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Organización de Información de Mercados de las Américas (OIMA)  
Market Information Organization of the Americas (MIOA)

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(MIOA)

## Progress Report to the Executive Committee of IICA

IICA Headquarters  
July, 2017



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## Introduction

The Market Information Organization of the Americas (MIOA) is a cooperation network comprised of Agricultural Marketing Information Systems (MIS) in 33 countries, whose main functions or objectives are to collect, process and disseminate information on markets and agricultural products. These institutions are directly involved in generating information on agricultural markets in their own countries, either by disseminating the prices of agricultural products, or by conducting market analysis and projections, or both.

The primary purpose of the MIOA is to promote market transparency through the timely and systematic exchange of information. As part of this process, the MIOA sets standards and issues recommendations on the use of common terminologies and methodologies; facilitates technical assistance among its members; and promotes links with international organizations to secure technical cooperation.

The MIOA does not seek to intervene in the natural processes unfolding in each country; rather, its efforts are aimed at promoting the use of information as a valid instrument for agricultural management. Its strategy for addressing this challenge focuses on the search for mechanisms of support and cooperation to enable all member institutions to strengthen their systems, acquire a common language, offer and receive assistance from other experiences and expand their capacity to generate, process and, especially, disseminate information to the agricultural agents in their own countries and in the Americas in general.

The Executive Committee is the MIOA's executive organ. It is responsible for making proposals regarding the organization's general orientation and program of work, analyzing special problems, helping to implement the work plan and setting the organization's priorities. In April 2004, the MIOA designated IICA as its Technical Secretariat, with responsibility for implementing projects, providing technical advice, receiving and translating documents, preparing reports, following up on agreements reached at the different meetings and administering the organization's funds, in accordance with the instructions of the Executive Committee.

## Activities implemented by the MIOA

Since August 2016, the date on which the last MIOA report was submitted to the Executive Committee of IICA, the following activities have been carried out:



Organización de Información de Mercados de las Américas (OIMA)  
Market Information Organization of the Americas (MIOA)

OIMA/MIOA

- Regular Meeting in Guatemala

The XV Regular Meeting of MIOA was held in the city of Antigua, Guatemala in October 2016, with delegates from 25 countries. The agenda of the Meeting included the presentation of the MIOA 2016-2018 Strategic Plan, which sets out the course to be followed by the organization during that two-year period, and the presentation of a document on Market Information Systems (<http://repositorio.iica.int/bitstream/11324/3133/2/BVE17079124i.pdf>), published in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese, which provides a reference point for the MIS of the MIOA's member countries, universities and the general public. The delegates also discussed the efforts carried out by their respective MIS to develop technologies for the dissemination of agricultural market prices through text messages and applications for smartphones.

During the meeting, the delegates of the United States, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Argentina were elected to serve as Regional Representatives on the current MIOA Executive Committee, for a two-year period. The delegates also agreed to accept Argentina's offer to host the MIOA's next Regular Meeting in October 2017.

- Regional Meeting in the Caribbean

In November 2016, the Caribbean Regional Meeting of the MIOA took place in St. Lucia, attended by representatives of 13 countries of the region. The MIOA Chairman, Mr. Terry Long, together with MIOA Delegates from the Caribbean, policy advisers from the participating countries, John King, IICA Representative in St. Lucia, James French and Helena Ramírez acting as Technical Secretariat, and observers from the University of the West Indies and CARICOM, met in St. Lucia to discuss issues such as the importance of market intelligence and infrastructure for agricultural trade, technological tools, current challenges and the development of an institutional framework for the MIS in the region.

The participating countries recognized that part of the improvement process implies defining the standards for products traded in the Caribbean. This is essential when using tools such as the MIOA database and the smart phone application developed by the MIS of Ecuador, which facilitates the dissemination of agricultural prices, and which will be made available to interested countries with catalogues of compatible data. During the meeting, delegates also analyzed the results of the study by the APP project in the Caribbean, which demonstrates the importance of market intelligence and market infrastructure in the effectiveness of the MIS. Finally, the participating countries recognized the MIOA's Database Project as an initiative that will improve information management for agricultural markets and will provide the basis for the development of complementary regional initiatives.



Organización de Información de Mercados de las Américas (OIMA)  
Market Information Organization of the Americas (MIOA)

OIMA/MIOA

- Meetings of the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee (EC) of the MIOA held its first meeting in January 2017, at IICA Headquarters in San Jose, Costa Rica. The Director General of IICA, Víctor Villalobos, welcomed the members of the Executive Committee and reiterated the Institute's commitment to continue supporting the MIOA and the Agricultural Market Information Systems (MIS) of the hemisphere. During the meeting, the EC agreed to establish a panel of experts in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as an advisory body on technology issues, with representatives from each of the five regions that comprise the MIOA. The group would be responsible for analyzing the main topics associated with technology and innovation in general in order to improve the performance of the MIS. The recommendations made to the MIS by this group of experts will be presented during the Regular Meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In April 2017, the Executive Committee held a meeting in Guayaquil, Ecuador, primarily to follow up on the implementation of the existing portfolio of projects. Delegates discussed the importance of strengthening the MIOA's relations with the MIS of Peru, Colombia, El Salvador and Nicaragua, in order to encourage their active participation and continue to benefit from the institutional contributions that they have traditionally provided.

- Establishment of the ICT panel

A meeting was held on June 6, 2017 to establish the Advisory Panel on Information and Communication Technology (ICT), with representation from IT experts from each of the MIOA regions. The role of this Panel will be to advise the MIOA on the development of technology systems aimed at improving the performance of the MIS. The ICT Panel will hold its first face-to-face meeting in July 2017, and as part of the preliminary work agenda, will analyze a range of topics including: the administration of the MIOA Web site; the implementation of the price information smart phone application developed by Ecuador in MIOA member countries that have expressed their interest; implementation of the Pan American Catalogue of Agricultural Products; and the evaluation of a remote price information loading system, among other issues.

- Completion of the SMS Project

With financial support from the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and the technical support of IICA, the MIOA evaluated SMS systems as a mechanism for facilitating access to information on prices for producers, business people and consumers in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay. The objective was to identify lessons learned and good practices in the implementation of these systems.



Organización de Información de Mercados de las Américas (OIMA)  
Market Information Organization of the Americas (MIOA)

OIMA/MIOA

With the support of IICA's Secretariat of Planning and Evaluation, the experiences implemented in these four countries were systematized. A group of specialists was designated to meet with experts of the MIS in order to move forward in developing tools and identifying innovative approaches, lessons learned and opportunities for improvement.

This effort resulted in the publication of a book entitled "Experiences in the use of text messaging and mobile phone services in the agricultural markets of Costa Rica, Ecuador, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay," which is available to the MIS at the following link:  
<http://repositorio.iica.int/bitstream/11324/2521/2/BVE17028611i.pdf>

- Completion of the MIOA Database Project

Given the need for some countries to strengthen their data management and technological capacity, during the first semester of 2017 the MIOA completed the design and implementation of a Cloud-based platform for the management of countries' agricultural market databases. This will allow for the effective storage, processing and dissemination of market information, mainly in the Caribbean and Central regions. The project has already been implemented in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. During the months of July and August 2017, training courses on the use of this tool will be imparted for representatives of Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Dominican Republic, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The database project is financed with USDA-FAS resources and is implemented by MIOA through the Technical Secretariat of IICA.

- Completion of the Curriculum Project

The first phase of the Curriculum Project, funded by USDA-FAS, was completed with the participation of the Escola Superior Agrícola Luiz de Queiroz (ESALQ) in Brazil, EARTH University in Costa Rica, the Zamorano University of Honduras and the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Trinidad and Tobago. The objective of this phase was to develop a study plan for training professionals in market information and market intelligence systems, with the participation of various interested higher education institutions in the region. As part of this project, a course on "Market Information for Entrepreneurs" was implemented at UWI. In addition, the universities of Zamorano and ESALQ incorporated market information as cross-cutting topics into their economics, marketing and statistics courses. EARTH University took advantage of the knowledge acquired during the project to incorporate these topics into the curriculum of its Master's in Agribusiness Innovation Program, specifically in the module on Senior Agribusiness Management.



Organización de Información de Mercados de las Américas (OIMA)  
Market Information Organization of the Americas (MIOA)

OIMA/MIOA

The project also resulted in the creation of a network of universities interested in sharing experiences and research on agricultural market information systems in the hemisphere.

The second phase of this project is currently under implementation. Its objective is to create a virtual (online) course on Agricultural Price Analysis directed at students of universities participating in the project and at technicians of the MIOA's member MIS who wish to improve their skills in the analysis of agricultural prices. In addition to receiving support from the professors who participated in phase I of the project, the second phase will include the ISA University of the Dominican Republic, the University of Costa Rica and IICA specialists in price analysis. This will expand the network of universities interested in conducting research on agricultural markets and strengthening the capacities of the MIS in the member countries of MIOA. The virtual course will be available in English and Spanish during the last quarter of 2017.

### Future Activities

With the support of its delegates in the member countries and the Technical Secretariat of IICA, the MIOA will continue its efforts to ensure the availability and transparency of agricultural market information through the implementation of projects, the development of innovative initiatives, the strengthening of its members' technical capabilities and the quest for and management of resources. In addition, it will continue to promote spaces in which participants from each of its member countries can share and exchange their experiences, address institutional challenges and discuss short term expectations.

- XVI Regular Meeting in Buenos Aires Argentina

The XVI Regular Meeting of the MIOA will take place in October 2017, in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. As on previous occasions, this event seeks to promote closer institutional ties and consolidate collaborative relations between delegates of the MIOA's member countries. During the 2017 meeting, delegates will coordinate the implementation of the smartphone application for disseminating agricultural prices in countries that show interest in using it. In addition, the Action Plan and main recommendations issued by the Advisory Panel on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) will be announced; new project proposals submitted by the different regions comprising the organization will be discussed; and a visit to promote the Market of Buenos Aires will be arranged, among other activities.

- Launch of the Catalogue of Agricultural Products

With the support of USDA-FAS, a Pan American Catalogue of Agricultural Products was developed. In the initial stage, the catalogue included agronomic, commercial and nutritional information on



Organización de Información de Mercados de las Américas (OIMA)  
Market Information Organization of the Americas (MIOA)

OIMA/MIOA

the 39 products of greatest importance for the Central Region and the Dominican Republic. The official launch of the catalogue will take place in Buenos Aires, Argentina during the XVI Regular Meeting of the MIOA.

The catalogue will be available for use by MIOA delegates, public and private institutions - both national and international -, students and the general public. The second phase of this project will incorporate data on new products and regions of the MIOA's member countries.

- Training on GATS

As part of capacity building efforts with the member countries of MIOA, experts from USDA-FAS will visit Ecuador, Paraguay, Chile and Panama to impart a training workshop on the use of the Global Agricultural Trade System (GATS) database. This database includes statistical information on agricultural, fish, forest and textile products dating from 1989 until the present. The training workshop is directed at public sector officials and representatives of producers' organizations who need to develop high-level market intelligence skills. During the 2014-2015 period, USDA-FAS officials imparted similar training workshops in Honduras, Peru, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Colombia and Guatemala, which have proven extremely useful to representatives of the public and private sectors of those countries. Hence the importance of expanding the training to Ecuador, Paraguay, Chile and Panama.

- Outlook and challenges

With the backing of its Technical Secretariat, the MIOA will continue to support the development of innovative, low cost, mass use technologies for the collection, analysis and dissemination of information on agricultural markets and prices, following global trends in information management.

As a responsible and visionary organization, the MIOA faces the challenge of renewing and encouraging the active involvement and cooperation of member countries whose participation has declined due to institutional restructuring processes. The Technical Secretariat and the IICA Offices in each country are currently working to identify the official representatives of the MIS in this group of countries, and to follow up on actions resulting from this effort.

The MIOA will continue to develop practical tools and instruments for the benefit of the MIS, mainly by providing training to reinforce the technical skills of the professionals who work in the MIS and by strengthening the tools for innovative management, analysis and dissemination of information on agricultural markets in its member countries.