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United States

Agricultural Situation

2008 Country Strategy Statement

2008

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Report Highlights:

2008 Country Strategy Statement

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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MISSION STRATEGY STATEMENT USUN MISSION IN ROME

SCOPE PAPER

Overview

The Office of Agricultural Affairs (OAA) at the U.S. Mission to the UN Agencies in Rome serves as the USDA representative to three United Nations organizations -- the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Program (WFP), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). FAO, the UN's largest technical organization, has a mandate to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations and contribute to the growth of the world economy. WFP, the world's largest humanitarian organization, provides food aid to meet emergency needs and support economic and social development. IFAD designs, funds and implements projects to reduce rural poverty in developing countries. Of the three, FAO is the organization in which USDA has the greatest interest and consequently the one to which the OAA directs the majority of its resources.

FAO Organization and Budget

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization is the world's Department of Agriculture. It is organized into six substantive departments – Agriculture and Nutrition, Economic and Social Development, Forestry, Fisheries, Natural Resources Management and Environment, and Technical Cooperation. In addition to the headquarters in Rome, FAO has offices in 74 countries, as well as 5 regional offices (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East, and Europe), 5 subregional offices, and 5 liaison offices (North America, EU, Japan, United Nations – Geneva, and United Nations – New York). The Director-General, Jacques Diouf (Senegal), is the executive head of FAO. Diouf was elected to his third 6-year term in November 2005. The Conference, which meets every two years in November, is the supreme governing body of the organization. All of the 190 members of FAO are members of the Conference. The Council, composed of 49 elected members, is the interim governing body between Conference sessions.

The FAO regular program budget for the 2008-09 biennium is \$929.8 million. Members' contributions are calculated according to the UN scale of assessments. The U.S. is the largest single contributor, paying 22 percent of the budget, or \$218 million. In addition to the assessments, many countries make voluntary contributions, usually earmarked for specific programs or activities. Voluntary contributions have grown rapidly in recent years and now slightly surpass the assessed budget contributions.

USDA Priority Interests in FAO

FAO engages in a broad range of activities, encompassing, *inter alia*, standard setting, capacity building, policy advice, information sharing, and technical training. Most USDA agencies have some interaction with FAO. In CY2007 the OAA supported over 100 USDA visitors from 10 separate agencies. Most of these visitors were engaging with FAO on issues of direct strategic interest to FAS.

Standards setting: FAO is home to two of the three international standards setting bodies recognized in the WTO SPS Agreement – Codex Alimentarius and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). Codex and IPPC are responsible for developing standards and guidelines for food safety and plant quarantine measures, respectively. The standards

established by these bodies help to harmonize requirements for international trade and therefore are crucial to the effectiveness of the SPS Agreement.

SPS Capacity Building: Capacity building in a broad sense is one of the primary functions of FAO. Both Codex and IPPC have active capacity building programs. FAO's efforts, which are focused on infrastructure development and technical training, are complementary to the efforts of WTO, which focuses primarily on establishing regulatory systems. FAO also devotes significant resources to enhancing the ability of developing countries to participate in the standard-setting process.

Biotechnology: FAO views biotechnology in the context of its mandate to promote food security and increase agricultural productivity. It serves as a forum for dialogue on biotechnology issues and provides technical assistance and capacity building, especially in the regulatory area. While FAO strives to be neutral in its role as a disseminator of information and knowledge, it has the potential to be an opinion leader among developing countries. In a recent shift signaling a more proactive approach to biotechnology, FAO has begun to focus on how assist developing countries in overcoming obstacles to use the technology as a tool to increase agricultural productivity.

Avian Influenza: FAO is at the forefront of the global effort to control avian influenza. It provides emergency assistance to affected countries and aids countries in the development of the veterinary infrastructures prevent and control the disease. With substantial USDA assistance, FAO has recently established a Crisis Management Center to enhance its emergency response capabilities.

Genetic Resources: FAO is the home to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which governs access to plant genetic resources in gene banks under the control of member governments. The United States has signed but not ratified the treaty. Nevertheless, the U.S. seed industry and the public sector research and plant breeding system in the United States will be impacted by the treaty as they will have to comply with its provisions in order to gain access to genetic resources for breeding purposes from those countries that are members.

Statistics: FAO maintains the world's most comprehensive database of global food and agricultural statistics. FAO also assists developing countries in establishing statistical services to improve market transparency.

GIEWS: FAO, working in conjunction with WFP, monitors the world food situation and attempts to provide early warning of threats to food insecurity from droughts, pests, civil unrest and other causes.

