

## Go South, Young Man!

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American plant pathologists have an enviable record accumulated through many years of cooperation with the millions of people south of the Rio Bravo del Norte (also known in the United States as the Rio Grande). The contributions of many famous and not so famous United States plant pathologists and their involvement in international programs in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America are well documented. In no small way they have contributed to the welfare of our neighbors. In the process, they have done

much to improve our relations with friends who at times may not have considered the United States quite the disinterested close relative many have purported it to be.

Names like Niederhauser, Borlaug, Wellman, Stakman, Harrar, Fawcett, Dunlap, among many others, are recognized for contributions to the advancement of plant pathology in these countries. As Harrar well stated, "Individuals assigned to foreign programs of technical collaboration are inevitable ambassadors for the country they represent, and the success or failure of the effort rests largely upon their shoulders both as technicians and as individuals." And while they help others, their successes also help us, for the economic benefits our country reaps from their work are great. Consider the impact of tropical plant diseases on us. Coffee rust and Panama disease and Sigatoka disease of bananas, among others, significantly affect the prices we have to pay for these imported commodities. Other diseases can impact on us in a different but very significant manner. Rust and smut of sugarcane, lethal yellowing of coconut palm, hoja blanca of rice, peanut rust, and citrus tristeza, for example, not only limit the availability of these commodities in the United States but also can threaten our own plantings and the industries that depend on them.

In addition to the obvious benefits, what price tag do we place on the tremendous amount of goodwill generated toward us by these ambassadors of science? Their contributions to making peace among our friends surpass the economic benefits resulting from their work.

The personal gains are also great. Several co-workers have related to me the favorable impression a foreign assignment made on their lives and how it changed for the better the outlook and perspective of their professional career.

So our past has been good, our contributions have been many, our benefits have been great. What do we do now? Will this trend continue? Do we need a change? I, personally, can see much room for improvement. Traditionally, our involvement has consisted of sending our well-trained professionals to these countries to do the survey, the research, and sometimes the teaching. Their young people are trained in the profession at our schools, then return to their respective countries to apply their newly acquired knowledge. This was the basic concept used by the Rockefeller Foundation in its mission to Mexico, and it has worked well. Even though this approach may continue, however, a new direction must be taken.

The important question at the present time is: How many young U.S. plant pathologists are currently involved in plant pathology in these countries? Not many, according to Rodrigo Rodríguez-Kábana, APS councilor from the Caribbean Division. He told me recently how he has noticed during the last few years a lack of involvement of young Americans in the meetings and affairs of the Caribbean Division (should it be called the Latin American Division?). The only American plant pathologists usually there are the well-established professionals, with certain traditional interests in tropical plant pathology.

Maybe the word "tropical" has something to do with the lack of involvement of our young people. The word connotes to many the torrid, humid tropics, with little growing but sugarcane, bananas, mangoes, and other exotic plants. Nevertheless, traveling 200 miles south of my home in McAllen, Texas, I find myself among apple orchards and blooming potato fields in the mile-high valleys of Saltillo, Mexico. To the surprise of many, almost all of our well-known crops can be found in the temperate areas of South America.

There are many opportunities for our young persons wanting to become involved in plant disease work in Latin America. It could easily be said that the reason for not becoming more involved at an early age is lack of support and travel funds, and this could well be the case. But the reason could also be rooted deeper, in a lack of a well-defined policy from our administrators and even our own APS that would encourage such involvement. Our institutions should support travel of advanced students and young professionals to meetings, seminars, and other projects in these countries, realizing that some of the observations made and experiences gained may be applied in the United States and could more than offset the travel expenses. The Society should develop policies that detail what our involvement in Latin America should be.

Many of our co-workers prefer the glamour of Europe to the frequently less appealing areas south of us, and many budding plant pathologists cast their sights in the same direction. In many respects this is understandable, since the origin of plant pathology is deeply rooted in the countries of de Bary, Millardet, Woronin, Berkeley, and the like. But some of the problems found in Latin America are more directly related to our own welfare than many found overseas.

APS should promote among our administrators a more aggressive sabbatical program in which a change in trend could take place. And in time a "buddy system," as Hank Purdy called the camaraderie existing between some U.S. scientists and their European counterparts, would develop with many of our southern neighbors. This could perpetuate a bidirectional flow of ideas and contributions and result in the improvement of our societies. Our own PLANT DISEASE staff could contribute to increased participation by soliciting more contributions from Latin American workers; papers written in Spanish or Portuguese could be translated into English. PLANT DISEASE could devote a regular column to keep us informed on important happenings, news, and developments from those areas.

Let us continue working with our Latin American counterparts. While we encourage our younger scientists to consider working in their countries, let us particularly encourage Latin America's well-established scientists to come and share their experiences with us. It behooves us to improve on our past records. We would help them, but we would help ourselves even more. The opportunities are great. Go south, young man . . . or woman.