Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) continued to work towards achieving sustainable global food security by raising nutrition levels and living standards, improving agricultural productivity and advancing the condition of rural populations.

The FAO Conference, the agency’s governing body, held its thirty-first session (Rome, Italy, 2-13 November). It approved a budget of $651.8 million for 2002-2003—an increase of $1.8 million over the previous biennium. The Conference approved an International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture intended to ensure access to plant genetic diversity while considering the needs of farmers and plant breeders. It adopted a new FAO Plan of Action on Gender and Development (2002-2007) with four priorities: food and nutrition, natural resources, agricultural support systems, and agricultural and rural development policy and planning.

The FAO Council, in November, decided that the World Food Summit: five years later, originally planned as part of the Conference, would instead take place in Rome in June 2002.

In March, FAO announced that more than 110 countries had adopted a new plan of action against illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. The voluntary agreement was aimed at eliminating those practices, which were blamed for overfishing of several high-value fish stocks.

In 2001, FAO membership rose to 183 countries, plus the European Community.

World food situation

World cereal output in 2001 was estimated at 1,880 million tonnes (including rice in milled equivalent), 22 million tonnes, or 1.2 per cent, above the previous year’s level, representing the first increase since 1996. World coarse grain production rose by around 3 per cent compared to 2000, despite declines in North America. World wheat production reached 582 million tonnes, about the same as in 2000. World rice output was estimated at 591 million tonnes (395 million tonnes in milled equivalent), 7 million tonnes less than in 2000. Much of that contraction concentrated in China. With overall cereal utilization exceeding world production for the second year in a row, world cereal reserves by the close of the 2001/02 season were expected to decline sharply. World cereal stocks were forecast to reach 587 million tonnes by the end of 2002, down 8 per cent from the previous season’s level.

FAO’s Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS), in cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP), fielded crop and food-supply assessment missions to affected countries. The GIEWS Workstation, an integrated information system, maintained a reference database for global crop monitoring and early warning.

Activities

FAO’s Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division responded to requests for emergency assistance in the agricultural, livestock, fisheries and forestry sectors submitted by developing countries affected by natural or human-induced calamities. The value of FAO’s emergency assistance reached $335 million in 2000-2001, including emergency relief and early rehabilitation programmes around the globe and the agricultural component of the oil-for-food programme in Iraq, FAO’s largest emergency and rehabilitation programme.

Through its field programmes, FAO provided technical advice and support in all areas of food and agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development. In 2001, $201 million was spent on 1,428 field projects. FAO’s Investment Centre assisted developing and transition countries to identify and assess investment opportunities, and formulated 90 agricultural and rural development projects for some $3.7 billion. The Special Programme for Food Security continued to assist developing countries, particularly through its South-South Cooperation initiative, to improve national and household food security on an economically and environmentally sustainable basis.

In 2001, FAO participated in activities related to the conservation and use of plant biological diversity, crop management and diversification, seed production and improvement, crop protection, agricultural engineering, prevention of food losses, and food and agricultural industries. It developed programmes and strategies for livestock production and health, and supported improved...
smallholder, specialized and mixed livestock farming through better resource utilization, improved processing and commercialization, and better control of animal diseases. Through its Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases, FAO promoted cooperation among countries on early warning, control of and research on the desert locust, the prevention and control of significant transboundary diseases, and the global eradication of rinderpest by 2010.

The FAO Forestry Department continued its work in forest resource management, forest policy and planning, and forest products. At its fifteenth session in March, the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) was informed about the main findings of the Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2000, according to which the total estimated global forest area in 2000 was nearly 3.9 billion hectares (95 percent natural forest and 5 percent plantations). COFO made a number of recommendations, in particular that the global FRA programme continue to be a priority for the Forestry Department.

FAO promoted long-term sustainable development and utilization of the world’s fisheries and aquaculture. Its priorities included the implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, with particular attention to the problem of excess fishing capacity, strengthening of regional fisheries bodies, and the promotion of an increased contribution of responsible fisheries and aquaculture to world food supplies and food security.

In 2001, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, responsible for implementing the joint FAO/World Health Organization Food Standards Programme, agreed on the first global principles for the safety assessment of genetically modified foods, on maximum levels of certain food toxins and on guidelines for organic livestock production. FAO continued to provide member countries with information and technical assistance in the formulation and implementation of national food policies and nutrition programmes.

FAO continued to implement the Plan of Action of the 1996 World Food Summit [YUN 1996, p. 1129]. In addition, it engaged in activities to enhance the capacity of developing countries to analyse the implications of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade agreements [YUN 1994, p. 1474] in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and to take advantage of new trading opportunities.

FAO activities to achieve more productive and efficient use of the Earth’s natural resources to meet current and future food and agricultural needs in a sustainable manner concentrated on six areas: natural resources assessment and planning; farming systems development; plant nutrition development and management; water development, management and conservation; soil management, conservation and reclamation; and sustaining the potential of natural resources.

FAO continued to provide technical assistance in plant breeding and the safe movement of germ plasm and associated systems. Its Global Strategy for the Management of Farm Animal Genetic Resources supported projects in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. FAO assisted members to comply with the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights as it related to plant varieties, animal breeds, related technology and germ plasm.

FAO continued to function as an information centre, collecting, analysing, interpreting and disseminating information through various media. The World Agricultural Information Centre provided immediate access to FAO’s bibliographical information documents and multimedia resources through the Internet and on CD-ROM.

Secretariat

As at 31 December 2001, FAO staff numbered 3,542, of whom 1,499 were in the Professional or higher categories and 2,043 in the General Service category.

Budget

The regular programme budget for the 2000-2001 biennium was $650 million.

NOTE: For further information, see The State of Food and Agriculture 2001.

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FAO also maintained liaison offices in Brussels, Geneva, Washington, D.C., and Yokohama, Japan; regional offices in Accra, Ghana; Bangkok, Thailand; Cairo, Egypt; and Santiago, Chile; and subregional offices in Apia, Samoa; Bridgetown, Barbados; Budapest, Hungary; Harare, Zimbabwe; and Tunis, Tunisia.