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ICA Press Release

ICA President Calls on FAO to Reverse Decision to Cut Co-operative Programme

Geneva, Switzerland, 3 December 2003, for immediate release - The ICA President, Ivano Barberini today made one last call on the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) to reconsider proposed budget cuts to its co-operative programs in 2004 -2005.

In a strongly worded statement to the 32nd FAO Conference in Rome Mr. Barberini said “such cuts will have the effect of virtually closing down the FAO’s Co-operatives and Rural Organisation unit by the end of 2004”.

He added, “It is very difficult to understand why the FAO, an organisation that continually expresses its commitment to eliminating rural poverty and hunger in numerous fora, is now proposing to virtually eliminate its support to strengthening farmers’ organisations and co-operatives. This is especially the case when it is these very organisations that small farmers and the poor use to more effectively access services and markets to improve their livelihoods”.

Mr. Barberini told the conference, “It is regrettable that at the very moment when FAO is moving away from support to people-centered development approaches such as rural co-operatives and producer associations, the number of government requests for FAO technical assistance in this field is growing stronger”. He strongly urged delegates to rethink this proposal to ensure that FAO continue to play a strong role combating poverty and promoting food security.

The ICA is not alone in calling on the FAO to reconsider its decision. A number of other organisations, representing farmer interests, including the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), the International Fertiliser Industry Association (IFA), the Asian Network for Development of Agricultural Co-operatives (NEDAC) as well as co-operative organisations from India, Kenya, Nepal, Tanzania, and the United States, have all sent letters to the FAO Director-General asking that this proposal be seriously reconsidered.

Mr. Barberini concluded by acknowledging the pressure the FAO faced in delivering “zero-real and zero nominal growth” budgets; but nevertheless urged Member States to find alternate proposals to distribute FAO’s limited resources that will enable it to retain a specific technical focus on farmers’ organizations and co-operatives. Mr. Barberini also restated the ICA commitment to work with the FAO together to address poverty eradication and hunger and find effective solutions to these current budgetary problems.

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The International Co-operative Alliance is an independent, non-government association which unites, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. The ICA was founded in London in 1895. Its members are national and international co-operative organisations in all sectors of activity including, agricultural, banking, fisheries, housing, tourism, and consumer co-operatives. ICA has more than 200 member organisations from over 100 countries, representing more than 760 million individuals worldwide.