

# CONFERENCE CONFÉRENCE CONFERENCIA

## **Thirty-sixth Session Rome, 18-23 November 2009**

**Kathleen Merrigan, Deputy-Secretar, USDA, CHAIRPERSON**

Distinguished Delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is an honour for me to have been elected Chairperson of this Thirty-sixth Session of the FAO Ministerial Conference and I wish to thank you for the trust you have placed in me.

The Conference this year comes at a critical time following the World Summit on Food Security. President Obama has committed the United States to a whole new government approach to tackle the problem of global food security. The United States will work with Members as we move forward with this important effort.

My Government fully supports FAO and its mission. We believe that the FAO Reform process underway provides a unique opportunity to move the Organization into a more relevant, focused and effective Organization, and we reaffirm our commitment and dedication to the faithful implementation of the FAO's Immediate Plan of Action. This endeavour will greatly enhance FAO's contribution to agricultural development and global food security.

The FAO's mandate to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living, improve agricultural productivity, promote rural development and ultimately provide all people at all times with access to the food they need for an active and healthy life is extremely important to the United States.

It has been twenty years since the last time the United States chaired this Ministerial Conference, but I am no stranger to FAO. My association with FAO began ten years ago when as an Expert Consultant I assisted FAO staff in drafting the Committee on Agriculture paper on Organic Agriculture adopted at the Thirtieth Session of the Conference.

Since that time, organic agriculture has grown substantially in my country and around the world. In the United States, more than two million hectares and over ten thousand certified producers are involved in organic agriculture.

There have been some important efforts by FAO on organic agriculture including the FAO-led organic standard harmonization effort and the 2007 meeting in partnership with the International Federation of Organic Farming Movements on Organic Agriculture and Food Security. However, after ten years the organic programme is neither mainstreamed in the FAO Programme of Work, nor in the FAO Budget. Even the very small amount of central funds given to the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Organic Agriculture may soon disappear. As someone with a deep interest in this subject, I would like to see the importance of organic agriculture and its role of agro-ecology elevated within the FAO's scope of work.

The Agenda before us calls for decisions which will have a lasting impact on the future of the Organization. Given that we have only five-and-a-half days to do this, I call on your cooperation, I call on your understanding, so that we can assure that we make the best use of our time to make wise and forward-looking decisions for the good of the Organization and its mission.