

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

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October 1, 1974

TO: Members of the Consultative Group
FROM: Executive Secretariat
SUBJECT: Communication to the World Food Conference:
Plant Nutrients

1. Members will recall that at the meeting of the Group on August 1-2, they discussed various measures being undertaken to carry forward and to stimulate research on plant nutrients.

2. It was agreed at that time that steps would be taken to inform the World Food Conference of these measures. Attached to this memorandum, for the information of members, is a copy of a letter on this subject to the Secretary-General of the World Food Conference from the Chairman of the Consultative Group.

Attachment

September 27, 1974

Mr. Sayed Marai
Secretary-General
World Food Conference
Food and Agriculture Organization
Via delle Terme di Caracalla
Rome 00100, Italy

Dear Mr. Marai:

The forthcoming World Food Conference promises to be an important step towards the improvement of food supplies and food production in the developing countries. The documents of the Preparatory Committee make it quite clear that fertilizers play a key role in any strategy to help developing countries feed their people. Moreover, the attention of the Conference has been called to the need for research which could lead to improved types of plant nutrients and non-energy alternatives for stimulating plant growth. It therefore seems opportune to write to you about the work of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research with respect to plant nutrients, including the proposals which the Group and its Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) have under consideration.

At the August 1-2, 1974, meeting of the Consultative Group in Washington, special attention was given to a report from the TAC on its consideration of how to approach the question of stimulating research on the application of chemical fertilizers to developing country conditions, biological fixation of nitrogen, and organic fertilizers, and to a proposal by the United States to help develop research on the chemical fertilizer part of this problem. The latter proposal was intended to fall within the context of any overall Consultative Group effort on plant nutrition; it would be based on the extensive facilities of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

The existing international agricultural research centers have a substantial interest in plant nutrition: the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT) have programs on the biological fixation of nitrogen by leguminous and non-leguminous plants. Moreover, work on conventional chemical fertilizers is under way at all the centers, including research into improving efficiency in the use of fertilizers in tropical conditions. An important aspect of this work, in view of the fertilizer shortage, is that the new varieties of wheat and rice, while responding best under controlled fertilizer use, are not dependent exclusively on fertilizers to be superior in yield to traditional local strains. At the same time, the need is recognized to strengthen these programs so as to increase the efficiency of presently available conventional fertilizers and to help define needs for new types of fertilizers.

Accordingly, the Consultative Group's Technical Advisory Committee has recently established a subcommittee to examine the best ways and means of giving effect to the need to mobilize the experience of TVA and other bodies; how best to monitor work at the centers and elsewhere in all relevant fields, and to stimulate further research in each of the three main elements of chemical, microbiological and organic aspects of plant nutrition. The subcommittee will report to TAC at its next meeting in Rome in February 1975. The Consultative Group and TAC have also welcomed the U.S. proposal to establish a non-profit corporation with a multi-national board and staff which would have access to the staff and facilities of the Tennessee Valley Authority and would help develop chemical fertilizer research for tropical conditions. Further plans are awaited by the Group and will be examined by TAC.

In sum, the Consultative Group is seized with the problem of promoting research on more effective means of nourishing the major crops that are practical for small as well as large farmers in developing countries. We hope and expect that this will make an important contribution to the solution of world food problems.

More generally, it is good to note the emphasis which the documents of the Preparatory Committee for the World Food Conference have given to increased agricultural research, including that sponsored by the Consultative Group. It is the hope of the members of the Group that this matter of strengthening international and national agricultural research will receive strong support at the Conference when it meets in Rome in November.

Sincerely yours,

Warren C. Baum
Chairman