

# Farmers should lead the way on sustainability

by

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Farmers around the world are determined to put their views on sustainable agriculture before world leaders at the mammoth United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil next June.

Representatives of farmer organizations from more than 25 countries from all continents refined their policy at a seminar last month in Iceland, organized by the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP).

Glenn Flaten, a former president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and past-president of IFAP, says that farmers approach to sustainable agriculture is quite simple.

"Farmers are concerned about the environment because they are very much a part of it," he said. "If people want farmers to preserve the environment, then they must ensure that farmers get a reasonable return for their crops. Otherwise, farmers have to cut corners to survive and the environment suffers."

Flaten attended the Reykjavik conference along with current CFA President, Ralph Jespersen.

Jespersen told the seminar that while policies must consider social, economic, agronomic, environmental and ethical considerations, "we must stress that it is only an economically profitable agriculture that will be capable of achieving the objectives of sustainable agriculture."

## **Canada follows suit**

The Canadian position paper echoed the views of the 25 papers presented from farm organizations in countries as diverse as Norway and Japan, Tanzania and Brazil.

A final statement adopted by the seminar states:

"IFAP strongly supports a farmer-centred approach to sustainable agricultural development: an approach which regards farmers as the key to the solution, not part of the problem.

"Sustainable agriculture means economically viable agriculture capable of meeting the demand for high-quality, safe food while ensuring the long-term preservation and enhancement of natural resources such as clean air, fresh water and fertile soil."

Flaten said the Iceland seminar was part of the process of IFAP policy development leading up to the UN Brazil conference in Rio de Janeiro next June, which is being billed as the "Earth Summit."

The statement from Reykjavik will be presented at the final meeting of the preparatory Committee for the Earth Summit in New York in March. Then IFAP members will have their own 30th annual meeting and World Farmers Congress in Quebec City the first week of June, just prior to the Earth Summit in Brazil.

### **Developing viability**

Economic viability is even more essential for poor countries in the Third World to be able to preserve their environment.

"Farming in developing countries cannot be sustainable until farmers receive payments for their produce which are high enough to give them both the financial means and motivation to conserve their land," the statement reads.

Flaten says the industrialized countries need to think seriously about their responsibility to help the developing countries preserve their environment. Citing the example of world concern about tropical forest removal in Brazil, he asked how far is Brazil responsible to provide oxygen for the rest of the globe.

"If we want Brazil to protect its rainforests, there is some responsibility on the rest of the world to help," he said.

He said there was concern expressed at the IFAP seminar in Iceland about the continuing sale to developing countries of products that are banned in the countries doing the selling. Some countries are still using DDT that is manufactured in the United States, he said.

The IFAP meeting in Quebec will be preceded by a seminar for farmer leaders from developing countries, on May 25 and 26. Themes for the World Farmers Congress, that starts June 1, will include a review of the world farming situation, the status of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the farmer's role in the food chain, and

agriculture in a technological age, which will include more debate on sustainable agriculture.

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