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About IATP

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. IATP is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota with an office in Geneva.

New agriculture research alliance on climate should focus on low-input, sustainable farming

Research can't continue unsustainable, business-as-usual model for agriculture

COPENHAGEN – A new global research alliance, led by New Zealand and the U.S., on agriculture and climate change should include participation from farmers in countries facing food insecurity and emphasize practices that are low-cost and ready for immediate application, said the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) today.

The Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases was announced today in Copenhagen at the global climate talks. The proposal was initially made by New Zealand, but has now added the U.S. and over a dozen other countries including Denmark, India, Japan and Uruguay. The alliance agrees to boost funding within the participant countries to focus on “improving management practices and technologies” to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions and support food security.

“We are concerned that this agenda will simply duplicate the pitfalls we’ve already seen within the U.S. agriculture research agenda, which for example spends billions of dollars on genetically engineered seeds that largely benefit transnational corporations and can take a decade to develop,” said Jim Harkness, President of IATP. “This new alliance recognizes food security within the framework of climate research, and that should be applauded. To truly support food security requires developing research in-country, based on local experience and indigenous knowledge.”

“The loss of traditional knowledge and seed varieties in the Global South is a much more urgent crisis, and much more crippling to the world’s capacity to address climate change, than what has been the traditional U.S. research model,” said Harkness. “Unfortunately, national research institutions have largely ignored the types of low-input, sustainable, small-scale systems that are needed for both food security and climate-friendly farming.”

A recent global agricultural assessment, modeled on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change process, emphasized the need to stop business-as-usual in agriculture, stressed the importance of multidisciplinary research, the participation of farmers, and greater support of traditional knowledge in food production. That global report, known as the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), also identifies key research gaps.

“We think the IAASTD really provides a roadmap for addressing climate change and food security,” said Harkness. “Further research should build upon the IAASTD, whose recommendations can be implemented tomorrow—not a decade from now.”

IATP is in Copenhagen following agriculture aspects of the global climate talks. You can read more about IATP’s work on agriculture and climate at: www.iatp.org/climate.

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