

I would like first to thank our hosts -- and particularly you, Mrs. Hart -- for providing us with the welcome opportunity represented by this Commonwealth Meeting on Food Production and Rural Development. It is fitting that Commonwealth members committed as they are to the social and economic betterment of their peoples should confront the interlinked problem of food production and rural development -- and determine how the Commonwealth can assist.

It is essential that any proposals for practical collaboration should benefit member countries directly and reinforce the spirit of Commonwealth collaboration which Heads of Government defined at the meeting in Ottawa in 1973.

With the increasing attention being paid to food production and rural development throughout the world -- especially in the wake of the World Food Conference -- this meeting must ensure that any activity undertaken through our Commonwealth supplements and reinforces -- and does not duplicate -- activities being undertaken elsewhere. Within the framework of existing bilateral programmes between Commonwealth countries the meeting may well recommend new and potentially fruitful areas of cooperation which could influence policy decisions.

One step which could help in this cooperation is the possibility of creating a Food and Rural Development Division within the Secretariat. Ministers will doubtless wish to examine this suggestion. Should productive areas of operation for such a division emerge from discussion, Ministers could recommend to governments a particular role for the division. In my view it could provide an information clearing house for member governments and an advisory service to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation. As well, there should be involvement, as appropriate, of the existing Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux in whatever recommendations are made -- a practice which would ensure maximum involvement by pertinent Commonwealth organizations.

Let me turn now, briefly, to the World Food Conference and review the follow-up action that is being taken internationally and by Canada.