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A proposal for collaboration

## IICA's contribution to the efforts to combat coffee rust in Central America

In response to the severity and visibility of the crises caused by coffee rust (*Hemileia vastatrix*) and falling coffee prices in Central America, a large number of stakeholders from both the private and public sectors have taken steps to assess the situation, identify the most effective responses, coordinate immediate actions, and plan for medium- and long-term actions.

## Development of a regional plan

A regional action plan, prepared by the Regional Cooperative Program for the Technological Development and Modernization of Coffee Production (PROMECAFE) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), which operates the PROMECAFE secretariat, was approved in March 2013 by all the national coffee institutes that comprise PROMECAFE, and then by the seven ministers of agriculture of Central America and the Dominican Republic (the members of the Central American Agricultural Council-CAC).<sup>1</sup> This plan served as the basis for the First International Coffee Rust Summit, held in April of this year. The plan has the following components:

1. Development of institutional and local capacities to manage and combat the coffee rust epidemic.
2. Integrated coffee rust management over the medium term.
3. Plant breeding research to improve or develop resistant varieties with good coffee cup quality.
4. Large-scale rehabilitation and/or renovation of old and unproductive coffee plantations.
5. A regional strategy for outreach to support the promotion of the Integrated Program for the Combat of Rust and the Recovery of Coffee Production Capacity and the Short Term Action Plan 2013.
6. A program to support vulnerable populations such as small farmers and laborers, as well as their families through food security and nutrition programs, generation of alternative employment opportunities, and social compensation measures.

In the short term, large-scale fungicide application programs are the primary tool to



suppress new outbreaks of rust. In the medium and long term, however, merely spraying is not viable as a solution to this crisis. A combination of plantation renewals, better agronomic management, improved fertilization practices, monitoring and appropriately timed fungicide applications are required. As a long-term strategy, coffee will have to be replaced in certain areas (especially lower elevations) with equally or more agronomically viable crops that are more resilient to climate change and will contribute to improved livelihoods. For this to be effective, institutional strengthening and enhanced investment in research and capacity development are urgently needed.

## Activities proposed by IICA

IICA and PROMECAFE are working with national and international partners to coordinate and facilitate communication and actions among all interested parties. Whenever possible, donors must work through existing institutions and

1. [http://www.promecafe.org/portal/images/stories/Plan\\_de\\_Accin\\_Medidas\\_Inmediatas\\_para\\_el\\_combate\\_de\\_la\\_Roya\\_de\\_Caf\\_2013.pdf](http://www.promecafe.org/portal/images/stories/Plan_de_Accin_Medidas_Inmediatas_para_el_combate_de_la_Roya_de_Caf_2013.pdf)

regional mechanisms, to strengthen and align resources more effectively. It is important not to undermine existing institutional arrangements, but to assist and empower them to meet the challenge posed by the disease and ensure sustainability over time.

Under the framework of the regional action plan, IICA has identified a variety of possible engagements with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). IICA will focus on the following initiatives that are seen as important for medium- to long-term sustainability to generate further discussion. Each will require significant development regarding funding levels, target countries, respective responsibilities, etc.

1. **Strengthening the Regional Coffee Breeding Program:** An assessment of available genetic material and the region's capacity to produce certified rust tolerant seeds is currently being carried out by PROMECAFE and the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE). Based on this assessment, IICA will support the countries' efforts to make strategic investments in the ongoing Regional Coffee Breeding Program carried out by CATIE with the support of the Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) in coordination with the national coffee research institutes and the World Coffee Research (WCR) program.
2. **Institutional Capacity Building:** IICA will strengthen institutional capacities to develop technologies, facilitate area-

based development, and enhance outreach and monitoring. Innovative extension services based on the use of information and communication technologies will be implemented to ensure that the innovations reach and benefit the most vulnerable smallholders.

3. **Scaling Up Production of Coffee Rust Resistant Materials:** With additional funding, IICA will support the scaling up of the production of seedlings of coffee rust resistant and tolerant materials with characteristics required by the market. This should include:
  - a. Harmonizing the production of certified planting material with coffee rust resistance/tolerance and other diseases/pests, and with good coffee cup.
  - b. Strengthening capacity for large-scale production of resistant/tolerant varieties in tissue culture labs, both private ones and those at the national coffee research institutes, agricultural institutes, and universities.
  - c. Strengthening national capacities for propagation of coffee varieties with desirable characteristics, using conventional methods like seed banks, nurseries, etc.
4. **Providing Livelihood Alternatives in Areas Where Coffee is not Economically or Environmentally Viable:** The coffee rust outbreak provides an opportunity to diversify



livelihoods and transition coffee farmers living in areas where anticipated climatic changes have already made, or will make, the growing of quality coffee impossible. In coordination with other national and international actors, IICA will carry out country-specific crop diversification schemes with emphasis on fruit trees, cocoa, certain vegetables, and dairy production based on agroforestry systems. IICA will ensure that the new cropping systems are climate smart, economically viable, and environmentally desirable systems.

5. **Strengthening PROMECAFE:** IICA will continue to provide technical and operational assistance to PROMECAFE to improve delivery of their goals and mission in the region. IICA will also encourage other nations to join and thus strengthen the regional platform, focusing on approved plans to address the coffee rust crisis and related actions to increase collaboration, and promote better farming practices.
6. **Supporting Country-Specific Actions:** IICA will capitalize on its physical presence in every country in the region to support specific requests for collaboration in countries that lack institutional capacity or structure. The Institute will focus not only on the Feed the Future countries, but also on El Salvador and Nicaragua, which have particular needs for assistance. IICA will also assist countries that are not yet members of PROMECAFE, such as Haiti,

which has requested assistance to revitalize its coffee sector.

7. **Improving Public Policy for the Coffee Sector:** Working with the private sector and academic institutions, as well as with the CAC and the public sector in each country, IICA will facilitate the design of improved public policies for the coffee sector. This will begin with an analysis of current policies and development of improvements that will facilitate the growth and success of the sector, enabling coffee to continue to play a critical role in the national economies. Harmonization of policies horizontally across the region will also be facilitated.
8. **Contracting of a Communications/Information Manager:** This person would be contracted for an initial short-term period to support the Regional Emergency Response Coordinator with the development and maintenance of an online database and inventory of activities, funding, and the parties involved in dealing with the coffee rust outbreak. The person will construct the system, compile available information, and communicate with partners to fill information gaps, ensuring that the platform contains the most accurate and up-to-date information, thus enabling full coordination and the maximization of available resources, both human and financial. Based on the success achieved, the position may then be determined to be long-term.

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