

Reduction of agricultural emissions fundamental for achieving carbon neutrality

Authorities, experts and representatives of companies analyzed the actions Costa Rica must take to reach its voluntary goal of being carbon neutral in the next decade.



Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Livestock Farming of Costa Rica, Tania López; the Manager of IICA's Program for Cross-cutting Coordination in Agriculture, Natural Resource Management and Climate Change, Gustavo Cárdenas, and the researcher of CATIE, Leonardo Guerra, discussed about the actions taken by Costa Rica to reach its goal of being carbon neutral.

San Jose, Costa Rica, July 21, 2011 (IICA). Some 37% of the greenhouse gases (GHG) emitted in Costa Rica originate in the agricultural sector. As a result, the country must support processes aimed at continued improvement in the practices of its farmers if it is to reach its goal of being carbon neutral by 2012.

According to the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Livestock Farming of Costa Rica, Tania Lopez, speaking during a technical forum held at the Headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), in San Jose, Costa Rica, "The State is taking steps in this regard, but it is the private sector that can show that carbon emissions can really be reduced."

The forum, followed in a number of countries of the hemisphere via the Internet, provided an opportunity to learn more about Costa Rica's pioneering efforts to achieve carbon neutrality.

In 2007, the country set the goal of becoming carbon neutral in the next decade, which means that by then its emission of GHG must be equal to any reductions or offsets it achieves. Lopez used the formula: **Carbon neutrality: Emissions – Reductions – Offsets = 0./STRONG>**.

Reduction is the responsibility of the source of carbon emissions, i.e. farmers. Offsets can be in the form of financial contributions to forest preservation efforts.

According to Gustavo Cardenas, Manager of IICA's Program for Cross-cutting Coordination in Agriculture, Natural Resource Management and Climate Change, any actions that countries and companies take to reduce and compensate for GHG emissions are voluntary since there is no binding global agreement on the topic.

Hortensia Solis, leader of sustainable projects for COOPEDOTA, a cooperative of 800 coffee growers, held that offsets should be the last option for achieving carbon neutrality, and

should be used only when it is impossible to reduce emissions.

“If there is to be a significant impact on climate change, emissions must be reduced by at least 50% to 60%,” she said.

In this regard, Cardenas added that the use of natural resources must be based on their capacity for regeneration, that environmental pollution must be reduced and that other improvements are needed. “Offsetting for the sake of offsetting accomplishes nothing; carbon neutrality is more than planting trees,” he said.

For Leonardo Guerra, a researcher with the Livestock Farming and Environmental Management Group of the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE), in Costa Rica, the release of GHG into the atmosphere is the result of production practices that tend to increase the carbon footprint of industries.

In his judgment, “If emissions are to be reduced, adaptive learning, which fosters creativity, is what is needed. It is the only way to address the concept of carbon neutrality.”

Carbon neutral society

Deputy Minister Lopez announced that Costa Rica is developing a management system that will be applied in businesses to monitor progress in the reduction of their carbon footprints.

In the public sector, the goal of carbon neutrality by 2021 is contingent upon investments in renewable energy sources and the modernization of the urban transportation system, she added.

Edmundo Castro, Coordinator of the Carbon Neutrality Unit of EARTH University, stated that to achieve the objective in 10 years, limited institutional capacity must be addressed in the area of carbon neutrality, insufficient understanding of the concept and the lack of incentives to undertake sustainable projects, as well as other challenges.

“More than a carbon neutral country, we should aim for a culture of carbon neutrality,” he stated.

According to Castro, over the last three years, EARTH has provided some 1,000 individuals and 35 organizations with training in how to ensure that the processes they follow to reduce their emissions and carbon footprints can be certified using standards such as ISO 14064.

At the IICA forum, two Costa Rican firms, Florida Bebidas and COOPEDOTA, explained their efforts to reduce emissions of GHG and measure their carbon footprint.

Gerardo Miranda, Environmental Manager from Florida Bebidas, indicated that the company expects to be carbon neutral by 2017 in the segment of its value chain that extends from receipt of the raw material of beer and soft drinks to the point of sale.

“We do not want to buy carbon credits until we have reduced all the emissions we can,” said Miranda, who added that the activities that generate the most GHG are the fermentation and aging of beverages, transportation and electricity consumption.

Hortensia Solis, of COOPEDOTA, reported that the cooperative had quantified the release of GHG throughout the life cycle of coffee, from the farms of producers to the residues left over following consumption, discovering that improvements could be made in the use of biomass, the drying process and water consumption.

COOPEDOTA, which exports 90% of its coffee to countries such as the United States, Germany and Japan, announced in March of 2011 that Carbon Clear had certified its products as carbon neutral, and placed on the market the first coffee in the world to earn that distinction.

“Inasmuch as coffee production is highly susceptible to the effects of climate change, growers must find ways to make their farms more resistant to them. It is not marketing, it is a survival technique,” she said.

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[Video and presentation of Dep. Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Tania López](#)

[Video and presentation Leonardo Guerra, CATIE](#)

[Edmundo Castro, EARTH](#)

[Gerardo Miranda, Florida Bebidas](#)

[Hortensia Solís, COOPEDOTA](#)