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## RUTA launches its sixth phase in Central America

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# RUTA launches Phase VI in Central America

- The framework for action will be the Central American Agricultural Policy and the Regional Agroenvironmental and Health Strategy (ERAS).
- RUTA remains committed to the objective of reducing poverty and promoting rural and agricultural development in Central America.



RUTA's sixth phase, covering the period 2008-2011, was launched in the framework of the Central American Agricultural Policy and the Regional Agroenvironmental and Health Strategy (ERAS). RUTA, which actively supported the design of both the Agricultural Policy and ERAS, will now focus on supporting their implementation, bearing in mind the priorities identified by the Central American countries.

Seven partner agencies, including two newcomers, will be providing backing for RUTA during this new stage. Although some of the operating and conceptual aspects still need to be ironed out, there is no doubt that RUTA remains committed to reducing poverty and promoting rural development in Central America.

RUTA is thus moving ahead on the course which it began in 1980 pursuant to a decision of the Central American governments, which also

laid down guidelines for the design of Phase VI and will continue to act as the main stakeholders throughout its implementation.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) will continue as partners.

Two new partners have joined RUTA, namely, the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). (See separate note).

In addition, although the World Bank is no longer participating in RUTA's governance system, it will continue carrying out joint actions with RUTA in the countries and the region.

## Major issues of current interest

After a period of careful design, preliminary analyses and strategic planning based on the Central American Agricultural Policy and ERAS, RUTA and its partners decided to focus their action during this new phase on eight priority areas, as follows: agricultural policy, family agriculture, international trade liberalization, institutional modernization, agroenvironmental business, social development, market access and value chains, and project support.

"While RUTA has experience and capacity in all these areas, there are also two specific frameworks that provide focus for its work during this new phase, namely, the Central American Agricultural Policy and the Regional Agroenvironmental and Health Strategy (ERAS)," said Miguel Gómez, Director of RUTA.

“Both the Policy and the Strategy will ensure greater harmony between the actions carried out by the countries and by the international cooperation agencies,” he added.

The Director of RUTA pointed out that small-scale family agriculture will receive special attention in our technical cooperation efforts during Phase VI. The idea is to promote actions aimed at ensuring that small- and medium-scale producers have greater access to financial and business services, improving market access, helping them form associations and strengthening institutions.

On the matter of how to respond to the imminent food crisis, the Director of RUTA said that the situation might actually favor the rural sector of Central America. “Current prices for agricultural products represent an opportunity for thousands of farmers in Central America. However, they will only be able to take advantage of these opportunities when an effort is made to strengthen the entrepreneurial and productive capacities of the agriculture sector,” said Miguel Gómez. He stressed that timely implementation of the regional agendas pertaining to the Central American Agricultural Policy and ERAS would make it possible for farmers to take advantage of these opportunities.

### New mission and vision

In addition to analyzing and adjusting to the present circumstances, RUTA has reflected on its past efforts and decided to take a new approach to some of the issues on its agenda and to rethink its mission and its vision.

RUTA's new vision is to consolidate its role as a center that provides highly specialized technical services and knowledge management for sustainable rural development in Central America, a role for which it is already well known, given its impact and innovative actions.

Governments, social agencies and civil society associations may expect to see greater value added to their actions thanks to the technical advisory services of RUTA. They will find that RUTA will provide a rapid response to their requests, in keeping with the commitment of the entire staff to this principle.

Bearing in mind the mission for which it was established, RUTA will focus on offering technical advisory services, training and technical support, helping clients to develop knowledge, generate information and design specialized technical methodologies. In all these activities, RUTA will encourage dialogue and inter-agency cooperation, consistent with its values as an institution.

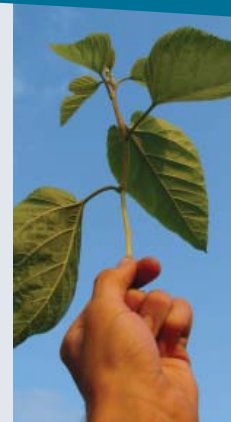
In an effort to meet these new requirements, RUTA is in the process of revamping part of its staff. It has clarified its organizational values, made adjustments in its financial administration and strengthened its planning, follow-up and evaluation system so as to better reflect the demands of its clients.

The new approach will be discussed with the competent authorities in the countries and in its partner agencies, so as to ensure that it reflects the priorities laid down in the Central American Agricultural Policy and in ERAS.



## Spain and Austria join the RUTA initiative

- They will help reinforce work in the areas of trade, environment and organic agriculture.



The Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) are RUTA's new partners in Phase VI. Spain is contributing more than US\$ 2 million, and Austria, around US\$ 800,000.

In addition to providing financial support, Spain and Austria will play a key role in reinforcing RUTA's work in the region in the areas of trade, food security and market access for agricultural products, as well as on environmental issues, especially agroenvironmental business and organic agriculture.

MAEC will help develop RUTA's work programs as a whole, but will pay special attention to certain issues, such as the Central American Agricultural Policy, ERAS, the association agreement between the European Union and Central America, intra-regional trade, trade in foodstuffs, knowledge management and communication.

ADA, for its part, will focus on supporting efforts in the area of agroenvironmental business, especially organic agriculture. It will also help develop knowledge management and communication networks relating to trade liberalization and organic agriculture (see more information on pages 4 and 5).

Both Spain and Austria have a longstanding tradition of cooperation in the region. In both cases, the programs with RUTA are being well coordinated (in terms of harmonization and alignment) with the programs already being carried out by these two agencies in Central America.



# RUTA promotes organic agriculture

- The Organic Production Project was launched with Austrian cooperation resources and the technical support of IICA
- This project supplements the efforts set forth in the Central American Agricultural Policy and the Regional Agroenvironmental and Health Strategy (ERAS)

The central purpose of the Project on Organic Production and Knowledge Management for Rural Development in Central America which was launched this year by RUTA, with the financial support of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) is to boost organic agriculture in the region.

This project, which is also receiving technical support from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), has two components. The first is aimed at promoting organic production in Central America, and the second seeks to strengthen the knowledge-management capacities of key actors concerned with trade liberalization, rural sector reform and organic agriculture.

The idea is that the two components should contribute to the integration and rural development of Central America, strengthening intersectoral dialogue and the participation of different stakeholders in the design and implementation of policies and programs, both for the complementary agendas and for the promotion of rural development.



## Support to small-scale organic producers

In Central America, most organic activity is carried out by small- and medium-scale producers. The Organic Production Project will therefore concentrate on helping small-scale producers to organize for marketing purposes. To this end, it will support the promotion of organic agriculture in the Central American countries.

Around 10,000 farmers in Central America are engaged in the production of organic crops, growing everything from traditional crops such as coffee, bananas and cacao to tropical fruits, vegetables and mini-vegetables, all certified organic.

Organic agriculture in the region has been growing over the last 15 years thanks, in particular, to increased



international demand and the help of nongovernmental organizations and cooperation agencies that have promoted organic farming.

The Organic Production Project will work to encourage the adoption of policies and institutional arrangements for the development of organic production. This will enrich both the Central American Agricultural Policy and the Regional Agroenvironmental and Health Strategy (ERAS). Interventions for the integrated development of organic agriculture should not be carried out in isolation, but should be supplemented with national promotion strategies and policies to create institutional structures and guarantee their sustainability.



## Main advantages of organic agriculture

- Production of healthy foods.
- Respect for and protection of natural ecosystems and genetic diversity.
- Promotion and diversification of biological cycles of agricultural systems as regards microorganisms, flora and fauna, crops and domestic animals.
- Protection and improvement of soil fertility through the use of organic fertilizers (manure, green fertilizer and compost).
- Use of natural and renewable resources found in the region and on the farms.
- Promotion of self-sufficiency and improved nutrition for organic farmers.
- Better conditions for animals, enabling them to manifest their natural behavior.
- Maintenance of genetic diversity of agricultural systems.
- Fair remuneration and a safe and healthy working environment for farmers.
- Prevention of negative effects of crop and stock-raising techniques on the environment and the social fabric.

### More knowledge and communication

Another main objective of the Organic Production Project will be to ensure that all stakeholders in Central America are better informed about the subject.

By strengthening their knowledge management and communication skills and improving the quality of information supplied by key actors, an effort will be made to help the Central American countries minimize risks and extend the benefits of trade liberalization and organic agriculture to the rural population.

To implement this component, a multisectoral e-working community will be established, as well as a work platform and an information gateway.

Thus, civil society will be encouraged to increase its participation in generating policies and strategies for the development of organic agriculture.

### Actions undertaken in Guatemala

The Project on Organic Production and Knowledge Management for Rural Development was launched in Guatemala on 29 April 2008, in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA).

In Guatemala, work will be focused mainly on small-scale organic producers in the departments of Huehuetenango and San Marcos, with the aim of improving their living conditions. In addition, a national strategy for the organic agriculture sector of the country will be developed.

The regional project was also presented to the Central American community at a validation meeting held on 5 and 6 June in Nicaragua. At that meeting, the project was validated with key actors in Central American organic agriculture, including competent authorities, ADA officials, experts and representatives of organic agriculture movements, associations and organizations, at both the national and the regional levels. This validation made it possible to compile new inputs and feedback to improve project implementation.





# IFAD and RUTA support implementation of the Central American Agricultural Policy

- The seven directors or representatives of the international cooperation units of the ministries of agriculture of the isthmus will meet in Costa Rica to define the guidelines and first efforts of the International Cooperation Committee

A meeting will be held in July, under the leadership of the Secretariat of CAC and with support from RUTA/IFAD, to discuss the latest advances of the Central American Agricultural Policy and formulate guidelines for the establishment of the International Cooperation Committee that will support implementation of the Policy.

The meeting will be attended by the seven directors or persons in charge of the international cooperation units of the ministries of agriculture of the region, officials of the Secretariat of the Central American Agricultural Council (S-CAC), and staff of RUTA/IFAD.

According to Carmen Eugenia Morales, IFAD Liaison at RUTA, the idea is to lay the groundwork for setting up the International Cooperation Committee envisaged in the Central American Agricultural Policy.

RUTA and IFAD have been assisting with the design and implementation of the Central American Agricultural Policy, as well as specific steps such as the establishment of the Committee, in the framework of the institutional strengthening measures needed in order for this regional initiative to succeed, added Carmen Eugenia Morales.

At the meeting, Róger Guillén, Executive Secretary of CAD, will speak on the role of international cooperation in the Central American Agricultural Policy. Regional cooperation mechanisms for the agriculture sector will also be discussed.

The International Cooperation Committee will be made up of representatives of the ministries of agriculture and international technical and financial cooperation agencies that support the agriculture sector in the region, as mentioned in the report on the Central American Agricultural Policy 2008-2017.

This Committee will be responsible for promoting the participation of international cooperation

agencies in actions, programs and regional projects pertaining to the implementation of the Agricultural Policy.

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*IFAD is supporting the sixth phase of RUTA with a contribution of US\$ 1 million. These resources will be devoted, in particular, to furthering implementation of the Central American Agricultural Policy, especially in the area of small-scale agriculture, and to improving the IFAD project portfolio in Central America.*





# RUTA gives priority to rural women and value chains

- Ensuring that women receive greater benefits in agricultural value chains will be the main objective of the new Social Development Area created by RUTA with the support of Spain, IFAD and GTZ.

Around three million rural women in Central America belong to the economically active population (EAP), especially in agricultural activities.

This group of women will be the priority beneficiaries of the new Social Development Area set up by RUTA to promote the participation of rural women and ensure that they obtain greater benefits from agricultural value chains. The Spanish cooperation agency, IFAD and GTZ are supporting RUTA's efforts in this regard.

"We have begun by gathering information throughout Central America on the activities of public and private institutions and cooperation agencies aimed at promoting economic progress and entrepreneurial efforts of rural women in the context of value chains," explained Ana Lucía Moreno, Social Development Specialist at RUTA. She added that the idea is to find better tools for gender mainstreaming in value chains and to increase coverage by influencing programs concerned with value chains that have not yet incorporated the gender approach.

Another concrete step will be the first meeting for the exchange and harmonization of initiatives to support economic progress of rural women in the context of value chains, to



*The main objective of RUTA's Social Development Area is to strengthen the human and social capital available in rural territories, in keeping with principles of equity and participation.*

be held on 10 and 11 July in Costa Rica. This meeting, which is being organized by RUTA, will be attended by representatives of governmental and nongovernmental institutions, cooperation agencies and regional programs that have promoted actions in this field. The purpose is to promote exchanges, dissemination and utilization of the advances achieved through studies, methodologies and practices, as well as to generate new

means for including women in value chains.

"We have noticed that women are the weakest links in value chains or that they are simply absent from them, and this has to change," stressed the RUTA specialist. She pointed out that this calls for training human resources with a gender approach, encouraging business organizations to adopt gender mainstreaming and supporting rural enterprises run by women. These will be priority objectives of RUTA's Social Development Area.

## Other actions

As part of its work plan, the Social Development Area of RUTA will set up networks and partnerships with key actors. It recently supported the participation of women entrepreneurs in IFAD projects at the Central American Meeting of Female Entrepreneurs, organized by the Arias Foundation. A partnership will be set up with GTZ and CATIE to incorporate the gender approach in the methodology for training in value chains.

In addition to women, the Social Development Area will give priority to young people and indigenous peoples, gradually covering many different aspects.



# CATIE and RUTA support agroenvironmental business as part of ERAS



- The two organizations signed an agreement to work together in the areas of rural development, agriculture, environment and natural resources.
- RUTA and CATIE also helped formulate the action line on Agroenvironmental Business in the context of the Regional Agroenvironmental and Health Strategy (ERAS) adopted recently by the Central American presidents.



With the recent signing of a framework cooperation agreement, RUTA and the Tropical Agronomic Research and Training Center (CATIE) formalized what had already been a fruitful institutional relationship over the last few years. The agreement will help promote joint efforts in the area of rural development, agriculture, environment and natural resources.

It also provides for joint actions in other specific areas relating to food and nutritional security, micro- small- and medium-scale rural enterprises, and agricultural and sustainable rural development for the Central American region.

The work will be carried out in line with policies, strategies and programs approved and ratified by regional and national authorities, including the Central American Agricultural Policy, the Regional Agroenvironmental and Health Strategy (ERAS) and the guidelines for the Regional Strategy on Climate Change, as stipulated in the agreement.

### Agroenvironmental business in the context of ERAS

The strategic partnership between RUTA and CATIE is not a new one, given that the two entities were already coordinating efforts in connection with the thematic area on agroenvironmental business in the context of the Regional Agroenvironmental and Health Strategy (ERAS).

This Strategy was adopted at the Third Inter-ministerial Meeting of

### Strategic areas of ERAS

1. Sustainable land management
2. Climate change and climate variability
3. Biodiversity
4. Agroenvironmental business
5. Healthy spaces and lifestyles

### Main themes of the agroenvironmental business area

- Promotion of small- and medium-scale enterprises engaged in production with ecological or environmental components
- Validation and management of knowledge on innovative mechanisms for payment for environmental services, among other aspects.

Ministers of Agriculture, Environment and Health of Central America, held in Panama in April 2008. It was ratified at the Presidential Summit on Climate Change and the Environment held in Honduras on 28 May 2008.

To promote agroenvironmental business, ERAS includes the promotion of small- and medium-scale enterprises engaged in production that have ecological or environmental components. It also envisages the validation and management of knowledge on innovative mechanisms for payment for environmental services, among other areas of work.

# RUTA supports the Central American Summit on Climate Change and the Environment

- The Presidents of Central America ratified guidelines for the Regional Strategy on Climate Change, which should be ready within a year.
- The basic document, drawn up with technical and financial support from RUTA, was approved in April by the Ministers of Agriculture, Environment and Health.

The Central American presidents ratified the guidelines for the Regional Strategy on Climate Change, handing down a mandate to develop the strategy within one year.

The ratification took place on 28 May 2008 at Presidential Summit on Climate Change and the Environment held in San Pedro Sula, Honduras.



## With the support of RUTA

The guidelines for the Regional Strategy on Climate Change were drawn up by a technical committee comprised of a group of experts and led by the Secretariat of the Central American Committee on Environment and Development (CCAD). The guidelines were approved by the Council of Ministers of CCAD and subsequently ratified by the Presidents.

RUTA contributed to the process by providing technical and financial support, as it has done with other climate change initiatives, in particular the Central American Agricultural Policy 2008-2017 and the Regional Agroenvironmental and Health Strategy (ERAS). The two proposals include environmental management as a crosscutting theme relating to socioenvironmental management in the agricultural sector.

The guidelines for the Regional Strategy on Climate Change are quite specific and are divided into five programmatic areas: vulnerability and

adaptation; mitigation; institutional development and capacity-building; education, awareness raising and sensitization; and international management to ensure the success of the strategy.

In ratifying these guidelines, the Central American presidents set a six-month deadline for drawing up a plan of action for formulating the Strategy, which must be ready within one year. RUTA will continue supporting CCAD and CAC throughout the process, along with other strategic partners. The idea is that, within this context, they will continue seeking solutions to problems that might threaten competitiveness in the agricultural sector and other sectors that are key to sustainable development in Central America, such as energy, health, biodiversity and drinking water.

## The 5 programmatic areas of the Regional Strategy on Climate Change

- Vulnerability and adaptation
- Mitigation
- Institutional development and capacity building
- Education, awareness raising and sensitization
- International management

MEETINGS

# IDB and RUTA promote discussions on support for the agricultural sector and public spending on agriculture in Central America



The support provided to the agricultural sector and public spending on agriculture in Central America and certain Latin American countries were discussed at the regional workshop on public spending in the agricultural sector in Central America: how to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. The event, organized by RUTA and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), was held in February 2008 in Guatemala City.

“This regional workshop was designed for the purpose of conducting an in-depth coordinated analysis of the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending in the agricultural sector in Central America and identifying possible policies and tools to support

the sector,” explained Miguel Gómez, Director of RUTA.

The event was inaugurated by Raúl Robles, Minister of Agriculture of Guatemala. Miguel Gómez, Director of RUTA, and Héctor Malarín, of IDB, welcomed the participants on behalf of the organizing institutions.

The Directors of Agricultural Policy of Nicaragua, Panama and Guatemala described the situation in their countries at a panel discussion on the current structure of support for agriculture in Central America. Another panel discussed experiences with the reform of public spending on agriculture in countries such as Paraguay, Dominican Republic and

Mexico. A review was also made of European trends in public spending on agriculture and a discussion was held on how to protect public spending on agriculture from extreme shocks.



# The World Bank presents the World Development Report 2008 in Costa Rica



The World Bank presented the World Development Report 2008 at a technical forum on Agriculture for Development. The event was held at IICA Headquarters in San José, Costa Rica, on 12 March 2008.

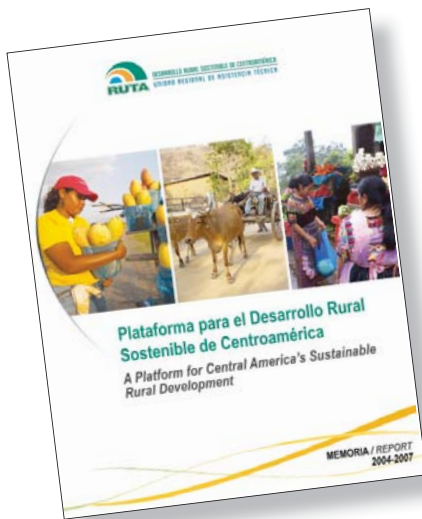
This is the thirtieth edition of the Report. The general message is that agriculture is a fundamental tool for development that is key to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halving by 2015 the proportion of persons suffering from hunger and living in extreme poverty.

Javier Flores Galarza, Minister of Agriculture of Costa Rica, opened the meeting, and Chelston Brathwaite, Director General of IICA, and Willem Janssen, Senior Agricultural Specialist for Latin America and the Caribbean of the World Bank, welcomed

participants. The report was presented by Allain de Janvry, Codirector of the Report and professor at the University of California at Berkeley. James French, Director of the Directorate of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management of IICA, served as moderators, and comments on the Report were made by Julio Paz Cafferata, Director of Policies and Trade at IICA, Byron Miranda, IICA Representative in Costa Rica, and Miguel Gómez, Director of RUTA.

## PUBLICATIONS

# Report on RUTA V: The report of four years of hard work



Report on RUTA V: The report of four years of hard work

RUTA began this year with the presentation of its report on the work done from 2004-2007 in a bilingual edition that describes the fruit of hard technical work. The report on Phase V, entitled RUTA: A Platform for Central America's Sustainable Rural Development, is a 100-page publication that describes the activities, partnerships and initiatives promoted by RUTA and its partners in the seven Central American countries.

The complete report may be found at [www.ruta.org](http://www.ruta.org).

# A contribution to Central America's preparations for CAFTA-DR

In December 2007, RUTA and the Latin American Trade Network (LATN) published the book entitled *Las agendas complementarias al CAFTA-DR en Centroamérica*. This publication summarizes the findings of a research study on the "complementary agendas" of the Central American countries in preparation for the entry into force of CAFTA-DR. The study was conducted with a view to determining the degree of preparedness of the countries for this development. The study, sponsored by the Latin American Trade Network (LATN), was conducted in 2005 and updated in 2006 and 2007. In 2007, RUTA became interested in supplementing and publishing these research studies so as to help the countries prepare for implementation



of the Treaty. The 345-page book has 11 chapters.

This publication may be found at [www.ruta.org](http://www.ruta.org).



# Agricultural Policies within reach of the rural sector

In June 2008, RUTA, the Regional Rural Dialogue Program (DRR) and the Secretariat of the Central American Agricultural Council (CAC) prepared this summary of the Central American Agricultural Policy. This 24-page booklet explains in simple terms the scope, benefits, objectives, lines of work, priority areas, crosscutting themes and concrete measures of the Agricultural Policy. This summary was adapted from the book entitled *Política Agrícola Centroamericana 2008-2017*, published in 2007 by the Central American Agricultural Council (CAC).

This publication may be found at [www.ruta.org](http://www.ruta.org).

# RUTA: A partner for promising and complex times



Miguel Gómez



Central America is busier than ever addressing new and old challenges. Poverty reduction and rural development are still some of the most important challenges that need to be addressed in order to guarantee better quality of life to the inhabitants of the isthmus.

But the international situation has also raised some formidable new issues, such as rising food prices,

constantly increasing oil prices, and the aggravation of the problem of climate change.

While the Central American countries are struggling to overcome structural problems with appropriate policies and programs, they must also focus their efforts on dealing with the energy crisis, climate change and food shortages. In this context, RUTA plays a role as a high-level technical advisor. Having received a vote of confidence for a new phase in its work from the seven Central American governments and our seven partner agencies, RUTA is prepared to respond with technical excellence, careful planning, timely responses and diligent work.

RUTA is not new to this struggle. The program was started in 1980, and in over 25 years of work, we have acquired and facilitated knowledge, experience, partnerships and

technically sound programs that can be used to advantage on behalf of the Central American countries, especially the rural population. We offer a strong and solid platform for the promotion of liaisons between governments, cooperation agencies, civil society organizations, academic institutions and the entrepreneurial sector.

Within and outside of Central America, work is being done by knowledgeable actors, with technical and financial resources, working networks and above all a strong desire to collaborate. RUTA creates synergies with all of these in order to promote rural development in Central America. We will provide the necessary platform for the region, supporting the responses and changes required. We will, above all, be an unflinching partner in these times of great challenges.

## In Touch with RUTA

Quarterly newsletter of the Director of the Regional Unit for Technical Assistance – RUTA  
Newsletter No. 9 – January-March 2008  
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### What is RUTA

RUTA is a joint initiative that was launched in 1980 by the Central American governments and a group of cooperation agencies to promote rural and agricultural development in Central America. At present, the governments of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama are participating in RUTA, along with seven partner agencies that have decided to join this Project, namely, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, and the Austrian Cooperation Agency (ADA).



RUTA seeks to contribute to sustainable rural growth and reduce poverty in Central America by developing national and regional capacities. RUTA works in conjunction with the seven ministries of agriculture and livestock of the isthmus and with the technical and financial support of its partner agencies. In fulfilling its role, RUTA serves as a processor and transmitter of information, acting among other things as a retailer for the dissemination of methodologies developed by its partners, a facilitator of dialogue, a leader on important regional issues and a trainer.