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Latin American Fund for Irrigated Rice – FLAR

A novel public-private partnership for development of Latin American rice sector

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ABSTRACT - FLAR is a result of the concerted effort between a heterogeneous group of public and private Institutions from Latin America and CIAT (International Center for Tropical Agriculture). Its main objective is to meet the needs of farmers and industry for continuous innovations in irrigated rice production making it more competitive, profitable, and efficient. It is a novel regional organization where farmers play a leading role in its conduction. In 2007 fifteen countries from tropical and temperate ecosystems and CIAT are members. Each of them makes a monetary contribution which is related with their country rice production. Rice breeding and transference programs to improve crop management and production efficiency have been the main projects of FLAR until now. It has also evolved as the forum for information and experience exchange about rice across Latin America. Ten tropical varieties are already released by FLAR member Institutions and up to four tropical varieties are on the way in 2007 in different countries. Improved management transference program has been highly successful so far, with thousands of farmers obtaining yields 1 to 3 t/ha higher with the same or lower costs, in the countries already involved in this activities. FLAR is a modern strategic alliance, led by farmer's associations, joining efforts with local and international public institutions, that creates a new type of supra-national organization. Its constitution gives it stability and strength to make real contributions to the irrigated rice sector of Latin America.

KEY WORDS – innovation; public-private; partnerships; research and extension; R&D organizations

Today Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panama, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela are represented by rice sector institutions, and with CIAT they constitute FLAR (Table 1). Member institutions recognized the benefits from collective action, obtained from a participatory low cost organization, for accessing elite germplasm, and other more efficient production technologies.

Table 1. FLAR members by Country.

Country	Institution	Producer	Milling	Seeds	Public
Argentina	INTA – COPRA		X	X	X
	CIAT –				
Bolivia	CONARROZ	X	X		X
Brazil	IRGA	X		X	X
Colombia	FEDEARROZ	X		X	
Costa Rica	SENUMISA		X	X	
Ecuador	PRONACA		X	X	X
Guatemala	ARROZGUA	X	X	X	
Guyana	GRDB				X
Honduras	DICTA – AHPRA	X			X
	CONSEJO MEX.				
Mexico	DEL ARROZ	X	X	X	X
Nicaragua	ANAR	X	X	X	
Panama	FEDAGPA –	X	X	X	X
	OTHERS				
Dominican R.	CLUSTER	X	X	X	X
	ARROCERO				
Uruguay	INIA – ACA	X	X	X	X
Venezuela	FUNDARROZ	X	X	X	X
	CIAT				X

I. INTRODUCTION

FLAR was created in 1995 to support irrigated rice research, that was going to be reduced after priority changes made by the traditional donors of the Rice Program at CIAT. An heterogeneous group of farmers associations, millers, seed companies, and national research institutions from Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela together with CIAT, joined efforts to establish a new model of international cooperation.

The main objective of this new public-private partnership is to deliver innovative technological solutions for irrigated rice to farmers and industry. FLAR is an inclusive model aiming to improve life quality of the Latin American rice sector, making it more competitive, productive, and efficient.

II. PROJECT LINES

At present FLAR works on three Project lines: Breeding, Agronomy, and Economy.

A. Rice Breeding

This Project is the core of FLAR since its foundation, and has two sub-projects, one for tropical and one for temperate ecosystems. Ten varieties have been released during the last two years in the tropics, and new materials bring high expectations for the future. Material for temperate region is advancing and it has already cold tolerance under controlled conditions, and high grain quality. FLAR also has an active Germplasm Bank for its own use and for member breeding programs, with thousands of lines well characterized. It is a joint breeding program where FLAR initiates it with great numbers of triple crosses (800 a year), advance two generations a year screening for the most important characteristics, and then send the materials to the associated

(1) Executive Director of FLAR

institutions in the countries. These local institutions make evaluation, adaptation, and selection to release new improved varieties.

B. Agronomy and Technology Transfer

Since 2000 FLAR works in a project to extend better crop management strategies, focusing on higher yields, cost reduction, and mitigation of environment impact. This goal has been achieved developing farmer to farmer transference programs, where innovative farmers are used to test improved practices and to transfer their experiences to other farmers. This project took gear in 2003 helped by funds provided by Common Fund for Commodities - CFC, and supported by FAO. Results in Brazil and Venezuela were very positive, with yields increases of 1 to 3 t/ha, maintaining or reducing costs. These practices have been extended to thousands of farmers in these two countries where the project started, and are now being spread to the rest of FLAR member countries.

C. Economy and Markets

This is a new Project started in 2007, also funded by CFC. It aims to understand rice price volatility, and markets structure, and with this information to promote tools to reduce price risks, improve farmers marketing capacities, and obtain new financial support for production.

III. ACHIEVEMENTS

Fifteen countries from tropical and temperate Latin America with CIAT are members of FLAR (Fig. 1). FLAR is a consolidated organization that channel funds for rice research from the direct demandants of technology, and where farmers share their responsibility to conduct it.

There are ten varieties already released, and many new ones are in the pipeline.

The technology transfer program partially funded by CFC/FAO obtained sound results, and improved rice production competitiveness of thousands of farmers in the region.

Many scientists and technicians from member institutions have been trained by FLAR, and the Fund became the forum for Latin American rice organizations, to share experiences, information, and to look for common goals.



Fig. 1. Members of FLAR

IV. CHALLENGES

To complete the representation of the Latin American rice sector.

To combine the new varieties with improved crop management, reaching new yield standards, bringing stability, and competitiveness to the farmers and the whole rice sector.

To expand the technology transfer program to all members, with our own resources.

To continue looking forward for new sources of funds for rice research focused in Latin America.