



## United States Department of State

*Washington, D.C.*

UN Commission on Sustainable Development, 16-17  
Agriculture Intervention  
May 5, Afternoon Session

Check Against Delivery

Intervention given by: **Colien Hefferan**, Administrator, Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Good afternoon. The U.S. Delegation is pleased to participate in this timely discussion about the importance of maintaining and investing in global sustainable agriculture. Today more than ever, the world requires a global food system that is productive enough to meet our expanding food, fiber and fuel needs. And, we must do so while maintaining the ecological foundation that will allow us to continue intensive production. With limited arable land, scarce water resources, and surging input costs such as energy, the world needs to implement new policies and technologies with the potential to significantly boost crop yields, and do so in a way that retains agricultural capacity for future generations to do the same.

The U.S. intervention will focus on describing the American agricultural engine, our science-based approach that we use to address issues, the way we make information useful and available to farmers and ranchers so that they can grow and market their products, and our strong commitment to the role of education in improving international quality of life.

U.S. agriculture is a formidable enterprise with policy, organizational, and governance aspects that we believe have contributed to its success. Many of these elements are relevant abroad as well. For example, the creation of a system of universities by the federal government in the late 1800s was key to promoting the vast agricultural potential of the United States. This land-grant system offered education, teaching, and research in service to all students – rich or poor, all communities – rural or urban, and all farmers – large or small. As part of that system, we also created a national network of Agricultural Experiment Stations and a network of intramural federal laboratories, the Agricultural Research Service, which conducts timely, problem-solving research.

We developed a system of producer-owned cooperatives for buying and selling commodities including electricity. We made knowledge available to users young and old by formalizing the Extension Service and 4-H youth development in the early 1900s. These are just some of the elements that help American agriculture prosper. They are just as relevant to helping us meet the challenges we face today. For example, using new information technology tools, the U.S. Cooperative Extension System is exploring new

ways to deliver programs such as the web-based information and education system known as eXtension (pronounced e-extension).

By investing in research, education, and extension, we have been able to successfully develop and implement new technologies to increase yields without expanding farmlands. In the United States, new technological developments have benefited farmers at small and large scale, using conventional and alternative production methods. Technologies have addressed more efficient use of inputs, improved seed genetics through traditional breeding or modern biotechnology, water quality, soil loss, food safety, and other issues. Biotechnology is considered one strategy to meet the increasing demand for food as well as maintaining the ecological foundation of food production.

The United States also believes that sustainable agriculture can help ensure productive rural development. Enabling legislation and cooperative training have provided powerful tools for rural economic development. For example, policies that enable farmers and other business people to form cooperatives allows the members to achieve collective power in purchasing inputs or services, or in negotiating prices with others in the marketing chain.

Sustainable agriculture also requires targeted land conservation to keep marginal land out of production. U.S. conservation policies essentially “pay” producers for green services. Because of the Conservation Reserve Program, over 34 million acres of highly erosion prone land in the United States has been taken out of production for multiple year periods.

One often overlooked and important aspect of maintaining a productive ecosystem for agriculture is pollination, a vital function for plant and seed reproduction. Pollinators (such as bees, bats, butterflies, and other insects), which transfer pollen between seed plants, have been in decline for several years. Without pollinators, humans and ecosystems cannot survive. Due to biodiversity threats such as habitat loss by land development, and over application of pesticides, we are gradually losing pollinators around the world. This trend must be reversed. The mysterious disappearance of honeybees, called Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), is a growing threat to pollination services in agriculture. The North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC) is a tri-national coalition dedicated to promoting the health of all pollinators.

More information on all of these efforts is available either as case study handouts, or at Learning Centers and Side Events throughout the CSD program.

Internationally, the United States recognizes the importance of international research, outreach and teaching efforts in agriculture. As such, we have supported the International Agricultural Research Centers (the CGIAR System), as well as many of the National Research Centers. The United States also contributes greatly to training a large number of foreign agriculturalists at our universities. The United States has traditionally been among the most important backers and financiers of the Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food

Program. On April 14, we committed \$200 million in emergency food aid to help meet immediate food needs in regions experiencing food shortages. A significant portion of these funds will be provided to the World Food Program. Good governance is a prerequisite to ensuring significant and lasting results.

In closing, the United States recognizes that the rapid rise in global food prices is an urgent concern and we are taking immediate steps to help address this challenge. Clearly, meeting food security needs is a critical part of a much needed world policy response. The United States also highlights the critical need to adopt national and international policies and programs to make agriculture more productive and sustainable. Negotiations continue in the Doha Development Round and the United States remains committed to trade liberalization. A liberalized trading regime is necessary for prosperous and productive global agriculture – one that provides wider access to markets for all countries.

The United States believes that the world can achieve its sustainable agriculture goals. We are convinced that by working together to create new science-based policies and technologies, and educating our young people while providing producers and the public with timely and relevant information, we can achieve a global sustainable food system.

Thank you for your attention.