

## **Press release: For immediate release**

### **World food leaders meet to bridge divide with small-scale farmers**

Over 130 world leaders in farming, policy, agri-food business, research and civil society are meeting in China this week for the first ever global attempt to assess how modernisation of the food system can include and benefit small-scale farmers.

The international conference, which runs from 5-6 March in Beijing, aims to answer questions such as:

- Can the new food giants including supermarkets — which have increased in China for example from one supermarket in 1990 to over 53,000 today — and food companies be partners in the economic growth of rural areas?
- Can small-scale farmers organise to meet the high expectations for food quality, safety, and quantity?
- And can policy help to make successful market linkages between business and small-scale farming?

This conference is an initiative of the Regoverning Markets programme, which represents a global consortium of 15 institutions worldwide and is coordinated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

“Rapid changes are underway in national and regional agri-food markets in developing and transition economies,” says Bill Vorley, head of the Sustainable Markets Group at IIED. “These changes have profound implications for the ability of agriculture to contribute to economic growth, poverty reduction and rural development.”

Small-scale agriculture, which supports most of world’s 1.9 billion rural poor, is potentially under-prepared for these changes. China and India alone have a combined agricultural workforce of 640 million and 43-60% of their workforces engaged in agriculture.

The Regoverning Markets consortium has just completed an intensive 3-year programme of research and policy dialogue.

Lessons from this work include the following:

- The speed of modernisation in food retail and processing varies around the world, but can be very rapid. The way in which these changes filter through to the farm level depends on how agriculture is structured.
- If dominated by small farms, then inclusion is very possible, as long as farmers have the required organisation and technology (such as irrigation for vegetables, or cooling tanks for milk). But a polarised farm economy such as that found in South Africa will mean that small-scale farmers are unlikely to be secure in modern organised markets.
- Inclusion ultimately depends on a receptive business sector, conducive public policies and an engaged farming community. Often, specialised market intermediaries who have both a business and a development orientation can be important.
- There is big challenge in meeting the growing demand for food quality, safety, and quantity in many developing countries where small farms dominate
- ‘Bridging the divide’ to sustain the involvement of small-scale farmers as food markets restructure and modernise will require new coalitions of business, farming and public policy.

The conference “*Inclusive Business in Agrifood Markets: Evidence and Action*” begins early today March 4, 2008 with a visit to wholesale markets and supermarkets in the greater Beijing area.

**For more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact:**

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

The conference "*Inclusive Business in Agrifood Markets: Evidence and Action*" is jointly hosted by the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy, Chinese Academy of Sciences, PRC; The Office of Agricultural Vertical Integration, Ministry of Agriculture, PRC and the "Regoverning Markets" programme. See

[http://www.regoverningmarkets.org/en/global/beijing\\_conference\\_2008.html](http://www.regoverningmarkets.org/en/global/beijing_conference_2008.html) for more details.

The "Regoverning Markets" programme comprises a global consortium of researchers and development practitioners from 16 organizations which set out to address the questions of small-scale farmer participation in dynamic national markets. The aim of the programme is to provide strategic advice and guidance to the public sector, agrifood chain actors, civil society organizations and development agencies on approaches that can anticipate and manage the impacts of the dynamic changes in local and regional markets.

The programme is coordinated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), and is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the International Development Research Center (IDRC), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), ICCO, Cordaid, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The Beijing conference was further supported by DFID, IDRC, CIDA, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Development Cooperation (DGIS). The views expressed are not necessarily those of the funding agencies. For further information see [www.regoverningmarkets.org](http://www.regoverningmarkets.org) or contact [RegoverningMarkets@iied.org](mailto:RegoverningMarkets@iied.org)