**Statement by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)**

Meeting of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction on the

Response to the Eruption of the La Soufriere Volcano in St. Vincent and the Grenadines

*Salutations…….*

IICA confirms its sympathy to and solidarity with the people and Government of St. Vincent for the damage and displacement caused (and ongoing) by the eruption of the La Soufriere Volcano. On behalf of our Director General, we underscore the Institute’s commitment to coordinate with our various partners to strategically respond to the short term and long needs and demands of the people as they work towards recovery and reconstruction of the country. Overall, IICA will continue to work closely with the Minister of Agriculture and other local officials of the Minister, while its technical team located in the region and in St. Vincent remain ready and proactive to support and engage in dialogue aimed at achieving an inclusive, strong and sustainable recovery. In terms of the more targeted intervention undertaken to date, IICA’s response is predicated on the preliminary data and information available to date.

Due to ongoing explosive eruptions, the conduct of a qualitative damage assessment of the agricultural sector is not currently possible. Notwithstanding this, observations by officials and review of video footage and photographs point to the fact that agriculture in the Red Zone has been decimated. Initial, qualitative assessments indicate that there have been immense losses in the crop sub-sector in particular. This include losses in annual crops and significant injury and loss to perennials such as banana and plantains. The North West and North East areas which are in close proximity to the La Soufriere Volcano are considered to be the rural heartland of the country and the source of much of the agricultural production that is so important for the food and nutrition security of the population and for commercial activities associated with regional and international trade in fresh produce and livestock. The area is noted for tree crop cultivation, has extensive acreages of coconut cultivation as well as banana and plantain farming and arrowroot production. Additionally, there is extensive production of vegetable crops, especially in the north-west. It is anticipated that over the next few days the collated information on the pre-eruption cultivation will be available and will provide a guide as to the extent of the losses to anticipate, once the damage assessment commences. Further south, significant ash fall has also inundated crops and it is anticipated that there would be high losses as well based on initial observations and the experiences of the 1979 eruptions.

Farmers living in the hazard zones have had to relocate southwards, in effect abandoning their livelihoods. Losses will accumulate to those enterprises so abandoned and even further afield in some of the safer areas as fallout from the eruptions in the short term result in crop damage. The end result will be a fall in agricultural output and scarcity of some commodities in the short term. For livestock farmers the welfare of their animals is another issue, with animals left behind and unattended and endangered. For those whose animals have been evacuated to safety, the logistical challenges of organising and managing communal housing will no doubt pose severe challenges, and will at least in the short term curtail any expansionary drive for the industry. This will be a severe blow for a country that prides itself as the largest exporter of live animals among countries in the grouping of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States. The outlook will therefore be for diminished production and trade in the short term, a fall in agriculture contribution to GDP and economic challenges for the farmers, especially those who have been displaced.

It is against this background that IICA as a specialized institution for agricultural and rural development in the Inter-American System has acted quickly in an effort to support the agricultural sector response. The IICA response is being led by Director General Dr. Manuel Otero who has been in regular contact with the Hon. Saboto Caesar, Minister of Agriculture to pledge the technical and financial assistance of the Institute and express solidarity with the Government and people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

In addition, IICA’s Delegation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the IICA Representative for the Eastern Caribbean States (ECS) have remained in constant communication with the hierarchy of the Ministry of Agriculture at the political, senior administrative and technical levels. The Honourable Saboto Caesar, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour has indicated that he will form a committee which will be responsible for planning the strategic response for the agricultural sector. The committee will first be engaged in the assessment process. He has indicated his desire to have IICA on this committee as well as several other regional and international organisations and regional professionals.

IICA has reached out to partners in the farming community, especially those from the hazard zones to have an indication of their general welfare, provide support and express solidarity. The Institute has also engaged its development partners, such as the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) in an effort to foster a coordinated approach to the delivery of immediate and short/medium term support to the agricultural sector.

In terms of immediate support, The Ministry of Agriculture has requested IICA to provide much needed feed for livestock given the extensive damage and loss of vegetation associated with the ashfall, pyroclastic flows and other effects of the explosive eruptions. This feed will assist in sustaining livestock which will be relocated to the communal holding areas in the southern part of the country as well as livestock generally on mainland St. Vincent.

As a consequence, On April 14, 2021 IICA purchased an initial amount of 770 50-pound sacks of livestock feed for delivery to the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry will coordinate the distribution of this feed to various livestock farmers through its six distribution outlets located across the country. IICA will purchase an additional amount of livestock feed for distribution to farmers, through the Ministry of Agriculture in the coming days. IICA’s Director General, Dr Manuel Otero, gave rapid approval for this initiative, making IICA amongst the first responders for the agricultural sector.

Once the assessment process is completed and strategic response for the agricultural sector prepared, the Institute would be better placed to identify the additional technical and financial assistance to be provided to the agricultural sector in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

 15 April 2021