

LARC/00/REP

REPORT

**Merida,
Mexico,
10 to 14
April 2000**

**Twenty-sixth
FAO Regional Conference
for Latin America and
the Caribbean**



FOOD
AND
AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE
UNITED
NATIONS

FAO Member Nations serviced by the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (20 April 2000)

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Date and place of the FAO Regional Conferences for Latin America and the Caribbean

First	-- Quito, Ecuador, 18-25 September 1949
Second	-- Montevideo, Uruguay, 1-12 December 1950
Third	-- Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1-10 September 1954
Fourth	-- Santiago, Chile, 19-30 November 1956
Fifth	-- San Jose, Costa Rica, 12-21 November 1958
Sixth	-- Mexico, D.F., Mexico, 9-20 August 1960
Seventh	-- Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 17-27 November 1962
Eighth	-- Viña del Mar, Chile, 13-29 March 1965
Ninth	-- Punta del Este, Uruguay, 5-16 December 1966
Tenth	-- Kingston, Jamaica, 2-13 December 1968
Eleventh	-- Caracas, Venezuela, 12-20 October 1970
Twelfth	-- Cali, Colombia, 21 August - 2 September 1972
Thirteenth	-- Panama, Panama, 12-23 August 1974
Fourteenth	-- Lima, Peru, 21-29 April 1976
Fifteenth	-- Montevideo, Uruguay, 8-19 August 1978
Sixteenth	-- Havana, Cuba, 26 August - 6 September 1980
Seventeenth	-- Managua, Nicaragua, 30 August - 10 September 1982
Eighteenth	-- Buenos Aires, Argentina, 6-15 August 1984
Nineteenth	-- Barbados, 5-13 August 1986
Twentieth	-- Recife, Brazil, 2-7 October 1988
Twenty-first	-- Santiago, Chile, 9-13 July 1990
Twenty-second	-- Montevideo, Uruguay, 28 September - 2 October 1992
Twenty-third	-- San Salvador, El Salvador, 29 August - 2 September 1994
Twenty-fourth	-- Asuncion, Paraguay, 2-6 July 1996
Twenty-fifth	-- Nassau, Bahamas, 16-20 June 1998
Twenty-sixth	-- Merida, Mexico, 10-14 April 2000

**REPORT OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

(Merida, Mexico, 10 to 14 April 2000)

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

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SUMMARY OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General debate on trends and challenges in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food security in the Region

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

1. Underlined that the international community should set about removing the obstacles that were preventing the elimination of poverty and hunger in the world. (Para. 22)
2. Stated that food security needed the commitment of governments and populations to put into effect the World Food Summit Plan of Action. It also stressed that a global effort was needed to explore new forms of cooperation between FAO and the countries of the Region. (Paras. 23 & 24)
3. Stressed that the liberalization of international agricultural trade was of vital importance to both exporting and importing countries. It stated that future negotiations on agriculture should include the elimination of obstacles so that countries could overcome poverty and food insecurity. (Para. 26)
4. Stated that it was necessary to uphold the rights of the countries of the Region with regard to the WTO and to see that national legislations were consistent with the WTO Agreement on Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and the standards of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. It also indicated that sanitary and phytosanitary measures should not be used as barriers to trade. It acknowledged the concern of the small island developing states of the Caribbean regarding implementation of the WTO agreements. (Paras. 28, 29 & 31)
5. Highlighted the importance of state reform and institutional change for a more decentralized and participatory administration and a stronger role for local authorities with support from central coordinating bodies. (Para. 32)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

6. Requested technical support to continue to update food legislation, food safety standards and plant and animal health standards; protect plant genetic resources; draw up inventories of water resources available for agricultural activity; establish systems for the prevention and mitigation of, and recovery from, the impact of adverse climatic events; and bolster rural development. (Paras. 35 & 45)

Impact of technical and non-tariff barriers on agricultural trade in Latin America and the Caribbean

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

7. Requested that FAO continue with the regional programme of technical assistance to countries in agricultural trade negotiations and the exchange of experiences through the organization of technical meetings. (Para. 46)

Effects of adverse climatological conditions on food production and trade

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

8. Indicated the need to establish ongoing policies to prevent, mitigate and recover from the impact of natural calamities. It recommended strengthening technical cooperation among the countries of the Region. (Paras. 49 & 50)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

9. Requested that FAO continue providing technical support to raise the awareness of decision makers in the development of information, education, training, modernization and organization programmes aimed at reducing the negative impact of adverse climatic events. (Para. 52)

Reform of rural development institutions

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

10. Considered the issue of institutional reform under discussion to be highly relevant to the countries of the Region. It emphasized that macroeconomic equilibria were necessary to activate rural development and that differentiated sectoral policies were needed if there was to be any impact on the peasant farming sector. It also underscored the need to strengthen the management capacity of municipal and local bodies. It stressed the need to overcome the discontinuity of rural development programmes and to seek mechanisms that would avoid this. (Paras. 54, 55 & 56).

Follow-up to the World Food Summit

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

11. Underlined the importance of developing actions at individual, household, community, subnational, national and regional levels to attain food security. It recognized the role played by the Committee on World Food Security in the follow-up to the World Food Summit. (Paras. 58 & 59)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

12. Requested that FAO continue to help the countries fulfil the commitments made at the World Food Summit and support the exchange of know-how and experience in the Region. It expressed its concern at the lack of resources from the international community for implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action. (Paras. 60 & 61)

Water as a resource for food production

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

13. Underlined the merit in using irrigation water more efficiently. It stressed the importance of user responsibility in the rehabilitation of systems and the need to include drainage works to avoid soil degradation through salinization. It drew attention to the importance of the irrigation component in the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS). It emphasized the practicality of using the watershed as the territorial unit for water management. It acknowledged the need for institutional reforms to improve the local management of water. (Paras. 63, 64 & 66)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

14. Requested technical assistance to countries to review their legal framework, suggest institutional reforms, disseminate understanding of water resources and educate the population accordingly, improve the administration and management of water, control water contamination, establish systems for the treatment of poor-quality water, develop drainage systems, modernize hydrometric and meteorological stations, stimulate the participation of the private sector in irrigation and promote the harvesting of rainwater. (Para. 69)

Research and transfer of technology in food production

For the attention of Governments

The Conference:

15. Recognized that governments should look into new forms of management of research and technology transfer so that these could be included as a priority item on the policy agenda. (Para. 74)

16. Took note of the need for more effective participation of countries in determining the priorities of the Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) operating in the Region, as well as the CGIAR proposal for the gradual phasing out of Regional representation, as presently structured, until the current representative has completed his term in the year 2002. (Para. 75)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

17. Requested technical assistance in the planning of strategies for research and technology transfer. (Para. 72)

Demonstration of the World Agriculture Information Centre (WAICENT)

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

18. Requested support for the implementation and strengthening of national agricultural information systems in the Region, including the necessary technical training. (Para. 77)

Reports of the Regional Commissions

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

19. Advocated the strengthening of the Regional Commissions and the continued regularity of their meetings. It also recommended that the reports of the Commissions be submitted to the Council and the Conference of FAO to achieve a regional perspective in the focus of its programmes. (Para. 20)

Date, place and agenda of the 27th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

20. Took note of the offer of the Delegation of Cuba to host the 27th FAO Regional Conference, which would be held in Havana, Cuba, from 11 to 15 March 2002, and requested that the Director-General take this recommendation into account when deciding the date and place of the Conference, after consultation with the Government of Cuba and the other members countries of the Region. (Para. 84)

Other matters

For the attention of FAO

The Conference:

21. Requested that FAO place greater emphasis in its studies and documents on the state of food and agriculture in the small island developing states of the Caribbean. (Para. 80)

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Organization of the Conference

1. The Twenty-sixth FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Merida, Mexico, from 10 to 14 April 2000. The Technical Committee met on 10 and 11 April. The Conference was attended by delegations from 24 FAO Member Nations in the Region, observers from countries in other regions and representatives of United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations and international and national non-governmental organizations. A list of participants is given in Appendix C.

Inaugural Ceremony

2. The Conference was inaugurated in the presence of His Excellency the President of the United Mexican States, Dr. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, government officials, members of the Delegations, the Diplomatic Corps accredited to Mexico and observers from various agencies.

3. The Governor of the State of Yucatan, Mr Victor Manuel Cervera Pacheco, welcomed the Delegations and Observers, and stated that the meeting was important for the advancement of peace as it furthered the development of food and agriculture in the Region.

4. The Director-General of FAO thanked the Government of Mexico and the State of Yucatan for their warm welcome and their generous hospitality for the organization of the FAO Regional Conference.

5. He stated that the meeting and the presence of the agricultural authorities of Latin America and the Caribbean provided a good opportunity for productive debate on key issues related to food security and the development of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in the Region.

6. The President of the United Mexican States welcomed all the participants and declared that the sustainable production and distribution of sufficient food for an ever-increasing world population was one of the major challenges of the 21st Century, particularly in the countries that were more behind.

7. He also affirmed that in Mexico, as in most of the countries of the Region, the effort to achieve food security was also a battle for a more productive rural sector, for social justice and for the elimination of poverty. That was why rural solutions had both social and productive implications, which led him to mention the Government of Mexico's strategy *Alianza para el Campo* which reflected the commitments of the World Food Summit.

8. He concluded by asserting that development would not be fully complete unless its benefits extended to the rural population, and that the aim was for all men and women living and working in rural areas to have at least the same opportunities as those living in urban areas.

Election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of Rapporteur

9. The Conference unanimously elected the members of the Conference Bureau listed in the Appendix C.

Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

10. The Conference adopted the agenda and timetable provided in Appendix B.

Statement by the Director-General¹

11. The Director-General of FAO reported that the most positive aspect of the state of food and agriculture in the world was the reduction by 40 million of the number of undernourished persons in the developing countries between 1990-92 and 1995-97, which was equivalent to 8 million per year. Although encouraging, this was considerably below the 20 million required if the World Food Summit objective was to be achieved.

12. With regard to food emergencies, the Director-General mentioned the growing importance of FAO's role in monitoring the food and agriculture situation and its activities for the rehabilitation of the agricultural, livestock, forestry and fisheries sectors. He also emphasized that FAO had to continue to meet the challenges and demands of other types of crisis related to food quality and safety, and to the consequences of new agricultural techniques brought about by advances in biotechnology.

13. He stressed that, despite intensive urbanization and industrial development, agriculture played an important role in growth and development in Latin America and the Caribbean as a generator of employment and foreign exchange, and was therefore an essential determinant of food security.

14. He noted that agricultural commodities accounted for almost 25% of the Region's export earnings and in 1998 represented over 7% of GDP. However, the macroeconomic successes continued to be shadowed by the long-existing challenges that had become more acute: increased economic and social polarization; concentration of income; and the intergenerational transfer of poverty. At the same time, the vicious circle of poverty and deterioration of the natural resource base continued to undermine sustainable development in the Region. Such a situation called for stronger political will and more decisive action.

¹ LARC/00/INF/4: "Statement by the Director-General". The complete text of the statement is available in Appendix D.

SUMMARY OF DELIBERATIONS

FAO activities (1998-1999).

Trends and challenges in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food security in the Region, and actions taken on the main recommendations of the Twenty-fifth FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

15. The Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative of FAO introduced this item² and identified the principal actions that had been taken in follow-up to the recommendations of the Twenty-fifth Regional Conference of FAO. He drew attention to the fact that the field programme in the Region comprised 164 projects, and reported that 78% of projects ongoing in August 1999 were geared towards the achievement of food security and rural development.

16. He mentioned the need to work jointly with legislative assemblies and the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO) to analyse the resources directed towards the agricultural and rural sector, including those earmarked for education and health. He suggested that a high-level meeting be convened to examine experiences in institutional reform on the basis of case studies carried out by international agencies.

17. The Conference commended FAO's activities in the Region in follow-up to the Twenty-fifth Regional Conference.

Reports of the Regional Commissions

18. The reports of the Regional Commissions³ were presented in order to draw the attention of the FAO Regional Conference to the main recommendations of the FAO Commissions in the Region, highlight their importance and their management and coordination capacity, and make proposals for enhancing and broadening the forum that they represent.

19. The Conference remarked that the presentation of these reports - the first time at the FAO Regional Conference - enabled it to note the recommendations of specialized fora and the discussions of experts on central issues related to fisheries, forestry and livestock.

20. The Conference advocated the strengthening of the work of the Regional Commissions and the continued regularity of their meetings. It also recommended that the reports of these Commissions should be submitted to the subsidiary committees of the Council of FAO, a process that would provide access to the Council and the Conference of FAO to achieve a better-defined regional and subregional perspective in the focus of its programmes.

² LARC/00/INF/5: "FAO activities, trends and challenges in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food security in the Region (1998-99) and action taken on the main recommendations of the 25th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean".

³ LARC/00/INF/9a: "Report of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)"; LARC/00/INF/9b: "Report of the Commission for Inland Fisheries of Latin America (COPECAL)"; LARC/00/INF/10: "Report of the Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission (LACFC)"; LARC/00/INF/11: "Report of the Commission on Livestock Development for Latin America and the Caribbean (CLDLAC)".

21. The Conference emphasized that the work of the Regional Commissions should include fundamental topics such as food security, trade, rural development and sustainable development.

General debate on trends and challenges in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food security in the Region

22. The Conference stressed that the international community should set about removing the obstacles that were preventing the elimination of poverty and hunger in the world, such as the external debt, lack of funding for development, inequitable terms of trade and imposition of rules of reciprocity between developed and developing countries.

23. The Conference stated that food security needed the commitment of governments and populations to put into effect the World Food Summit Plan of Action, and noted the progress made in this regard and in the formulation of national plans for short- and medium-term agricultural development.

24. The Conference expressed its concern over the fulfilment of the commitments of the World Food Summit which needed to be prioritized if the set objectives were to be achieved. It also stressed that a comprehensive effort was required to explore new forms of cooperation between FAO and the countries of the Region, given ever-increasing country needs and the fall in international aid.

25. The Conference reminded the international community of the importance of keeping to the commitments of the World Food Summit, particularly the financing, so that FAO could implement the Summit Plan of Action.

26. The Conference stressed that the liberalization of agricultural trade was vital to both countries with a competitive agricultural sector and countries that were net importers. It was unacceptable for the developed countries to maintain unjustifiable practices in support domestic production and subsidies for their exports, in addition to sophisticated protection barriers that impeded access to their markets. It stated that competitiveness was still determined by the level of funding that their governments could make available to subsidies rather than by the comparative advantages of agriculture. Future negotiations on agriculture would have to include the removal of these obstacles if countries were to overcome poverty and food insecurity.

27. The Conference stressed that food aid was an important tool to make up for critical reductions in supply; however, care was needed to prevent distortions deterring domestic production and such aid should not be tied directly or indirectly to exports to recipient countries. Furthermore, food aid should not be conditional or used as a means of applying political pressure.

28. The Conference pointed to the need to uphold the rights of the countries of the Region in relation to the WTO, which meant recognizing the particular circumstances of the least developed and the net food-importing countries. Sufficient flexibility was also required to reconcile the specific interests of individual countries in the most advantageous manner.

29. The Conference stressed that, as food safety was a topic of growing interest and importance, especially to consumers, national legislations should be consistent with the WTO Agreement on Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and the Codex Alimentarius standards. It also stated that sanitary and phytosanitary measures should not be used as barriers to trade.

30. The Conference underscored the potential risk that the multifunctionality of agriculture could become a mechanism leading to trade distortion, used to justify new forms of subsidy or protection.

31. The Conference acknowledged the concern of the small island developing states of the Caribbean regarding implementation of the WTO agreements, unless they were given longer transitional periods to adjust to the rules of the multilateral trade agreements.

32. The Conference emphasized the importance of state reform and institutional change for a stronger decentralized and participatory administration, promoting local initiatives and the role of the municipalities. However, these initiatives needed to co-exist with central coordinating bodies.

33. The Conference took note of the offer of various countries to promote horizontal cooperation in the fields of technology and international trade.

34. The Conference requested that FAO increase resources for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Region's representation among the decision-making posts.

35. The Conference requested FAO technical support: to continue the workshops to train agricultural trade negotiators; update food legislation, food safety standards and plant and animal health standards; protect plant genetic resources; draw up inventories of water resources available for agricultural activity; establish systems for the prevention and mitigation of, and recovery from, the impact of adverse climatic events; boost rural development through agricultural production; and implement binational projects in border zones.

36. The Chairwoman of the Regional Consultation of Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations (NGOs/CSOs), which was held in parallel to the Regional Conference from 10 to 11 April, presented its conclusions and recommendations. She drew attention to the need for the NGOs/CSOs to cooperate with FAO and governments in actions directed towards rural development and overcoming food insecurity. More specifically, she announced the decision of the NGOs/CSOs to form a Consultation Follow-up Committee charge with a regional network of NGOs/CSOs for Latin America and the Caribbean, and requested FAO help in setting it up and in its subsequent functioning.

37. The representative of the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO) called for closer links with FAO. Contact could be channelled from FAO to the national parliamentary commissions dealing with agriculture and the rural sector, thus providing legislators with information and technical assistance for debates and the drafting of legislation. In turn, PARLATINO could help the legislative authorities of the Region follow up commitments made at international level, such as at the World Food Summit.

38. The representative of IICA underscored the significantly higher coordination that now existed between FAO and IICA in technical cooperation for the countries of the Region. He suggested moving forward in the Caribbean subregion in partnership with other organizations.

39. The representative of Spain stated that the Conference discussions had been constructive in helping resolve the problems of food and agriculture in the Region ,and highlighted the important coordinating role of GRULAC in Rome in determining the agreed positions of the countries of the Region.

REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

Opening of the Technical Committee meeting

40. The Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative of FAO opened the session of the Technical Committee. He welcomed the delegates and observers and thanked the Government and people of Mexico for hosting the event.

Election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the Technical Committee, and appointment of the Rapporteur

41. The Committee unanimously elected the members of the Technical Committee Bureau listed in the Appendix C.

Adoption of the Technical Committee agenda and timetable

42. The Committee adopted the agenda and timetable given in the Appendix B, changing the order of presentation of Document LARC/00/3.

Impact of technical and non-tariff barriers on agricultural trade in Latin America and the Caribbean

43. The Committee highlighted the usefulness of the background document⁴ and expressed its concern over the protection of certain agricultural commodities on the markets of the major developed countries.

44. Although the opening up of markets provided new opportunities, some countries drew attention to the difficulty in seizing such opportunities because of insufficient training and access to the necessary information. They also mentioned the need to remove the obstacles that still existed in intra-regional trade.

45. The Committee requested that FAO broaden its technical assistance to ensure appropriate and timely implementation of the commitments undertaken by the countries of the Region in the existing agreements of the World Trade Organization and to help them draw tangible benefit from the emerging opportunities. The following areas were identified as being of particular interest to countries in this regard: plant and animal health standards and quality standards. It emphasized the need to give special differentiated treatment to the developing countries, in particular the food-importing countries.

46. The Committee requested that FAO continue with the regional programme of technical assistance to countries for agricultural trade negotiations, which should include activities at subregional and national level, in coordination with other specialized organizations active in the Region. This should include the training of negotiators and the building of analytical and evaluation capacity of officials responsible for these aspects and other matters related to trade.

⁴ LARC/00/2: "Impact of technical and non-tariff barriers on agricultural trade in Latin America and the Caribbean".

47. The Committee recommended that FAO promote the exchange of experiences and the identification, discussion and agreement of areas of common interest to the countries of the Region regarding priority issues, through the organization of technical meetings.

Effects of adverse climatological conditions on food production and trade

48. The Committee endorsed the strategies put forward in the document⁵ and emphasized the cumulative experience and cooperation that existed among the countries of the Region to deal with adverse climatic events.

49. The Committee indicated the need to establish ongoing policies to prevent, mitigate and recover from the impact of natural calamities.

50. The Committee recommended strengthening technical cooperation among the countries of the Region by using existing capacities to produce methodology documents, exchanging experiences and developing training programmes for the public and private sectors. It also drew attention to the merit of forging alliances with developed countries to take advantage of existing technological resources. Cuba offered to host a study and training centre to this effect.

51. The Committee suggested that efforts should be made to include the protection of natural forests more effectively in world protocols as a strategy to prevent the global changes that can influence the occurrence of adverse climatic events.

52. The Committee requested that FAO, and other bilateral and multilateral technical and financial cooperation organizations, continue providing technical support to raise the awareness of decision makers in the development of information, education, training, modernization and organization programmes aimed at reducing the negative impact of adverse climatic events. In this connection, the Committee recognized the importance of the FAO Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS).

Reform of rural development institutions

53. The Committee generally endorsed the proposals of the document⁶ and the importance for governments to have the necessary functional and institutional structure to continue operating in the context determined by structural adjustments. Some countries pointed out that their strategies already included a spatial approach to rural development; they also mentioned the need to integrate cultural aspects into rural development projects and programmes.

54. The Committee considered the issue of institutional reform under discussion to be highly relevant to the countries of the Region.

55. The Committee emphasized that, although macroeconomic equilibria were necessary to activated rural development, differentiated sectoral policies were also needed if there was to be

⁵ LARC/00/4: "Effect of adverse climatological conditions on food production and trade".

⁶ LARC/00/5: "Reforms of rural development institutions".

any impact on the peasant farming sector. It also underscored the need to strengthen the management capacity of local authorities to reflect the growing role of the municipal bodies.

56. The Committee stressed the need to overcome the usual discontinuity of rural development programmes and to seek participatory mechanisms that would avoid this and sources of funding that would facilitate the consolidation and functioning of these multisectoral processes.

57. The Committee emphasized the importance of making good use of modern communication and information technology as a tool of rural development.

Follow-up to the World Food Summit

58. The Committee took note of the state of food insecurity and vulnerability in the Region reported in the document⁷, and underlined the importance of developing actions at individual, household, community, subnational, national and regional levels to attain food security.

59. The Committee recognized the role played by the Committee on World Food Security in the follow-up to the World Food Summit.

60. The Committee requested that FAO continue to help the countries fulfil the commitments made at the World Food Summit and support the exchange of know-how and experience in the Region.

61. The Committee expressed its concern at the lack of resources from the international community for implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action.

Water as a resource for food production

62. The Committee recognized the importance of this topic⁸ for food security and pointed out that, although Latin America and the Caribbean has considerable water availability per inhabitant, there are significant disparities between countries and zones within countries, some with acute water shortages, others affected by periodic drought.

63. The Committee underlined the merit in using irrigation water more efficiently, as traditional surface irrigation systems are prone to heavy water loss. Priority needs to be given to investing in the rehabilitation and modernization of existing irrigation systems which generally offer better economic returns than irrigation projects in new areas. It also stressed the importance of user responsibility in the rehabilitation of systems and the need to include drainage works to avoid soil degradation through salinization.

64. The Committee drew attention to the importance of the irrigation component in the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) and in encouraging the participation of project beneficiaries, including in the funding.

⁷ LARC/00/6: "Follow-up to the World Food Summit".

⁸ LARC/00/3: "Water as a resource for food production in the Region".

65. The Committee noted that it was difficult to draw general conclusions because of the diversity of conditions in the Region; for example, the transfer of management of irrigated areas to users had not always been successful.

66. The Committee emphasized the practicality of using the watershed as the territorial unit for water management, both for controlling floods and dealing with conditions of drought, as well as routine distribution of water and soil management. It acknowledged the need for institutional reforms to improve the local management of water.

67. Some countries expressed an interest in receiving more information on the creation of possible water markets and their enabling legal framework, and on the international trade of water from countries with excess availability.

68. The Committee examined the role of rainwater harvesting in improving productivity in rainfed areas. It also referred to the potential impact of transgenic products on salinity tolerance and efficiency of water use.

69. The Committee considered that FAO could provide technical support to countries to review their legal framework; suggest institutional reforms; disseminate understanding of water resources and educate the population accordingly; improve the administration and management of water; control water contamination; establish systems for the treatment of poor-quality water; develop drainage systems; modernize hydrometric and meteorological stations; stimulate the participation of the private sector in irrigation; and promote the harvesting of rainwater.

Research and transfer of technology in food production

70. The Committee was highly appreciative of the document⁹ because of the importance of this topic for the development of agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean.

71. The Committee noted the need to pay attention to the priority areas suggested in the document which should guide FAO technical support in the Region for the reinforcement of national research systems based on real priorities and available resources; the development of the technology market specifically geared towards added value in the production chain; the strengthening of participatory research and extension for small and medium operations; the implementation of collaborative programmes with institutions of industrialized countries; and dissemination of research findings.

72. The Committee requested FAO technical assistance in the planning of strategies for research and technology transfer, using the successful cases of national programmes as models of action for intra-regional cooperation.

73. The Committee examined the new technology demands, in particular agricultural biotechnology and its appropriate and safe application; increased small-farmer participation in the management of research and transfer of technology; consolidation of available human resources; the establishment of priorities for research and the transfer and integration of

⁹ LARC/00/7: "Research and transfer of technology in food production".

technology; institutional strengthening, including management reforms; access to additional funds from public and private sources, and from bilateral and multilateral cooperation; and the importance of South-South cooperation in this regard.

74. The Committee recognized that governments should look into new forms of management of research and technology transfer, so that these could be included as a priority item on the policy agenda.

75. The Committee took note of the need for more effective participation of countries in determining the priorities of the Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) operating in the Region, as well as the CGIAR proposal for the gradual phasing out of regional representation, as presently structured, until the current representative has completed his term in the year 2002.

Demonstration of the World Agriculture Information Centre (WAICENT)

76. The Committee was shown a video on WAICENT, which is an FAO strategic programme for the management and dissemination of its information. This programme is accessible through the FAO website (www.fao.org) and the FAO Regional Office site (www.rlc.fao.org).

77. The Committee requested FAO support for the implementation and strengthening of national agricultural information systems in the Region, including the necessary technical training.

78. FAO invited countries developing information technology systems to establish links between their sites and the web page of the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean so as to boost dissemination of this information.

Other matters

79. The Committee was also shown the video “Step by Step” which illustrates the contents, functioning and achievements of the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS).

80. The Committee requested that FAO place greater emphasis in its studies and documents on the state of food and agriculture in the small island developing states of the Caribbean. It also requested FAO support in strengthening information and communication mechanisms to facilitate closer linkages between the countries of the Region.

Meetings of consultation and analysis among delegations

81. In follow up to the recommendation of the 25th FAO Regional Conference (Nassau, Bahamas, 1998), informal consultations were held between delegations to promote the exchange of ideas on matters of common interest. The issues dealt with were: a) agricultural plan of action for small island developing states, and b) transgenic crops, myths and realities.

Adoption of the Technical Committee Report

82. The Committee unanimously adopted the report and highlighted the importance of the informal opportunities that had been provided during the meeting for dialogue between delegations, a practice that should be maintained and broadened in the future.

Closure of the Technical Committee meeting

83. The Chairman of the Technical Committee thanked the delegations for their participation and closed the work of the Committee.

FINAL ITEMS

Date, place and agenda of the 27th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

84. The Conference noted with appreciation the offer of the Delegation of Cuba to host the 27th Regional Conference of FAO, which would be held in Havana, Cuba, from 11 to 15 March 2002. This was unanimously endorsed by the delegations present. It requested that the Director-General take this recommendation into account when deciding the place and date of the next Regional Conference, after consultation with the Government of Cuba.

85. The Conference requested that FAO also consider the following items for inclusion on the agenda of the next Regional Conference: training in rural areas in the concept of integrated production and marketing; food security and agricultural development in the small island countries of the Caribbean; protection of the environment in Latin America and the Caribbean to ensure the equilibrium of food production; contribution of fisheries to food security in the Region; intellectual property and genetic resources; control of pests and management of pesticides; biotechnology and transgenic organisms; financial instruments for rural development; system of plant protection; and protection of the marine environment. It also emphasized the need for prior consultation with the Ministries of Agriculture in determining the agenda for the next Regional Conference.

Other Matters

86. The Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative of FAO referred to the document¹⁰ on the establishment of an FAO Subregional Office for Central America which provides details related to this request.

87. The Conference endorsed the merit of establishing an FAO Subregional Office for Central America and requested that FAO continue to look into the matter.

88. The Delegation of Paraguay reiterated its request that FAO examine the possibility of establishing an FAO Representation in that country.

89. The Conference emphasized the need to accelerate the process of decentralization of FAO, strengthening the capacity of country representations to obtain greater direct assistance.

Meetings of consultation and analysis among delegations

90. As recommended at the Twenty-fifth FAO Regional Conference (Nassau, Bahamas, 1998) an opportunity was given for the exchange of ideas between delegations on matters of common interest. The meeting on the Intra-Regional Trade of Agricultural and Food Products was held in this context.

¹⁰ LARC/00/INF/12: "Establishment of a Sub-Regional Office for Central America".

Adoption of the Report

91. The Conference adopted the Report of the Plenary Session after introducing the necessary amendments. It also adopted the Report of the Technical Committee, which is integral to this document.

Closure of the Conference

92. The Conference thanked the Government and people of Mexico, the authorities of the State of Yucatan and the city of Merida for their warm welcome, for having hosted the event and for having given the delegations an enchanting stay in the American Culture Capital 2000.

93. The Chairman brought the 26th Regional Conference to a close, thanking the delegations for their active participation and for the high level of the deliberations.

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

*Mr Chairman of the Regional Conference,
Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

(Introduction)

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the Twenty-sixth FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean which is being held in this beautiful city of Merida, at the kind invitation of the Government of Mexico. I should like to express, on behalf of all the delegations and the staff of FAO, our sincere gratitude to the Government and people of Mexico and to the inhabitants of the city of Merida for their warm welcome and generous hospitality.

(State of food and agriculture in the world)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world is undergoing a rapid pace of globalization and growing interdependence, with borders increasingly opened economically.

The estimates for world cereal production in 1999 have recently been revised upwards and now stand at 1 872 million tonnes. This is, however, one percent down from 1998 and two percent down from 1997, which was a particularly good year. The only expected increase is for rice, while wheat and other cereal harvests will be lower. For the first time in four years, projected cereal consumption will exceed production. This will require a drawdown of 8 million tonnes from stocks which will therefore amount to 334 million tonnes. Such a level guarantees a stock-to-utilization ratio within the safety margin of 17 to 18 percent.

For these reasons, the 1999/2000 marketing season could register an increase of over three percent in world cereal trade, equivalent to a volume of 222 million tonnes. Yet, cereal prices on world markets are generally lower than last year, a positive factor for the 82 low-income food-deficit countries.

We can also observe an encouraging sign in the fisheries sector, which registered a partial recovery in output in 1999 after the heavy falls in production of the previous year.

But, the most positive factor is the indication in the FAO report on the *State of Food Insecurity in the World* of a reduction by 40 million, between 1990-92 and 1995-97, of the total number of malnourished people in the developing countries. This annual reduction of about

8 million people on average is encouraging, but it is far below the figure of 20 million required to achieve the objective of the World Food Summit.

(Emergency situations)

Against such a global picture, 35 countries have been faced with food emergencies. At the end of 1999, the number of people affected by food emergencies resulting primarily from natural and man-made disasters was estimated at about 52 million. However, data indicate that their relative frequency has changed over the last thirty years. Whilst in the 1970s and 1980s food emergencies were mainly the result of natural factors, in more recent years man-made disasters - especially war, civil strife and financial and economic crises - have done nothing but increase.

In Latin America, many countries are still suffering from the devastation caused by El Niño and Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and compounded by the torrential rains and floods of 1999. In addition, late last year, a severe cyclone and extensive floods hit Venezuela. In Africa, the emergency situations arise in particular from civil strife and recurrent droughts, whilst in Asia, millions of people have seen their basic access to food eroded by declining purchasing power as several economies were devastated by the financial crisis in 1997/1998. In the Near East, the worst drought in decades in 1999 seriously reduced food production in several countries. In this part of the world, in addition to weather fluctuations, the problem of access to water for food production will undoubtedly be the main cause of food supply problems in the future.

The role of FAO in such a context is more important than ever, primarily in assessing the food and agriculture situation, determining food aid needs and informing the international community, thanks to the Global Information and Early Warning System of FAO, which is working together with the World Food Programme, the UNDP and an extensive network of governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Emergency situations also require FAO to revive agricultural production by evaluating needs, in cooperation with other UN agencies in the framework of consolidated appeals for humanitarian assistance and, especially, by providing direct assistance to farmers. During last year and this year, FAO has implemented 20 emergency projects (both national and regional) for a total value of US\$5.5 million in 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries. The emergency operations have aimed at the rehabilitation of agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries sectors damaged by natural disasters such as the earthquakes in Bolivia and Colombia, the hurricanes and tropical storms George, Mitch, Floyd, Jose and Lenny, among others, in the Caribbean Islands and Central America, the El Niño phenomenon in Ecuador and Peru and more recently the catastrophic floods and mudslides in Venezuela. FAO's assistance has also aimed at strengthening the member countries' Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness, and Impact Mitigation Plans. The Organization also assists in humanitarian crises such as the plight of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Colombia, for which FAO is currently preparing an updated appeal.

The assistance is provided through the distribution of essential agricultural and fishing inputs such as seeds, tools, fertilizer, pesticides and fishing gear, and in a few cases through livestock restocking. In addition, technical advice has been given through the recruitment of international and national specialists, officers from technical units at FAO Headquarters and Regional Offices, and through the organization of workshops at both national and regional levels.

(Other “crises”)

But the world is also increasingly faced with other “crises”. These relate to the quality and especially the safety of food products, and to the impact of new agricultural techniques, resulting mainly from rapid advances in biotechnology. Recent problems facing governments have included the “mad cow” crisis, the presence of dioxins and listeria in the food chain, as well as the marketing of products containing genetically modified organisms.

This is an area where FAO will undoubtedly be called upon to play a greater role. Public opinion, sensitized by the media, wants objective information on possible risks and requires effective measures of protection. While such “crises” have occurred in developed countries, they create concern for the authorities and the populations of developing countries that do not have sufficient capacity of analysis.

The Organization must continue to respond to these challenges and demands. Its appropriate bodies, such as the Commission on Genetic Resources, are actively working on the drafting of codes of conduct. An inter-departmental programme has been initiated to deal with all technical aspects of the issues. The programmes of the Joint FAO/IAEA Division of Nuclear Techniques for Food and Agriculture will be reinforced to increase their contribution in these areas. As for questions of ethics, these are being examined by an internal committee supported by a panel of experts. Finally, the *Codex Alimentarius* remains the leading instrument for determining international standards – a crucial activity in a context of globalization and growing trade.

While recognizing the importance and urgency of these issues, FAO must nevertheless concentrate on ensuring that information provided is scientifically based and established by internationally recognized experts.

(State of food and agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish now to focus on the Latin America and Caribbean region. Despite its rapidly growing cities and booming industry, agriculture plays an important role in growth and development. As a provider of employment and source of foreign exchange, it constitutes a vital component of food security for all the inhabitants of the region. Close to a quarter of the region’s economically active population works on the land or in agro-industries. Agricultural products continue to earn almost 25 percent, in 1998, of the region’s export revenues; and the sector has proven itself to be a dependable growth engine in bad times as well as good, as agriculture has accounted for over 7 percent of the region’s total GDP over the last decade.

The lagging effect of natural phenomena and the steep fall of international prices translate into a projected growth rate posted by the agricultural sector in 1999 of 2.2 percent for the region as a whole, moderately higher than the 1.6 average of 1998 and the 1.9 average of 1997. Performance, however, was highly uneven across countries.

The projected recovery for 1999 is marked by significant improvements in Brazil and Mexico's performance, which together account for close to 60 percent of the region's agricultural output.

After experiencing an average growth of 7 percent in 1998, the agricultural sector of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) is estimated to have stagnated in 1999, growing at only 0.2 percent. This result is related to the poor performance of Argentina's agricultural sector.

The Andean countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) experienced negligible agricultural sector growth in 1998 (0.3 percent). In fact, except for Colombia and Peru, they experienced a contraction of the sector.

The Central American countries' overall sector growth remained practically unchanged from 1997 to 1998, at 2.1 percent. However, the countries hardest hit by Hurricane Mitch suffered steep drops in agricultural output.

In the Caribbean, traditional commodities were particularly hard hit by hurricane damage in 1998, with sugar output contracting by roughly 15 percent. Similarly, banana production declined by an average of around 6 percent despite moderate growth in the countries belonging to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

Agricultural output now represents only 7.3% of the region's GDP. There are, however, significant differences among the Andean and Southern Cone countries, as well as Brazil and Mexico, where agriculture represents less than 10 percent of the economy, and the Central American and Caribbean countries, where it is close to 20 percent.

The economically active population working in agriculture has remained constant, at around 44 million, during the last two decades. During the same period, the total number of economically active people has increased from 130 million to 217 million. Thus, agriculture employs a decreasing proportion of the economically active population, falling from slightly over one third of all workers in 1980 to a little more than one-fifth today.

Historically, the Latin America and Caribbean region has enjoyed a positive and increasing net agricultural trade balance, which in 1998 amounted to about US\$24 billion, a slight decline from the record US\$25 billion enjoyed in 1997.

For the region as a whole, the share of agricultural exports as a percentage of total exports has shown a declining tendency since 1987, dropping from 27 percent to a current level of around 23 percent.

Agricultural exports from Latin America and the Caribbean represented around 12% of the world total in 1998.

In relation to destination, in 1997 the European Union surpassed the United States as the largest recipient of primary agricultural exports from the region. Intra-regional trade was also important, representing almost 14 percent of total primary agricultural exports.

Changes in agricultural production, which recorded a rate of growth of 1.66 percent against 1.7 percent for population in the period 1990-1999, closely mirror indicators of food security. The region as a whole has experienced a modest decrease in the overall number of its citizens suffering from undernourishment in recent years (1990/92 to 1995/97), from 58.6 down to 53.4 million, after experiencing a substantial rise in the previous decade. Only the Southern Cone subregion has in fact experienced a decline in the number of undernourished in recent years. Central America has seen its number of undernourished increase while its proportion has remained constant.

The Caribbean subregion has experienced an alarming increase in the number and proportion of undernourished people. In recent years, the number of undernourished in the Caribbean has increased by 2 million, while the proportion has gone from 25 to 31 percent. This can mainly be attributed to the sharp deterioration of the food security situation of Cuba and Haiti.

(Challenges and opportunities for food and agriculture in the Region)

Together with the macroeconomic successes in the Region, old challenges still persist and have even increased: widening economic and social polarization, concentration of income, and intergenerational transmission of poverty. At the same time, the vicious circle of poverty and deterioration of the natural resources base continues to be one of the main problems for the sustainability of development in the region. The marginality suffered by an important part of the population in wide areas of different countries hampers their integration into market mechanisms and their access to economic progress. It constitutes an obstacle to a better territorial organization of development and to political stability in the region.

There are currently an estimated 204 million people living in poverty in Latin America, up from 200 million in 1990. Of these, 78 million live in rural areas, representing 54 percent of rural households. According to the latest available information, eight countries in the region have reduced hunger quickly and steadily enough to meet the goal of halving the number of the world's undernourished people set forth in the World Food Summit. But on a regional level and with the business-as-usual scenario, the goal will not materialize.

A stronger political will and decisive action are therefore needed to reduce poverty, improve the food security of low-income people, and promote sustainable increases in agricultural productivity.

New mechanisms need to be put in place, notably in the areas of rural finance, technological development and agricultural input and output marketing, in the framework of the required structural reforms. Innovative policies that enhance the functioning of rural markets are also required. Innovative approaches to risk management in food production, distribution and consumption need to be promoted.

It is vital to develop a new institutional framework that allows for the different players to participate in and contribute to the process of agricultural and rural policy-making.

(Parallel meetings to the Twenty-sixth FAO Regional Conference)

*Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to point out that parallel to this Twenty-sixth Regional Conference, two other main gatherings of high relevance to the region have been convened. The first is a forum for the regional non-governmental organizations and civil society, while the other is on intra-regional trade.

Non-governmental organizations play an important role in the rural and agricultural development of our Members Nations. The engagement of NGOs and civil society in the World Food Summit was much valued and added to the strength of the Plan of Action which in turn calls for collaborative efforts from all sectors of society to achieve the objectives set in Rome. Against this background, FAO decided to organize the NGO/Civil Society Consultation in parallel to its Regional Conferences with the view of benefiting from these active players' experiences in fields relevant to FAO's mandate and to help the Organization formulate its policy and strategy in cooperating with grassroots organizations. The recommendations of the NGO/Civil Society Consultation will be submitted to this body for consideration.

In conjunction with the Conference, there will be a consultation on intra-regional trade in the Latin America and Caribbean region. This consultation will focus on major issues relating to the fostering of cooperation among the countries of the region to facilitate trade to bring about national agricultural development and food security.

(Agenda of the Regional Conference)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Twenty-sixth Regional Conference will examine the key issues relating to the fight against food insecurity and vulnerability, international agricultural trade, and technological change and sustainable development, including institutional reform. The major issues on your agenda include:

- **The World Food Summit follow-up** - in particular the actions taken by FAO in its endeavours to support the implementation of the seven commitments of the Summit of

November 1996 and the Summit Plan of Action prior to the mid-term review which is scheduled for 2006.

- **The impact of technical and non-tariff barriers on agricultural trade in Latin America and the Caribbean** - in particular the progress made regarding the reduction of tariffs at international level, and especially within the Latin American and Caribbean Region, and the growing importance of non-tariff instruments as international agricultural trade regulators.
- **Effect of adverse climatological conditions on food production and trade** - in particular the need to ensure prompt attention is given to the prevention and mitigation of adverse natural phenomena.
- **Reforms of rural development institutions** - in particular the asymmetry between demands on agricultural sector institutions on the one hand, and capacity and available resources on the other.
- **Research and transfer of technology in food production** - in particular the main challenges for the generation and transfer of viable, realistic and sustainable technologies.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your Regional Conference will have to take up the challenge of fighting hunger and poverty on the continent. I therefore await the outcome of your deliberations with great interest and wish you every success in your work.

Thank you.

**AGENDA OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
(10 and 11 April 2000)**

I. PRELIMINARY ISSUES

1. Opening of the Technical Committee session
2. Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons and appointment of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

II. TECHNICAL ISSUES

4. Impact of technical and non-tariff barriers on agricultural trade in Latin America and the Caribbean
5. Effects of adverse climatological conditions on food production and trade
6. Reform of rural development institutions
7. Follow-up to the World Food Summit
8. Water as a resource for food production
9. Research and transfer of technology in food production
10. Demonstration of the World Agriculture Information Centre (WAICENT)
11. Other matters
12. Meetings of consultation and analysis among delegations
13. Adoption of the Technical Committee report
14. Closure of the Technical Committee session

**AGENDA OF THE PLENARY SESSION
(12 to 14 April 2000)**

I. PRELIMINARY ISSUES

1. Inaugural ceremony
2. Election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and appointment of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

II. STATEMENTS

4. Statement by the Director-General
5. FAO activities (1998-1999). Trends and challenges in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food security in the Region, and actions taken on the main recommendations of the Twenty-fifth FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean
6. Reports of the Regional Commissions: Commission for Inland Fisheries of Latin America (COPESCAL), Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission (LACFC), Commission on Livestock Development for Latin America and the Caribbean (CLDLAC)
7. General debate on trends and challenges in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food security in the Region
8. Date, place and agenda of the 27th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean
9. Other matters
10. Meetings of consultation and analysis among delegations
11. Adoption of the Report (including the Report of the Technical Committee)
12. Closure of the Conference

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<i>Alternate Rapporteur</i>	Joao Mauricio Cabral de Melo (Brazil)

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LIST OF DOCUMENTS

<u>Code</u>	<u>Title</u>
LARC/00/1	Provisional Annotated Agenda
LARC/00/2	Impact of technical and non-tariff barriers on agricultural trade in Latin America and the Caribbean
LARC/00/3	Water as a resource for food production in the Region
LARC/00/4	Effect of adverse climatological conditions on food production and trade
LARC/00/5	Reforms of agricultural development institutions
LARC/00/6	Follow-up to the World Food Summit
LARC/00/7	Research and transfer of technology in food production
LARC/00/INF/1	Information Note
LARC/00/INF/2	Provisional Timetable
LARC/00/INF/3	Provisional List of Documents
LARC/00/INF/4	Statement by the Director-General
LARC/00/INF/5	FAO activities, trends and challenges in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food security in the Region (1998-99) and action taken on the main recommendations of the 25 th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean
LARC/00/INF/6	Sustainable development in mountain areas
LARC/00/INF/7	Plant genetic resources: international commitment and the Leipzig Plan of Action
LARC/00/INF/8	Plan of action project for agriculture in the small island developing states
LARC/00/INF/9a	Report of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)
LARC/00/INF/9b	Report of the Commission for Inalnd Fisheries of Latin America (COPESCAL)

- LARC/00/INF/10 Report of the Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission
- LARC/00/INF/11 Report of the Commission on Livestock Development for Latin America and the Caribbean
- LARC/00/INF/12 Establishment of a Sub-Regional Office for Central America