

End-of-Year Message from the Secretary of the FAO Intergovernmental Group on Grains

December 2011

One wonders if 2011 is about to begin or end! Throughout the year the rapid pace of events left little time for pause or reflection. This end-of-year letter attempts to provide a snapshot of some of the main outputs and activities of the FAO Grain Team (FGT).

As in the past, market monitoring and analysis formed the core work of the FGT in 2011. However, during the early months of 2011, with prices rising and fear of another global food crisis, demand for more frequent market updates increased. Thus, from March 2011, the team launched the monthly **Cereal Supply and Demand Briefs** on the **FAO World Food Situation** website. These briefs were published on the first (or second) Thursday of each month together with the monthly **FAO Food Price Indices**. In addition, the FGT's **News Reports on Grains (MNRs)** continued to be released for the seventh consecutive year on the last working day of each month throughout 2011. Starting in January, MNRs were restyled in order to improve their readability. They were also slightly refocused, with fewer news articles but more links to relevant market reports.

Among the major outputs, *Food Outlook* reports continued to absorb most of the team's attention. Feedbacks from the media and users suggested that the analyses contained in the June issue were particularly helpful in dampening concerns about an impending food crisis. However, following four years of continued market turmoil, an important political process started to unfold by the time the June *Food Outlook* went to press. This was the G-20 initiative, which aimed at making markets more transparent and prices more stable by promoting accurate forecasts and coherent policy responses. The initiative led to the establishment of the **Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS)**. In effect, AMIS opened up a new chapter in the work of the FGT. AMIS is not only housed in FAO, more precisely in the FAO's Trade and Markets Division, but it soon occupied the main day-to-day activity of the team. The grain team facilitated the organization of the two-day **AMIS Inception Meeting**, which took place in mid-September in FAO. At this meeting, the G-20 participants elected the Secretary of the FAO Intergovernmental Group on Grain as also the AMIS Secretary. The AMIS Secretariat is formed by nine international organizations and entities, namely: FAO, IFAD, IFPRI, WFP, OECD, World Bank, WTO, the UN High Level Task Force (UN-HLTF) and UNCTAD.

AMIS brings new responsibilities and given the desire of the G-20 leaders to achieve results swiftly, the second half of 2011 focused mostly on AMIS-related activities. By the end of the year, the **AMIS website** was established. The free access AMIS website contains all the relevant reports produced to-date with regard to both the AMIS structure and objectives. It also offers a basic statistical tool for users to view and compare data on selected commodities from different sources. Obviously AMIS is a work in progress, needing time to mature, but it is expected that from the early 2012, the website will begin hosting not only the latest market data or forecasts but also regular reports and in-depth analysis.

Introducing AMIS featured as a special chapter in the November issue of *Food Outlook*. The November report was one of the most comprehensive Food Outlooks in over 30 years of its existence. A reader survey was included in the November issue, seeking views and suggestions of our readers. In recent years, we have been constantly trying to enhance *Food Outlook* but there is always room for further improvement and for this reason every now and then we seek inputs from readers. You can share your views with us by completing the online questionnaire at: www.surveymonkey.com/s/engl.

