers, four African Presidents, and key nonprofit, university and private sector leaders, the Partnership is a member-driven, innovative and field-savvy catalyst for analysis and reform of policies and programs affecting African agricultural development.