Education and Training

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Background

The Working Group on Education and Training to enhance the development of more productive and sustainable natural farming systems first considered the problems and constraints associated with the agricultural production and marketing systems throughout Latin and South America. These include (a) socioeconomic realities such as inequities in the distribution of land and economic resources, and land tenure and ownership, (b) extreme poverty among the small-scale, subsistence farmers, (c) severe degradation of soil and water resources from improper fanning practices, (d) perpetuation of the Minifundio (small marginal farms) and Latifundio (1arge commercial farms producing export crops) systems which have restricted small-scale, subsistence farmers to marginal, unproductive lands that are highly prone to degradative processes such as erosion, desertification, and environmental pollution, (e) unsatisfactory and exploitive marketing conditions for small-scale farmers, (f) the wide cultural diversity of people throughout the Latin and South American region, and (g) the lack of ecological consciousness among all sectors of our society. Other problems cited by the working group were the lack of integrated decision-making among agencies (public and private) on development and environmental policies; the lack of fanner's participation in the decision-making process; and the lack of producer/consumer relationships to foster direct marketing of produce.

Recommendations

In view of the aforementioned problems and constraints to agricultural reforms in Latin America and South America, the Working Group on Education and Training has recommended the following actions:

1) Establish community economic development plans that would emphasize the importance of increasing the productivity, stability, and sustainability of small-scale, natural fanning systems.
2) Emphasize the need for participatory research involving farmers, government agencies, universities, PVO's and NGO's, to develop and adopt new, appropriate, and affordable technologies for natural farming systems that consider local cultures and conditions.
3) Establish sociopolitical linkages and support for agricultural reforms that would strengthen the concept of nature fanning for production of safe, nutritious food while protecting the natural resource base and preserving the environment.
4) Cooperate with the Ministry of Education in participating countries to introduce the concept of alternative agriculture, agroecology, and natural farming systems into the curricula of high schools and agricultural universities. The attributes of non-chemical, natural farming systems compared with chemical-based, conventional agriculture should be emphasized including food safety and quality, human and animal health, and environmental quality.
5) Establish farmer's associations to engage in common, on-farm experiments that would determine the effectiveness of the new, non-chemical technologies, including effective microorganisms (EM).
6) Establish rural/urban linkages to foster better communication and understanding among small-scale fanners and the urban community. This would help to develop direct marketing strategies, including agricultural cooperatives and farmer's markets; to improve the environment and utilization of municipal wastes as biofertilizers and soil conditioners, possibly through composting; and to create a better awareness of the needs and problems of small-scale farmers.