

CONTACT:
Miriam Rich
(540) 231-4153
mrich@vt.edu

Meeting to Focus on Improved Agriculture and Natural Resource Management

BLACKSBURG, Va., May 15, 2008 — As the global food crisis deepens, 60 agriculture and natural resource scientists, engineers, and development experts from around the world will meet in Los Baños, Philippines, May 26-29 to discuss techniques to improve crop yields while protecting fragile ecosystems.

The Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Collaborative Research Support Project, or SANREM CRSP, is a global project funded by USAID and managed by Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. It is designed to introduce and maintain best practices of agriculture and resource management in developing countries. The program has been operating in the Philippines since 1992.

Communities in many forest and vegetable-producing watersheds in Southeast Asia suffer from poverty, while forest, soil, and water resources are being degraded. The objective of the SANREM CRSP's work in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam is to develop economically viable and ecologically sound vegetable agro-forestry (VAF) systems with potential economic and environmental benefits. VAF is the integration of vegetable crops with trees, a technique that researchers hope will improve quality of life for small-scale farmers. Researchers are experimenting with a variety of high-value medicinal plants and vegetables, including bell pepper, bok choy, cabbage, cauliflower, melons, and tomatoes; and with cash-crop trees such as cashew.

The project is researching various techniques such as low-cost drip irrigation, reduced tillage, reintroduction of indigenous vegetables, and soil enrichment; and offering local workshops to introduce improved cultivation and production practices. The research team in the Philippines comprises more than 30 scientists, engineers, and other development experts. The program works closely with the World Vegetable Center (AVRDC) and the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), and has a partnership with international food giant Mars Inc.

Those gathering in Los Baños will be specialists in farmer livelihoods, pest management, crop diversity, soil and water management, agricultural markets, social diversity, policy and governance, and economics. They will focus on scientific results from the SANREM CRSP activities not only in Southeast Asia but also in Africa, Central and South America. Besides VAF in Asia, the program is researching decentralization reforms and property rights for forest sustainability in Uganda, Kenya, Mexico, and Bolivia; a market-based approach to conservation in Zambia; watershed management and agriculture in Ecuador and Bolivia; and agricultural adaptations to climate change in the Andean regions of Bolivia and Peru. A daylong tour of experimental fields and research sites in Lantapan, Bukidnon, Mindanao, will precede the scientific meeting.

Sustainable agriculture and natural resource management are viewed by some scientists as crucial to ensure global food security. “The SANREM CRSP is dedicated to the concept of sustainable food security. SANREM research not only provides knowledge to meet the basic needs of humanity today, but it attempts to do so in a manner that does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs,” said Dr. Theo Dillaha, a biological systems engineer and program director for the SANREM CRSP.

Organizers expect that the global SANREM meeting, hosted by the University of the Philippines-Los Baños, will enhance cooperation and collaboration among regions and permit researchers to share success stories from different parts of the world. It will also highlight to governments and donor agencies the important role that sustainable agriculture and natural resource management can play in empowering farmers to increase their households’ food security.

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Time and Location of the SANREM CRSP 2008 Annual Meeting:
Splash Mountain Hotel and Oasis Resort, Los Baños
Beginning Monday 26 May, 8:00 a.m.
Ending Thursday 29 May, noon