



## Press Release

December 5th 2006

### **Citrus Producers extend a hand to the environment supported by WWF**

*The Sonaguera Citrus Producers Association (ACISON) and WWF, the global conservation organization, have agreed to carry out joint actions in the search of Better Management Practices which will favor, in the long term, their production processes, the nearby communities and the area's natural resources.*

**Sonaguera, Honduras. December 5th, 2006.** The coordination of group work strategies aimed to benefit the environment, the communities, and to develop a sustainable economy is the main goal of officializing the Memorandum of Understanding, between WWF and this major citrus producer Association.

The city of Sonaguera was the meeting point for WWF representatives and the Sonaguera Citrus Producers Association, ACISON, to officially undertake the task of coordinating efforts that will allow the identification, reduction and mitigation of the environmental impact that the pesticide use has on the Mesoamerican Reef, MAR.

The signing of this MOU, sets the grounds for these associations to consolidate their interest in moving towards the implementation of Better Management Practices. This process will begin by working towards common goals such as: identifying good and bad pesticide use practices, constructing inventories on the types and applications of these substances, and to determine the impacts their use has on the environment.

Once the evaluation and identification stage is completed, the organizations will proceed to plan and develop pesticide use reduction strategies and to implement better agricultural methodologies which are more efficient for productivity and environmental protection.

*"This agreement is of grand importance to achieve WWF's goals of reducing the environmental impact that citrus production may have on the Mesoamerican Reef, since this association groups around 3500 citrus producers who at the end of the program could be implementing Better Management Practices in their plantations, this would translate into a great benefit for the Mesoamerican Reef ecoregion and the nearby communities that profit from this activity,"* said José Vásquez Agriculture Official for WWF Central America.

Vásquez also added that conjoint work with citrus producers will be carried out from two main angles; the reduction of pesticide use through the implementation of cover crops and a better weed control management in citrus production, as well as monitoring meteorological parameters and soil conditions to be used in erosion reduction models and plantation productivity in ACISON's plantations.



Engineer Selmy Mejía, President of ACISON, stated that the alliance with WWF will facilitate work in the search of viable and profitable solutions to improve productivity and it will allow producers to reduce any possible negative impact that pesticide use has on their product, plants, water, soil, workers, nearby communities, and the environment. *“The implementation of the evaluation of the cover crops project in citrus production will allow us to reduce weed control costs, preserve the soil and, of course, decrease the use of herbicides and their impact on the environment. As citrus producers we need to take the lead, create conscience and begin to work in a more environmentally friendly way”.*

The MOU is an unrestricted agreement within which each participating organization can work independently or with other related NGOs without contracting any economical obligations. This particular MOU's goal is to strengthen working relations with citrus producers in order to preserve the biologic community, to maintain mountain water springs that flow into the reef and to coordinate education and conservation activities with neighboring communities.

With support from The Summit Foundation, The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), The United Nations Foundation (UNF), Crop Life Latin America, and the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN), WWF develops the “Better Management Practices (BMP) Program”. The program's objective is to achieve and effective and efficient use of the natural resources from the agriculture industry which includes products such as citrus, banana, pineapple, sugar cane, amongst others, this would result in a positive health change of the MAR.

This initiative is part of the conservation and sustainable development strategies carried out by the ICRAN-Mesoamerican Reef Alliance (ICRAN-MAR), a project aimed at bringing major stakeholders together in reef conservation, engaging them in activities that promote better management of the Mesoamerican Reef around three key components: Watershed Management, Sustainable Fisheries and Sustainable Tourism.

The BMP program includes collective work with transnational companies and smaller producer associations based in the MAR area to search for new useful and cost-effective ways to sustain productivity and reduce any possible negative impacts that the use of pesticides has on their products, plants, water, soil, workers, nearby communities and the environment.

*“The social aspect of this project is relevant as well since the most affected populations are plantation's workers and families who live in near communities. If they reduce the use of pesticides they'll be less exposed to these products and consequently, their health effects will be greatly reduced. The reduction of pesticide bioaccumulation in marine species will affect positively their commerce and consumption, and will approach the industry to a responsible and sustainable use of the natural resources”,* Vásquez noted.



WWF hopes to include more companies and independent producers in this project; oil palm, producers from the MAR area are expected to add-on to the initiative and implement Better Management Practices in their production processes soon.

#### Notes to Editor:

1. The Internacional Coral Reef Action Network Alliance for the Mesoamerican Reef ICRAN (ICRAN-MAR). Aims at minimizing the impacts on the mesoamerican reef barrier through the adoption of better sustainable practices in specific areas such as tourism, fisheries and watershed management. This initiative, initially designed for three years has a multifaceted focus that recognizes the strong relation between those three components and their impact on the reef's health. Financed by the United Nations Foundation (UNF) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the project joins important conservation expert institutions, who coordinate different activities aimed at promoting the creation and strengthening of local capacities, the development of decision making tools, the adoption of better practices and the construction of strategic alliances with private companies."
2. WWF, the global conservation organization. Is one of the largest and most experienced independent conservation organizations in the world. WWF was founded in 1961 and is known by it's Panda logo. WWF is supported by more than 5 million people and it's global network works in more than 100 countries.

To learn more about WWF visit: [www.wwfca.org](http://www.wwfca.org)

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