

The Need for Alternatives

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Honorable Ministers and Secretaries
Distinguished Guests and Colleagues
Faculty of Luiz de Queiroz College
Conference Participants
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me as Secretary of Agriculture to participate in the inauguration of this Second International Conference on Kyusei Nature Farming along with my colleague Dr. Alaor Caffé Alves, our Secretary of Environment.

This is most appropriate because agriculture and the environment are so closely interrelated and interdependent. Governor Fleury Filho of ten reminds us that they must be dealt with collectively if we are to achieve our goals of resource conservation, environmental protection, and sustainable development. Unfortunately, we, as well as others, have often attempted to address issues and problems of agriculture and the environment separately which has been both costly and counter-productive to say the least.

Our staff has followed the activities of the Mokichi Okada Foundation with great interest in their efforts to develop Kyusei Nature Farming as an economically-viable and environmentally-sound agricultural production system. In fact, our office has been conducting cooperative research with the Mokichi Okada Foundation at the Instituto Agronomico de Campinas and the Instituto Biologico, and in our rural extension program at Rio Claro. We have also developed a very successful cooperative program with the Foundation that has provided meals for public school students in the municipality of Rio Claro.

If there is any doubt about the need to search for new alternatives to conventional agriculture, one must only consider what has happened in the Marilia, Tup, Oswaldo Cruz, Lucelia and Dracena areas. During the 1940's and 1950's when coffee was grown as the main commodity cash crop these were very wealthy areas. Today, after four and five decades of exploitive farming practices and improper land use, soil erosion has devastated the landscape, soil fertility has diminished, crop production has drastically declined and the region is referred to as "the Hunger Corridor." This is why we are so keen on acquiring new technologies and methods that will allow us to regenerate and restore the productivity of our degraded farmlands, to produce healthy and nutritious food, to conserve our soil and water resources, and to preserve and protect the environment for future generations. Thus, we are delighted that the Second International Conference on Kyusei Nature Farming is being held in Brazil, and especially in our Luiz de Queiroz College of Agriculture. This is indeed a unique opportunity for us to learn firsthand what new technologies might help us to achieve these goals.

I would like to thank the Organizing Committee for developing such an excellent program, and to encourage the participants to contribute their very best ideas, perspectives and strategies for enhancing the sustainability of agriculture throughout this region. I look forward to receiving the recommendations of your working groups.

Thank you for your participation in this Conference.