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**HEMISPHERIC MEETING
RURAL VOICES: YOUTH IN ACTION**

September 2025



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Hemispheric meeting rural voices: youth in action

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1. Introduction

The main purpose of this document is to provide basic guidance for creating intergenerational spaces for dialogue where young people can share their needs, visions, and proposals, so that agriculture in the Americas enables them to build and strengthen their life projects, while responding to the demand for increasingly efficient, sustainable, and inclusive agricultural systems.

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) seeks to create spaces that promote and enhance rural youth leadership, as well as opportunities for engagement with adults, to facilitate dialogue and the presentation of proposals from the perspective of young people across the Americas. An example of this is the institutional dialogue process that the Institute is developing with youth as part of the Continental Alliance for Food Security and Sustainable Development in the Americas and in connection with the international agenda leading up to the VII Young Americas Forum, organized by the Young Americas Business Trust (YABT) in the framework of the Summit of the Americas in the Dominican Republic.

In the case of the dialogue between youth, women, and ministerial authorities from the member countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), held at IICA Headquarters in Costa Rica in May 2025, participants highlighted the importance of fostering the attachment of young people to rural areas through improved living conditions and public policies focused on food security, entrepreneurship, and agricultural innovation. Capacity-building activities, exchanges of experiences, and study visits were carried out, including to the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) in Turrialba, focusing on environmentally friendly agricultural techniques that improve production practices and strengthen resilience to climate challenges. The central focus of all the activities was on youth, recognized as agents of change.

Another initiative in this direction—aimed at promoting, through strategic partnerships, the leadership, advocacy, and participation of youth—is the involvement of representatives of the Institute's AgroJoven Program in the Hemispheric Meeting *Rural Voices: Youth in Action*. Its objective is to strengthen the technical and strategic skills of young people engaged in agrifood systems in key areas such as negotiation,



leadership, and capacity building in management and administration, so that rural enterprises can consolidate, expand, and generate benefits for youth in rural areas.

Young people must be included in decision-making spaces to propose guidelines that ensure that agriculture—today and in the future—becomes the main driver of development in a region that produces food for the world. According to FAO and IFPRI (2023), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) exports 40% of its food production and accounts for 17% of global exports of this food.

Moreover, given the progress made by some countries in technological innovation and the presence of competitive and environmentally friendly production systems, LAC has great potential to meet the growing global demand for food (FAO 2024). However, it remains the region with the highest rates of moderate and severe food insecurity in the world, affecting 40.6% of its population in 2021—the same year in which the prevalence of undernourishment reached 8.6% and hunger increased by 48.3% between 2015 and 2021, far above the global increase of 22.5%. (FAO 2024).

In this context, youth play a strategic role in driving innovation, agri-bioentrepreneurship, and the digital transformation of agrifood systems, and above all, in ensuring that agriculture in the Americas remains a viable, profitable, and sustainable pathway for the social, cultural, and economic development of young people.

This document draws on the experience of the Hemispheric Meeting “Rural Voices: Youth in Action,” held on August 12–13, 2025, and organized by IICA as part of International Youth Day. On this important occasion, the Institute highlighted the role of rural youth across the Americas in shaping agriculture.

The meeting created a space for inter-learning, based on young participants’ life experiences and productive projects. It also provided them with technical inputs in areas such as entrepreneurship, agrifood digitalization, leadership and advocacy, communication and social media, and access to finance—resources that contribute to building and strengthening their life projects and to the exercise of their leadership and agency.

Over the course of two days, activities were carried out to promote the networking of youth leaders participating in the meeting, as well as to strengthen their skills through



thematic workshops. The event's methodological design therefore combined activities aimed at fostering cohesion among young people from different countries of the Americas with others focused on developing key competencies to reinforce their leadership in economic and organizational spheres.

The following sections present information on rural youth in the Americas, the approaches promoted by IICA during the meeting, and the methodology used—aligned with a youth-centered approach and recognizing the central role of rural youth participation in agrifood systems.

The document also reflects on the importance of generating inter-learning processes as a foundation for interaction and youth empowerment, as well as intergenerational spaces to ensure the advocacy and influence of rural youth leaders.

Finally, it shares the vision and proposals of the rural youth leaders who took part in the meeting, with a view to building a Rural Youth Agenda to be presented at the VII Young Americas Forum and within the framework of the Continental Alliance for Food Security and Sustainable Development in the Americas, led by the Institute.

As for the youth participants in *Rural Voices: Youth in Action*, they were selected based on several criteria and with the support of IICA Delegations in the countries of the Americas. The main criteria included being between 18 and 35 years old; living, working, or developing their life projects in rural areas; being young leaders, entrepreneurs in agriculture, or having experience in advocacy processes; and representing ethnic, territorial, and cultural diversity. Other criteria included proficiency in Spanish or English, and participation in IICA national or regional initiatives such as AgroTalento, the 2024 Rural Women's Training Program, Leaders of Rurality, or partnerships such as YABT and the Next Generation Agricultural Impact Network (NGIN).



2. Situation of youth and rural youth in LAC

The situation of rural youth in the Americas reflects both progress and persistent challenges. From a legislative standpoint, several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have enacted laws and allocated specific budgets to promote youth participation and engagement in national and sectoral policies. However, the specific realities of rural youth are not always fully recognized, as their development takes place in contexts marked by significant disparities compared to urban areas.

In 2017, Latin America had 16.6 million family farming units, representing 81.3% of all agricultural holdings (FAO 2024). Within these households, family dynamics are closely tied to productive activities, which often shapes the autonomy of young people—many of whom remain under the direction of adults while awaiting opportunities to assume generational leadership.

Currently, Latin America and the Caribbean are home to 1.2 billion young people between 15 and 24 years of age, representing 16% of the world's population. This number is expected to rise to nearly 1.3 billion by 2030 (United Nations, n.d.). Despite their demographic significance, youth—particularly rural women, Indigenous Peoples, and people of African descent living in rural areas—continue to experience high levels of poverty.

In education, although the urban–rural gap has narrowed, completion rates and access to tertiary education remain lower in rural areas. According to ECLAC and Ayuda en Acción (2024), it is estimated that by 2030, 70% of young people will work in the services sector, reflecting a decline in the agricultural and manufacturing labor force.

The structural causes underlying the current situation include:

- Persistent territorial inequalities, which limit access to education, employment, connectivity, and basic services in rural areas.
- Lack of recognition of rural youth as a group with distinct characteristics, challenges, and potential.
- Mismatch between educational skills and labor market demands, according to the ILO (2025), which creates barriers to employment, particularly in rural contexts with limited access to digital technologies.



- Digital and socioeconomic gaps that constrain the ability of young people to benefit from emerging opportunities linked to new forms of technology-based employment.
- Limited opportunities for developing individual life projects, due to traditional family structures within family farming units.
- Insufficient differentiated policies and programs that address the specific needs of rural young women, Indigenous Peoples, and people of African descent.

These structural factors generate a set of social, economic, and demographic impacts that affect the capacity to transform agrifood systems:

- Rural-to-urban youth migration, driven by the lack of employment, educational, and recreational opportunities in rural territories (El País 2025).
- High levels of unemployment and informality: six out of ten young people work under precarious conditions, without benefits or social protection (ECLAC and ILO 2020).
- Elevated rates of inactivity, especially among young women: one in five is neither studying nor working, which represents more than 20 million people (Manzanero 2021).
- Economic costs of adolescent pregnancy and early motherhood, estimated at USD 15.3 billion across 15 countries in the region, with the greatest impact on young mothers (El País 2025).
- Progressive loss of young labor in agriculture: projections indicate that by 2030 only one in ten young people will work in the agricultural sector (ECLAC and Ayuda en Acción 2024).
- Perpetuation of poverty and inequality cycles, due to persistently low productivity, economic dependence, and social exclusion.

Despite the challenging outlook, the region has ample room for action to transform the conditions of rural youth. This transformation can be driven by strengthening the following areas, among others:



- Digitalization and agricultural technologies (AgTech): advancing these areas creates opportunities to enhance productivity, sustainability, and innovation, while fostering a younger and more dynamic profile in agriculture.
- Youth entrepreneurship and leadership: improving access to financing, digital education, and the use of communication as a leadership tool can boost youth empowerment and strengthen their influence in decision-making processes.
- Participation in rural and international trade, which contributes to income generation, local employment, and reinvestment in rural territories.
- Formalization of youth employment, creation of quality jobs focused on technology and sustainable energy, reduction of gender gaps, and increased investment in education and training (El País 2021).
- Intergenerational and youth-centered approaches promoted by the Institute, which seek to position young people as key actors in rural development, moving beyond adult-centered and urban-centered perspectives.

Rural youth should not be viewed solely as a generation in waiting, but as a generation of the present—with skills, interests, visions, and leadership that can be strengthened through tools for sustainable agriculture and agrifood digitalization, serving as key drivers of the new agriculture of the 21st century.





3. Approaches to working with rural youth presented at the Meeting

Through its Rural Women and Youth Program (PROMJUR), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) has established strategic partnerships to promote youth participation and leadership from a perspective that focuses on policy advocacy and resource mobilization, in order to ensure the sustainability of youth engagement and agency in the agriculture of the Americas.

Both the Institute and its partners promote a plural vision of youth, recognizing that there is no single type of young person. Living conditions and ways of life vary greatly due to multiple factors: the territories where they live; forms of social organization; the productive activities they engage in (agricultural or otherwise); their ethnic and cultural backgrounds; whether they live with a physical or cognitive disability; the languages they speak and write; their levels of connectivity and digital skills; and their degree of



access to markets, among other characteristics that reflect the diverse identities of rural youth across the Americas—a region marked by pluralism and diversity.

IICA also promotes a youth-centered approach, a conceptual and methodological perspective that places the interests and needs of young people at the core, recognizing them as active rights-holders with the capacity to influence and contribute to the social, cultural, economic, and environmental development of society. This approach seeks a comprehensive understanding of youth, taking into account their diverse needs, identities, and contexts, while fostering policies, programs, and actions that advance their empowerment and full, sustainable well-being (IICA 2024). The youth-centered approach is therefore based on the substantive participation of rural youth, promoting their advocacy and lobbying capacity in decision-making spaces to ensure their perspectives and proposals are integrated into all actions undertaken.

This makes it a departure from adult-centered approaches that have historically shaped policies and actions targeting youth—approaches in which adults' positions, ideas, and interests prevail, defining what is considered appropriate for young people without consulting them or acknowledging the validity of their views.

Accordingly, the intergenerational approach promotes the creation of spaces for dialogue and joint construction among different generations in rural territories—meaning a process of co-creation that integrates the needs, priorities, perspectives, and proposals of people of all ages.

This approach does not negate the need for youth to have their own resources, spaces, and dynamics specific to this stage of life—spaces where they can learn from one another, exchange experiences, and develop proposals to share with adults and sectoral authorities. In doing so, they strengthen their leadership, influence, and agency within sectoral policies.





4. A methodology in keeping with the youth-centered approach

The two approaches promoted by IICA's Rural Women and Youth Program (PROMJUR)—the youth-centered approach and the intergenerational approach—guide a methodological framework based on horizontal relationships of mutual learning.

The methodological proposal that shaped *Rural Voices: Youth in Action* is participatory and oriented toward co-learning, grounded in the understanding that all people—regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or any other characteristic—possess life experiences, knowledge, ideas, and proposals that are equally valid for the joint creation of initiatives. In this spirit, the meeting sought to foster the protagonism of young people, strengthen their leadership, and promote their agency in intergenerational spaces.



The PROMJUR team applied the pedagogical facilitation approach (IICA 1996) with the participating rural youth, ensuring that all technical inputs were internalized by each participant according to their context, history, life experience, and education, among other factors. In other words, the meeting was not treated as a one-way opportunity to transmit knowledge or technical content, but rather as a space to generate reflection and ownership processes that enriched both individual and collective learning and inter-learning experiences among youth.

This approach, which clearly challenges adult-centered and vertical models of education and training that view youth merely as recipients of adults' knowledge and experience, enabled the pedagogical facilitation process to achieve—based on the richness, diversity, and shared experiences of the participating youth—a collective construction of knowledge and action proposals.

During the two days of the meeting, it was the youth themselves, rather than technical specialists, who became the focus of the learning process. This made it possible to start from their everyday lives, reflect on their realities, and enrich them with new values and knowledge through sharing, exchange, and inter-learning among participants. Within this interactive and co-learning dynamic, topics such as entrepreneurship, agrifood digitalization, bio-entrepreneurship, financing and financial services, empowerment, youth leadership and advocacy, and narrative transformation (communication for advocacy) were addressed.

Pedagogical facilitation in working with and among rural youth provided opportunities to share their life stories, enterprises, leadership experiences, and aspirations for agriculture as a life path. In this context, teaching meant helping others learn—encouraging and facilitating learning, as well as building networks among the nearly thirty young participants who collectively developed a vision for a Rural Youth Agenda (see section 8: Vision and proposals of rural youth leaders of the Americas).

The Meeting, centered on youth, focused on the collective construction of new knowledge, built from shared experiences, joint reflections, and the development of proposals, within an environment of mutual respect and collaborative learning.

This methodological approach made it possible for the diverse participants to find a space they could truly make their own—a space for joint creation. These young people



came from 19 countries across the Americas¹. Most of them were between 26 and 29 years old, followed by participants aged 18 to 24, and a smaller group between 30 and 35. More than half were women, reinforcing the women's empowerment approach applied by IICA's PROMJUR. In terms of education levels, 42.11% had completed university studies, 31.58% had completed secondary education, 10.53% were pursuing university degrees, 10.53% held master's degrees, and 5.26% were enrolled in technical programs.

The predominant language among participants was Spanish, spoken exclusively by 42% of them. Another 32% were bilingual in Spanish and English, 21% spoke only English, and 5% spoke Spanish and Guaraní.

Given the importance of youth leadership in economic and organizational spheres, 74% of the young people brought together by *Rural Voices: Youth in Action* were part of a youth organization—national, international, or student-based. Furthermore, 74% had an enterprise in areas such as agriculture and livestock (39%), agrotechnology (23%), agroecology/regenerative agriculture (23%), and agroindustry (15%). Additionally, 50% of participants reported having prior knowledge in advocacy, participation, and leadership.

¹ Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, The Bahamas, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela



5. Participation of rural youth: why and what for?

For IICA's PROMJUR, the participation of rural youth in the agrifood systems of the Americas is essential, as these systems directly depend on the energy, innovation, and commitment of young people to sustainable development and resilient agriculture. Youth represent a generation that combines traditional knowledge with new technologies, enabling them to contribute solutions to the challenges of production, food security, and adaptation to climate change. Including their voices in decision-making spaces helps guide policymakers and public institutions to integrate their proposals and address their current needs as well as the future demands of the region.

Youth participation is linked to the ability to transform the realities of rural territories and reduce long-standing inequalities and forms of exclusion related to age, ethnicity, geographic origin, income, education, family situation, and more. When young people lead and influence public policies, their rights are strengthened, opportunities for decent employment are expanded, and agricultural innovation is fostered. At the same time, more equitable and inclusive environments are created, where their contributions support the sustainability of agrifood systems and their resilience to economic, social, and environmental crises.

Participation is not only a right but also a condition for democratic and effective governance. Ensuring that rural youth play a leading role in the formulation and implementation of public policies guarantees that their experiences and perspectives are represented—avoiding their being seen merely as beneficiaries and instead recognizing them as agents of change. This consolidates a model of agricultural and rural development that prioritizes inclusion and promotes innovation, the bioeconomy, digitalization, and new narratives that reinforce youth leadership as a cornerstone for achieving agrifood systems that include young people and are more sustainable and competitive.





During the meeting, the crucial role played by these young leaders in their communities and countries became evident—not only by presenting their proposals but also by serving as the voice of many other young people across the region.

This perspective on participation differs from mere attendance at an activity, consultation, or numerical representation, as these do not generate real influence. Simply inviting young people to sessions or presenting them with pre-decided proposals does not foster their ability to participate meaningfully. Therefore, the Institute, through PROMJUR, promotes every opportunity for youth to influence the initiatives of governments and international organizations, and it fosters the creation of spaces where rural youth can be present and contribute based on their own priorities, needs, and proposals. This type of participation is considered substantive, as it ensures that youth engagement influences key decisions for the development of their communities and countries, while preventing consultation processes in which decisions are already made from an adult perspective—processes that overshadow and diminish young people’s ability to make proposals and have agency.



Hence the importance of supporting rural youth by building bridges through design thinking, digitalization, agri-bioentrepreneurship, financing, and communication, in order to strengthen their capacities to influence and lead the development of agriculture in the present and future. These and other strategic areas were addressed during the meeting to consolidate youth leadership, while recognizing the experiences of the participants.

In the development of each of the workshop topics held over the two days of the meeting, one or more young people were the central actors in the thematic discussions. Moreover, the methodology prioritized the participation and protagonism of the youth involved, and every technical tool used was oriented toward strengthening their participation and leadership.



6. Inter-learning as a pillar of interaction and youth empowerment

The methodology used at the Meeting fostered interaction among the participating rural youth, allowing them to share their knowledge, experiences, and visions of agriculture in the Americas.

The Meeting focused on two main objectives: a) promoting a sense of connection and shared identity among youth from different countries, and b) providing technical inputs to strengthen their training in key areas for their enterprises and leadership roles.

To achieve the first objective, the participants were grouped by region of origin, identified their places of birth and work on a map, and shared details of their experiences. Identifying their regions and presenting them to participants from the other four regions enabled them to recognize themselves as youth of the Americas, united by a common identity within their diversity. This initial instance of integration and intercultural exchange fostered trust, encouraged teamwork, strengthened their sense of youth identity, and highlighted the Latin American essence of the young collective that took part in the Meeting.

This activity marked the beginning of the process to strengthen the participants' protagonism, which continued throughout the Meeting—in participatory thematic workshops built on their individual experiences and processes through collective dynamics, as well as during the cultural exchange held at the end of the first day. The youthful joy and energy found an outlet for enjoyment, integration, and connection both within each region and across the Americas.

The Meeting encouraged young people to keep driving change, supported by the testimony of a young person who had overcome barriers, established a successful enterprise, and emerged as a youth leader in key rural development spaces. Even when discussing access to financial resources from an institution operating across several countries, the testimony of a young entrepreneur who shared his process for securing such funding illustrated the advantages of having financing adapted to his reality and that of thousands of young people across the Americas.



To achieve the second key objective—strengthening young people’s capacities for entrepreneurship and leadership—various workshops were organized. These activities centered on their personal experiences, individual and community contexts, expectations, and life project visions. In this way, technical inputs complemented their experience and were integrated into their proposals. In workshops on topics such as agri-bioentrepreneurship and agri-food digitalization, tools were introduced and immediately applied. This allowed participants to demonstrate their ability to absorb and incorporate new tools into their work, as well as their commitment to contributing to agri-food systems through productivity and innovation.

The strengthening of the participants’ technical capacities aimed to foster their entrepreneurial spirit through the application of design thinking as an innovative tool to generate new ideas and solutions to agricultural challenges. To familiarize them with this tool, exercises were conducted based on their own productive experiences.

There was also an introduction to bioeconomy and bio-entrepreneurship, grounded in their ongoing initiatives—whether in early or advanced stages—identifying the bioeconomy’s potential for ensuring sustainability. Staff from IICA’s Innovation and Bioeconomy Program led this workshop, organizing groups according to the level of development of youth enterprises in order to design work lines suited to each stage. The goal was for the bioeconomy to help increase productivity and sustainability while consolidating their long-term life projects.

In the same vein, and in coordination with the Digitalization of Agri-food Systems Program, the Interpretative Center of Tomorrow’s Agriculture (CIMAG), and IICA’s Digital Fabrication and Community Innovation Laboratory (FabLab), workshops were held to promote the use of agri-food digitalization among rural youth and to build digital skills. Prototyping exercises, drone operation, and 3D printing sessions allowed participants to experience agri-food digitalization firsthand. These workshops took place in various physical spaces across the IICA campus.

With the clear intention of strengthening the leadership and advocacy capacities of rural youth in agri-food policymaking, a workshop was also held on empowerment, leadership, and advocacy. Fostering their leadership and substantive participation in decision-making processes was key to learning from meaningful examples of youth leadership and identifying the pillars that sustain them. The sessions combined presentations by the facilitation team with group work and reflection exercises designed to reinforce young people’s roles as current leaders in agri-food systems.



At the start of the second day, an activity showcasing rural youth leadership was held: two young participants, one woman and one man, presented a summary of the previous day's experiences using digital tools to engage the entire group. Together, they constructed a "snapshot" of their interactions, lessons learned, and future opportunities for coordination as a rural youth contingent leading agri-food systems—visions that had emerged during the first day.

One of the main barriers youth face when starting enterprises is access to financial services that enable them—given their frequent lack of land or capital—to obtain funding adapted to their circumstances. To address this issue, a session was held on financing and financial services, featuring a presentation by the BBVA Microfinance Foundation on rural youth financing and the experience of a young cocoa entrepreneur preparing to export high-quality products thanks to funding from the Foundation. The participants also visited IICA's Hemispheric Fund for Agricultural Resilience and Sustainability in the Americas (FoHRSA) as part of the financing component within agri-food systems.

Another workshop focused on communication, a vital tool for advocacy and positioning youth interests and proposals. Technical inputs were shared to promote the strategic use of social media and enhance empowerment, leadership, advocacy, and visibility of the participants' experiences and proposals. Examples included a campaign carried out with rural youth in Guatemala that sought to break stereotypes about rural life and promote it as a space of innovation and diverse opportunities for youth rooted in their communities. The discussion explored the role of communication and social media in rural development and how youth can use them to boost their initiatives and influence key decisions in agri-food systems. One participant highlighted the importance of preserving culture, reminding everyone that while looking toward the future, one must not forget where one comes from.





7. Inter-generational spaces or velvet ghetto?

The Institute promotes the Continental Alliance for Food Security and Sustainable Development in the Americas, which proposes to “continue strengthening and promoting actions with rural youth across the Americas to enhance their leadership in agriculture through initiatives such as those developed within the framework of IICA of Open Doors (FabLab and CIMAG) and other joint actions with strategic partners that influence agri-food systems, including the Next Gen Ag Impact Network (NGIN), the Young Americas Business Trust (YABT), I4Nature, 4H, among others” (IICA n.d.).

All dialogue and capacity-building processes developed under the framework of the Alliance contribute valuable inputs and add value to the Institute’s Member States, aimed at strengthening agri-food systems and supporting the implementation of IICA’s Medium-Term Plan for the 2022–2026 period, in synergy with the strategic partnerships mentioned above.

This involves connecting rural youth leaders with the Alliance, positioning public and private interventions in member countries and strategic partnerships at the highest level of importance.

The work of IICA’s PROMJUR program is specifically aimed at creating spaces for youth across the Americas to strengthen their leadership skills—whether in agricultural



production or in the organizational or political arena—so that they can influence the substantive decisions shaping the future of agriculture in the region.

In this regard, its goal is to mobilize young leaders to participate in spaces such as the VII Young Americas Forum or the World Food Forum, where they can engage with high-level authorities, build networks as a rural youth collective, and propose concrete actions to advance an agriculture that meets their needs and aspirations.

The intergenerational approach promotes youth participation in organizational, work, and advocacy spaces alongside other age groups, particularly in those where policies are defined, ensuring that their needs and interests are integrated into decision-making processes. Spaces for youth capacity-building and organization are key, as they trigger generational dynamics rooted in shared vision and identity. Beyond the mutual learning that takes place, these spaces strengthen youth leadership, which can only be fully realized if young people have access to meaningful participation and influence.

Therefore, action must be taken on both fronts: promoting spaces specifically designed for youth while also integrating them into intergenerational interaction spaces—thus avoiding the so-called “velvet ghetto.” This concept refers to the situation where, from an adult-centric perspective, youth are placed in enclosed environments where only young people interact, without opportunities to step out, engage, participate, and make decisions on an equal footing with other age groups within agri-food systems.





8. Vision and proposals of rural youth leaders of the Americas: A rural youth agenda at the VII Young Americas Forum

The rural leaders who participated in the Meeting identified priorities and proposed solutions to address them. The participating youth were divided by region—North, Central, Caribbean, Andean, and Southern—to **build a Rural Youth Agenda**.

The exercise began with a discussion on how they envisioned agriculture in their regions ten years from now. They then shared their thoughts on the role that youth should or could play in agri-food systems in that future.

This was the starting point for identifying priorities and visions for agriculture in each region. Each group then presented the results of its work in plenary, which allowed for regional articulation and projection. As they expressed during the Meeting, their



aspirations were to contribute ideas that reflect the needs and dreams of those who work the land, highlight the challenges faced by rural youth in practice, and promote solutions that foster innovation, access to land, and financing.

The Rural Youth Agenda has been conceived as a tool in the hands of young people and as a key resource for transforming the reality of youth living in rural areas of the Americas. The discussions and proposals emphasized the importance of empowering youth as agents of change in agricultural transformation.

Rural youth across the Americas agree on the urgent need to transform agri-food systems toward more sustainable, inclusive, and innovative models, where new generations play a central role as agents of change. From the regional dialogues, four common axes of action emerged: access to resources and financing; education and technical training; technological and digital innovation; and environmental sustainability with a regenerative approach. These themes reflect a shared vision for the rural future, grounded in territorial justice, intergenerational equity, and climate resilience.

First, youth identified **access to land, water, infrastructure, and financing** as structural challenges that determine their ability to remain and thrive in rural territories. They call for fair and sustainable mechanisms that allow them to access productive resources, affordable credit, and technical support—particularly for those starting rural enterprises or seeking to modernize their farming systems. They propose that credit programs incorporate a youth focus, include seed funds and green financing lines, and promote the creation of cooperatives and local markets to facilitate economic inclusion. In the long term, they advocate advancing toward legal frameworks and public policies that guarantee equitable access to natural and financial resources for youth, in coordination with national and regional institutions.

Agricultural education and training for innovation emerged as a second pillar of the proposals. The young participants emphasized the need to rekindle interest among new generations in agriculture by integrating practical and agroecological content from primary education through technical and university training. They consider it essential to strengthen intergenerational mentoring programs and peer learning spaces that combine traditional knowledge with science and technology. In particular, they propose creating more specialized centers for agricultural sciences, rural leadership diploma programs, and scholarships aimed at applied research. These actions seek



to close the knowledge gap and equip rural youth with tools to innovate and lead productive and social transformation processes in their territories.

Digitalization and technology are recognized as drivers of change to make agriculture more efficient, attractive, and sustainable. In this area, the youth propose expanding their digital skills through training programs, practical workshops, and technological platforms that facilitate the exchange of agricultural information among countries. They highlight the need to promote the development of digital tools that improve marketing, traceability, and data management, as well as open and collaborative information systems. In the medium term, they aim to consolidate regional technology networks that connect young producers, researchers, and companies, fostering innovation ecosystems where youth play an active role in designing and adopting digital solutions.

Environmental sustainability and regenerative agriculture constitute a cross-cutting axis in all proposals. Rural youth advocate a transition toward resilient and ecologically sound production systems based on respect for the land and ancestral knowledge. They emphasize the need to combine agroecological practices with clean technologies, integrating agricultural planning strategies to confront climate challenges. They also propose strengthening environmental education and community communication to raise awareness about the relationship between agriculture, biodiversity, and culture. In the short term, they suggest collecting and disseminating evidence on the economic and environmental benefits of regenerative practices; in the medium term, accompanying the productive transition through technical and institutional support; and in the long term, promoting legal frameworks that recognize regenerative agriculture as a model for sustainable development.

Across all themes, rural youth underscore the importance of **leadership, organization, and participation in decision-making**. They insist that public policies must recognize youth as strategic actors whose networks and organizational structures should be strengthened. They propose creating permanent dialogue forums among youth, governments, the private sector, and international organizations, as well as digital systems to monitor proposals and assess impact. They also emphasize the need to ensure the full inclusion of women and Indigenous peoples in leadership spaces, guaranteeing representativeness and cultural diversity in rural governance processes.



Taken together, the proposals of rural youth across the Americas express an integrated and forward-looking vision for the future of the countryside. Through capacity-building, technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and territorial equity, young people reaffirm their commitment to transforming agri-food systems into a fairer, more resilient, and more solidarity-based model. Their voice—articulated across the five regions—converges in a single demand: to have the means, training, and recognition necessary to lead the agriculture of tomorrow.

Through the Alliance with YABT, these inputs will be presented at the VII Young Americas Forum, to be held in December 2025, ahead of the 2025 Summit of the Americas in the Dominican Republic. All these inputs will form part of the contributions that the youth of the Americas will present at the Forum, aiming to position the proposals of rural youth in the Americas on the agenda of high-level decision-makers.





9. Next steps: toward sustainability



9.1. Follow-up mechanisms for the Rural Youth Agenda

The process of developing the Rural Youth Agenda marks a milestone in making visible the proposals and priorities of rural youth across the Americas. To ensure its continuity and implementation, it is proposed to establish a permanent monitoring mechanism in partnership with regional platforms and youth networks. This mechanism could include a participatory monitoring system that enables young people to report progress, challenges, and emerging demands from their territories, ensuring that decisions and public policies remain responsive to their evolving realities. Likewise, it is essential to facilitate intergenerational dialogue spaces among youth, public institutions, and international organizations to periodically assess the implementation of the commitments made.



9.2. Continuity of dialogue and youth platforms (CHJR, RedJU)

To ensure the sustainability of the youth advocacy process, it is necessary to strengthen and provide continuity to existing platforms such as the Hemispheric Community of Rural Youth (CHJR) and the Rural Youth Network (RedJU). These spaces, supported by IICA, have proven their potential to connect leaders, share experiences, and build capacities. It is proposed that both platforms serve as permanent bridges for exchange between rural youth and institutional actors,



generating synergies with programs on digitalization, bioeconomy, innovation, and rural financing. Strengthening these platforms will help maintain the cohesion and regional projection of the rural youth movement, ensuring their voice is heard in decision-making spaces.



9.3. Sustainability strategies

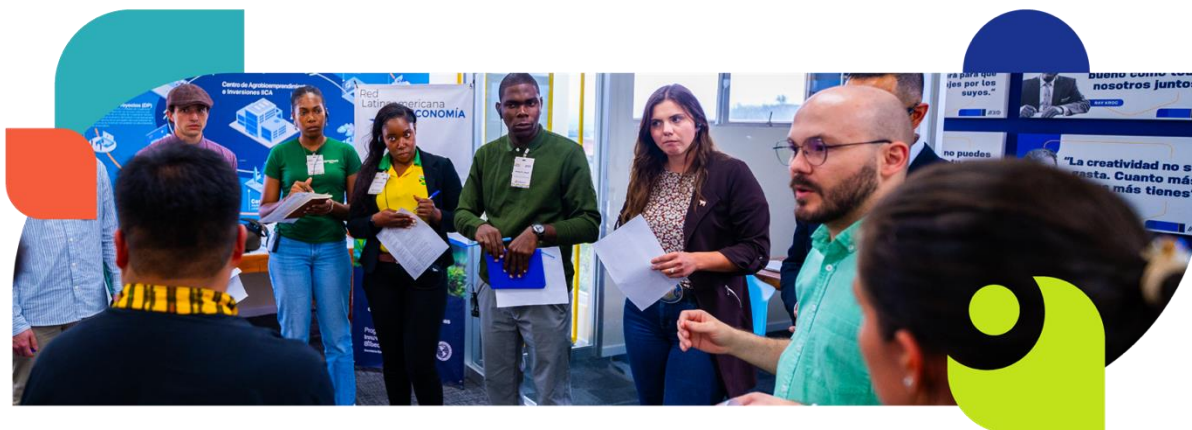
The sustainability of work with rural youth depends both on organizational strengthening and on the mobilization of financial and technical resources. It is essential to move toward collaborative models that link the public sector, international cooperation, and private enterprise, fostering co-financing mechanisms for youth initiatives. Training in project management, access to competitive funds, and the promotion of bio-entrepreneurship are key tools to consolidate the economic autonomy and political influence of rural youth.



9.4. Engagement with high-level spaces (ministerial and multilateral)

Rural youth must continue engaging with high-level deliberative spaces—both ministerial and multilateral—to position their proposals on the hemispheric agenda. Participation in forums such as the VII Young Americas Forum, to be held ahead of the 2025 Summit of the Americas, the World Food Forum, and other initiatives promoted by the Continental Alliance for Food Security and Sustainable Development represents an opportunity to directly influence policies affecting agriculture and rural development. These spaces allow youth to act as legitimate interlocutors with governments, international organizations, and strategic partners, thereby consolidating their role as key actors in the present and future of agri-food systems.





10. Conclusions

10.1. The Hemispheric Meeting *Rural Voices: Youth in Action* demonstrated that the most meaningful capacity strengthening occurs when young people are protagonists of the process. The participatory and co-learning methodology showed that the collective construction of knowledge enhances the leadership, creativity, and advocacy capacity of youth across the Americas. Rural youth reaffirmed their commitment to transforming agriculture, promoting environmental sustainability, and advancing social equity—underscoring that their participation must go beyond consultation to become substantive and binding in decision-making processes. Intergenerational spaces are essential to this advocacy and to strengthening their leadership within emerging agri-food system policies.

10.2. Today, rural youth are strategic agents of change—innovating, producing, and adopting sustainable practices within agri-food systems. Their leadership blends traditional knowledge with digital tools, new forms of organization, and more sustainable production models. Through their enterprises, cooperatives, and networks, they contribute to local economic development, social inclusion, and climate resilience, positioning themselves as people who are transforming rural territories. Their energy and vision for the present and the future are essential to ensuring the continuity and renewal of the agri-food sector in the Americas.



10.3. IICA's approach recognizes that there is no single way to be young in rural areas: youth are diverse in their territories, cultures, languages, socioeconomic conditions, levels of connectivity, and types of production, among other factors. This heterogeneity is, in fact, their greatest strength, as it brings creativity, adaptability, and innovation to agri-food systems. The lessons from the Meeting confirm that when inclusive and horizontal spaces are created, rural youth are able to unleash their potential to generate innovative and sustainable solutions, actively contributing to a fairer, more competitive, and more resilient agriculture.



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