

Keynote: Sustaining the Global Farm – Conference Conclusions

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About 750 conservationists from 80 countries discussed the “state of the world’s soils” during the 10th International Soil Conservation Organization (ISCO) Conference and what might be done to build a greater measure of ecological sustainability into the world’s agricultural systems. This distinguished gathering arrived at the following conclusions, which it would like to share with policymakers, donors, program administrators, and opinion-leaders globally.

The Need for and Significance of Improved Conservation of Land Resources

- ◆ A growing number of important field examples around the world show that improved care of land results in greater sustainability of agricultural systems, leading to increased food security, more effective conservation of soil and water, and improvements in environmental quality. Such examples need to be more widely publicized and their successes repeated.
- ◆ On a wide scale, however, various forms of land degradation, induced by humankind, continue to diminish the land’s productivity and, in the process, raise production costs, increase the frequency and severity of drought and floods, and heighten food insecurity.
- ◆ In addition to the qualitative information already available, reliable quantitative data are needed to document the impacts of land degradation on soil productivity, human health, nutrition, and environmental quality.
- ◆ Models and other new technologies need to be used to quantify the values of the services provided by ecosystems and by such landscape units as watersheds or catchments. The results of these efforts and their implications need to be widely publicized.
- ◆ Communicating the importance of land and water conservation must start with children and become an integral part of awareness campaigns in each and every community.

The Need for Monitoring

- ◆ There is a critical need to improve and regularly update the information base regarding the present condition and future changes in land quality, with identification of the real causes, forms, extent, and impacts of inappropriate uses of land on its degradation. This effort should include identification of the key beneficial components, both technical and social, of improved land management.
- ◆ Under a cooperative international initiative, a single

institution needs to be responsible for monitoring land quality and to serve as a point of contact for information about the types, rates, trends, and directions of changes in land condition worldwide.

- ◆ Monitoring of changes in land condition is needed at local, national, continental, and worldwide levels of detail. A global view alone can miss important “hotspots” of improvement as well as of degradation, which may result in misleading conclusions by economic and political analysts about the spectrum of appropriate actions needed in different situations.
- ◆ Because food security is of increasing concern as populations rise, the monitoring of status and change in land condition at any specific location should employ a minimum set of economic, nutritional, social, and environmental indicators, both direct and indirect.
- ◆ The need for monitoring must always be assessed with respect to the specific benefits to be gained from using the results expeditiously to inform decision-makers of the results and possible implications.
- ◆ Farm families should be directly involved in monitoring land condition and in establishing and monitoring realistic and relevant indicators of agricultural sustainability in their respective communities.

Research and Development of Suitable Technologies

- More-and more relevant-multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research that involves farmers is needed, with the results effectively disseminated to farmers and other stakeholders.
- Career structures within research and advisory institutions must acknowledge and reward not only relevant research but also effective facilitation of conservation-effective action by farmers.

A Global Convention on Land Conservation

- A global convention on improving land conservation may be an appropriate way of making and putting into practice a strong statement on how to achieve better management and conservation of soil and water resources.
- To this end, those concerned with ISCO should network with individuals and participate in high-level forums that address issues of sustainability, such as the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and other relevant groups.

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