

Columbia University, IICA and President of Guyana build narrative to explain strategic role of Latin America agriculture

Joint work goal to strengthen region's agri-food systems as providers of solutions amidst growing population, political conflicts, and climate crises globally

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, October 1, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Columbia University and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) have taken a first joint step to develop a new narrative that highlights the value of agriculture in Latin America and explains to the world its strategic importance for the next 30 years, in the context of increasingly pressing global challenges.



Jeffrey Shaman, Interim Dean of Columbia's Climate School; Mohammed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana; and Manuel Otero, Director General of IICA

A select group of highly qualified experts from the public, private, and academic sectors, convened by the two institutions in New York, discussed the development of a roadmap that includes the topics of food and nutritional security, environmental sustainability, and energy security.

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Manuel Otero

The goal of this work is to strengthen the agri-food systems in the region as providers of solutions in a global scenario of a growing population, political conflicts, and climate crises. The debate took place at Columbia University's Forum, a venue for events that often shape the international public debate agenda.

Participants included the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, Mohammed Irfaan

Ali; the Director General of IICA, [Manuel Otero](#); Jeffrey Shaman, Interim Dean of Columbia's Climate School, a multidisciplinary research faculty on the climate crisis; and Cynthia Rosenzweig, Senior Research Scientist at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS) and a scientific researcher at Columbia's Climate School.

Ismahane Elouafi, Executive Director of CGIAR; Paulo Pianez Junior, Director of Sustainability and Communication at Brazilian company Marfrig; Rubén Echeverría, Senior Advisor on Agricultural Development at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; David Milestone, Managing Director for the Americas at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change; Joao Francisco Adrien Fernandes, Head of ESG Strategy at Itaú Bank, focusing on social, environmental, and climate challenges; Marcelo Brito, President of the Dom Cabral Foundation and Executive Director of the Amazon Initiative Consortium; and Columbia University researchers Walter Baethgen and Glenn Denning also played key roles in the discussion.

The debate was coordinated by Izabella Teixeira, former Minister of the Environment of Brazil and Special Advisor to IICA for the G20 and COP 29 and 30.

The initiative reflects Columbia University and IICA's concern to consolidate a realistic vision of Latin America's position as a global provider of food and ecosystem services, given its vast natural resource heritage and its institutional framework promoting innovation and new technologies.

Addressing the interaction between agriculture, climate change, and biodiversity loss, as well as generating new public policies globally, also requires a new narrative that favors more efficient resource use, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, greater resilience, and increased productivity.

"Creating a new narrative for agriculture in Latin America. Resource-efficient agri-food systems for the health of people and the planet" was the title of the session, which took place alongside the United Nations General Assembly and Climate Week in New York.

In this fruitful discussion, the guidelines for an initial document reflecting the alliance between Columbia University and IICA were defined, aimed at shedding light on the true contribution of the region's agriculture to food security as well as environmental balance and global social stability.

In this regard, President Irfaan Ali emphasized the need to move beyond traditional agricultural views and focus on the link between production and biodiversity preservation in a new narrative that includes youth and women as fundamental actors in a sector that contributes to people's well-being and the economic development of countries.

Manuel Otero agreed with this perspective and noted that "an outdated narrative still survives that does not reflect the reality of rural areas in Latin America and is characterized by depicting a

commodity-based, extractive, and very primary agriculture, where quantity is more important than quality.”

The IICA Director General also referred to “the importance of connecting producers with consumers in a vision that must transcend traditional agriculture and address society as a whole.”

The construction of the roadmap for the new narrative includes interaction with governments, industry, and civil society in the most important global forums for political and environmental discussion.

The initiative reflects the concern of Columbia University and IICA to consolidate a realistic vision of Latin America’s position as a global provider of food and ecosystem services, given its vast natural resource heritage and its institutional framework promoting innovation and new technologies.

The first milestone will be in November, with the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 29) to be held in Azerbaijan, where IICA will have a pavilion to showcase the reality of agriculture in the hemisphere. A significant milestone will occur next year when the host country for COP 30 will be Brazil.

Climate Change and Trade Barriers

“We are initiating a dialogue to identify what we have in common in Latin American countries and the challenges we face, considering two important issues. First, we are already experiencing a climate crisis and a nature crisis, with prolonged droughts and floods. Secondly, non-tariff barriers related to environmental issues are increasingly emerging in international trade,” Teixeira said.

The IICA Special Advisor noted that the new narrative should also aim to provide knowledge to people and move beyond the antagonism between production and the environment. It should highlight the irreplaceable role of Latin American agriculture in a context of international instability, weakening of multilateral trade norms, and discussions on land use, deforestation, carbon capture, and ecosystem restoration.

Columbia University researcher Walter Baethgen emphasized the magnitude of the challenge. “When we build a new narrative, the question is, who are we talking to? What do our increasingly urban societies really know about agriculture? The challenge is immense because we know that the population, even in countries that are major agricultural producers, lacks awareness about its importance. The task is enormous. We need to build the new narrative and reach people with it,” he stated.

Participants agreed that science and innovation must play a primary role in response to the new

demands of trade and consumers regarding healthy food.

The issue of health, the challenge of new dietary habits, new lifestyles, health requirements, and additional pressures arising from migration movements associated with climate change and armed conflicts are also topics that should not be overlooked.

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