

*IFAP Presidency Letter**Number 3 – April 2007***“Bioenergy is good news for farmers and rural communities”**

Dear colleagues,

Bioenergy is receiving more and more attention in national and international organisations. It is a significant new market opportunity for farmers, and so farmers' organisations must ensure that the benefits reach their members. We cannot miss the boat. Some countries have already started to put in place sound strategies and systems, like the USA and the European Community. Others will follow, and so this is the right time for farmers' organisations to lobby their governments to make sure that a sound strategy is put in place for the overall development of rural areas - and for the reduction of poverty, including the option of producing bioenergy.

In this debate, we too often hear that the production of bioenergy raises the cost of food for poor people. Well in fact most of the poor people live in rural areas and the majority of them are farmers. For too many years, the price of food has been too low and has considerably hurt farmers all over the world causing poverty, in particular in developing countries. If the development of bioenergy helps farmers to receive better prices for their products, then this will improve the livelihoods of their families and rural communities. There may well be a negative impact of rising food prices on urban poor people, but this is an issue that must be addressed by governments and not fall on farmers.

The increased demand for farm crops to produce biofuels has strengthened prices; it has reduced surpluses, and it has reduced dumping of those surpluses in third markets at prices below production costs. Higher farm prices also give a chance to small-scale farmers in developing countries to be more competitive in their local markets, and on export markets. It is an opportunity to achieve profitability and an opportunity to revive rural communities.

Improving incomes in rural areas is the best way to fight poverty. Farmers can produce food, fibre or bioenergy, depending on what the market demands. What they care about is improving their incomes to provide a good living for their families and rural communities. It is not the responsibility of farmers to manage the social consequences of competing uses for their products. They are obviously concerned as individual citizens of their country, but it is the responsibility of governments to take measures to help poor people so that they can afford to buy food. The responsibility of farmers is to produce high quality crops, with good farming practices that respect the environment. For too long, there has been an urban bias in government which favoured a 'cheap food' policy. Today, governments need to take a broader view.



Bioenergy production by family farmers is not a threat to food production. It is an additional market for farm products. Bioenergy production will not replace food production. However, it will help to balance market concentration, improve economic activity and reduce poverty in rural areas. So let us make sure that governments put their energy into exploiting all opportunities for rural development.

Jack Wilkinson
President of IFAP