

OPINION: INNOVATION

Innovation is a panacea worth exploring

The notion that innovation is the key to economic recovery and development is one which has taken root in developed and developing countries alike. And no wonder.



BY AUDIA BARNETT

OTTAWA—The notion that innovation is the key to economic recovery and development is one which has taken root in developed and developing countries alike. And no wonder. A look at the BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the emerging economies that today epitomize buoyancy, hope and economic reform, is convincing. In this hemisphere, Brazil has vividly demonstrated the value added derived from investing in innovation.

Not half-heartedly, but with a singleness of purpose, focusing on all pertinent links in the chain of prosperity. As a result of strategic planning and considered investments in education, research and development, the economy has blossomed to global icon in a few short decades. Of course, its rich biodiversity didn't hurt.

There is precedence. Evidence from the countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development point to the fact that investment in R&D results in improved productivity and social returns. As a matter of fact, social rates of returns on investment in developed countries have been said to be as high as 40 per cent while in developing countries (depending on their level of underdevelopment) could be a whopping 100 per cent! Innovation can serve as the perfect incubator and catalyst for triple helix initiatives (government/private sector/academia).

Each has important roles—government in elaborating enabling public policies, for example, with respect to barriers to trade and intellectual property rights protection, private sector with needed venture capital or such funds for commercializing promising results of research and development work conducted by academia.

Another admirable feature of innovation is the fact that it is not limited to a particular field.

Business, industry, energy, health, the environment, are all sectors that have made tremendous strides resulting in improved efficiencies, performance and ultimately the bottom line.

With new markets, diversified customer base, more discerning and demanding consumers, together with the existing economic crunch, the pressure is on to innovate, innovate, innovate.

Food production is another prime candidate for innovation. From all accounts, the world is going to need to ramp up its production base to feed the nine billion population expected in 2050. How is this going to be done with a worsening water shortage, when arable land resources are scarce, drought and floods occur with increasing frequency, and the competition for energy or food is still real?

As with most global challenges, action must be effected at several levels—nationally, regionally, and globally. The Government of Canada has signalled its recognition of the role of innovation in agriculture and agri-food systems, added to the critical part that small and medium enterprises can play in addressing the problem. With its robust scientific and technological base, the country can make significant inroads in generating new knowledge for conquering the current challenges, the caveat being that investments in R&D are increased and sustained.

At the regional level, the Inter-American Institute for Co-Operation on Agriculture

(IICA) has the ideal machinery to aid transformation from at the grassroots level to the policy level in some 34 countries in the hemisphere. The Latin American and Caribbean region presents a conundrum with the socio-cultural as well as political and economic diversity. To their advantage, the region is rich in biodiversity and has the highest per capita ratio of arable land. IICA is therefore convinced that with a concerted effort, countries in the Americas can address this multi-faceted problem of food security through national agri-food innovation systems.

Such systems include a set of players, interactions and policies involved in the creation and dissemination of technologies and methodologies for improved productivity, competitiveness, sustainability and equity of agribusinesses and agri-food chains.

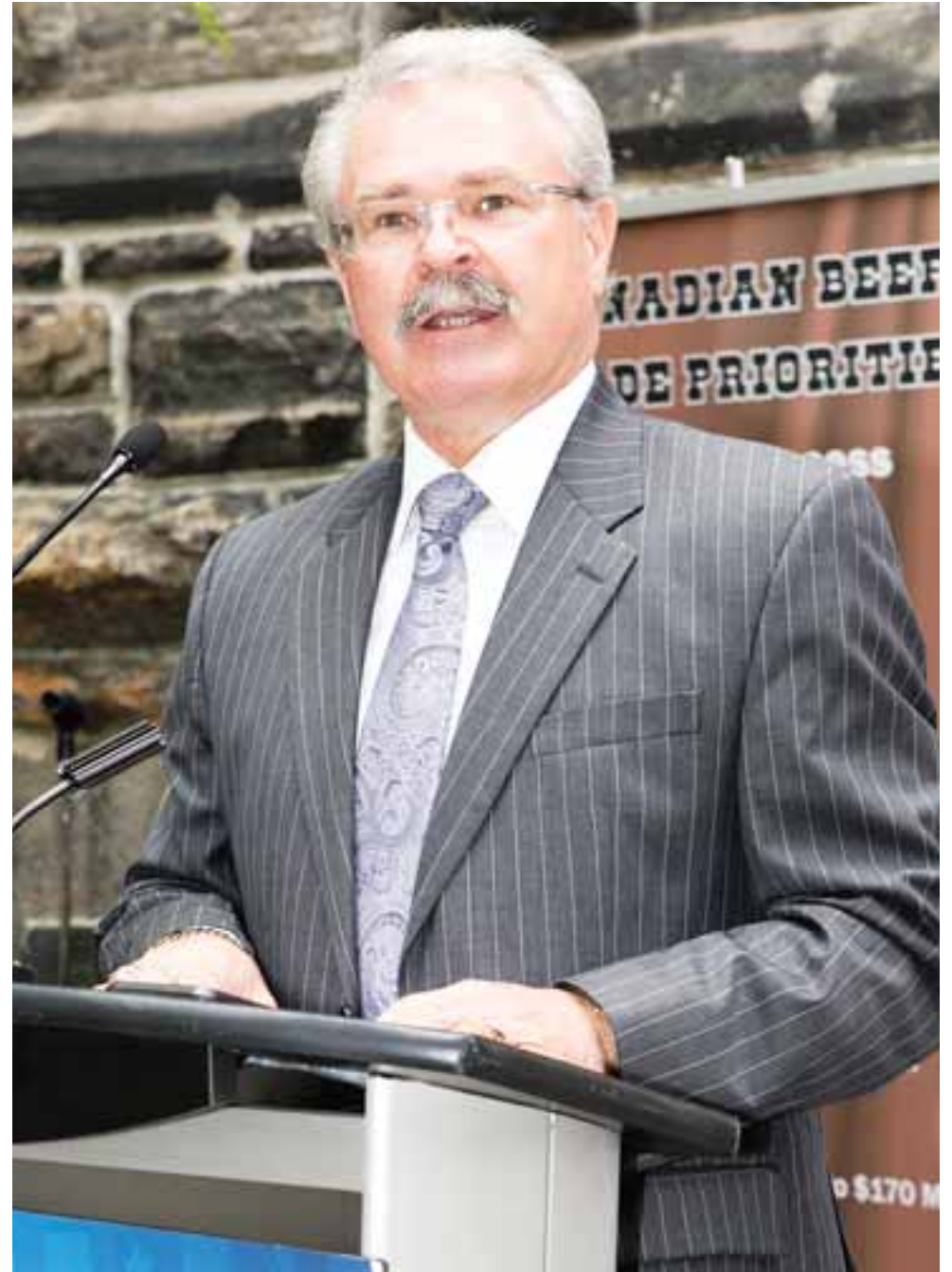
Collaborations between the North and the South as well as South—South in agricultural R&D, enabling policies, finance, information and communication technologies, can ensure that the response rate in the hemisphere is appropriate to its needs. It is important to acknowledge the fact that while the more developed economies in the Americas bring advanced technologies to the table, technology-poor countries also provide valuable contributions.

With their tacit knowledge, being the centres of origin for important agricultural crops and with centuries steeped in a culture of innovation, inputs from these countries can be considerable.

Today, sustainable agricultural and food trade is subject to trade regimes that are premised on economic viability, safety, and increasingly, "sound science." Enabling policies, regulations and strategies, together with modernized institutional innovation systems will of a necessity be priorities for the region.

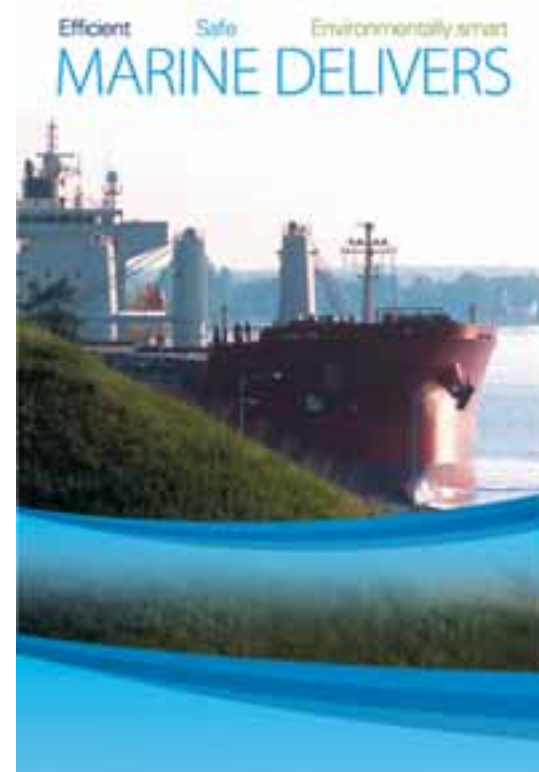
Agriculture ministers in the hemisphere have the critical, though often unwritten charge of utilizing appropriate mechanisms for building capacity throughout the food system, sharing knowledge and continuously innovating for assured sustainability of the region.

Audia Barnett is Canada's representative for Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture.



Photograph by Jake Wright, The Hill Times

It's about food, too: Canada's federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz. Agriculture ministers in the hemisphere have the critical, though often unwritten charge of utilizing appropriate mechanisms for building capacity throughout the food system, sharing knowledge and continuously innovating for assured sustainability of the region, writes Audia Barnett.



INVITATION

A Celebration of Marine Commerce

All Parliamentarians are invited to attend a Chamber of Marine Commerce reception

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

5:00 – 7:00 pm

Speaker's Dining Room

Room 216-N, Centre Block

We look forward to welcoming Members of Parliament and Senators, invited government officials, marine transportation industry stakeholders as well as executives from related sectors joining with the Chamber's Board of Directors in celebration of Canada's maritime assets and their contribution to our national prosperity.

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