

**Inauguration of the
Ernest W. Sprague Experiment Station,
Agua Fria, Puebla, 27 March 2003**

To help serve the millions of resource-poor and subsistence farmers who grow maize on some 52 million hectares in the lowland tropics—the largest ecology for maize in the world—on 27 March 2003 CIMMYT inaugurated a state-of-the-art, 50-hectare experiment station in the municipality of Agua Fria, State of Puebla, Mexico. Participants for the day-long inauguration events, which comprised field visits, speeches, and a picnic lunch, included Nobel Laureate, Dr. Norman E. Borlaug; Dr. Ernest W. Sprague and his wife, Jacqueline; Undersecretary of Agriculture, Mr. Francisco López Tostado, and other state and local Mexican dignitaries; Dr. Robert Bertram, Chief, Multilateral Program Division, USAID; several members of the CIMMYT Board of Trustees, including Chairman Dr. Alex McCalla; CIMMYT Director General, Dr. Masa Iwanaga; Maize Program Director, Dr. Shivaji Pandey; local farmers; and CIMMYT staff.

Named after Sprague, Director of the CIMMYT Maize Program during 19XX-XX and currently Senior Consultant, Food Security, for the Carter Center, the new station replaces the Poza Rica facility that was destroyed when the San Marcos River flooded in October 1999. It is located at 20° N, 97° W, lies at 110 meters above sea level, and features a humid, subtropical climate with an annual average rainfall of 1,200 mm and temperatures that range from 5 to 42° C. Its soils are clayey black vertisols with a pH of 7.5. The new station also abuts the San Marcos, which supplies water for irrigation, but its topography makes it much less prone to flooding than Poza Rica.

Because of the uniquely diverse range of environments found within Mexico, CIMMYT has been able to develop and perfect crop varieties and management practices that very nearly fit most major farm settings of the developing world, simply by working on its five experiment stations and other locations in its host country. The Sprague station will serve

farmers who work small, multi-cropped holdings in the lowland tropics throughout the developing world. It is not an easy environment in which to grow maize: the lowland tropics feature relatively high temperatures, aggressive insect pests and disease pathogens, low soil fertility, frequent drought, and—in many places—acidic soils. "Work at Poza Rica contributed to the development of no less than 450 improved maize varieties and hybrids grown on millions of hectares throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America," said Dr. McCalla. "Quality protein maize also traces its development to Poza Rica. Because of factors such as the more intense disease pressure at this new location, we have every reason to believe efforts here will prove even more productive."

Evidence of that promise was patent in as participants walked among the rows of demonstration plots sown for the event and heard presentations covering a wide gamut of the CIMMYT Maize Program's work in breeding for diverse ecologies; genetic resource management and use; maize physiology, pathology, and entomology; training; and the regional offices. Many presentations aroused interest and questions; for example, the explanation of maize training officer, Dr. Julien de Meyer, of mother-baby trials, a farmer participatory varietal testing approach he helped to apply in southern Africa, as part of CIMMYT's work to disseminate drought- and low-nitrogen-tolerant maize varieties in the region. "This method is now being used by our researchers in Asia and Latin America," said de Meyer.

Undersecretary López arrived by helicopter to accompany Mr. Enrique Zunzunegi, Undersecretary of Rural Development, State of Puebla, and other dignitaries of the Mexican entourage, in a tour of many blocks of quality protein maize (QPM) genotypes, with explanations by Dr. Cordova, leader of recent CIMMYT efforts to disseminate QPM worldwide, with funding from Nippon Foundation. "Our work has delivered new QPM varieties and hybrids to the hands of farmers in 21 countries," Dr. Córdoba said. "Use of these varieties can help improve the nutrition of the poor whose diets consist heavily of maize. Partners in Mexico have contributed significantly to the development and testing of QPM."

[Goyo: Statements from Lopez and/or Zunzunegi?]

[Words of Dr. Sprague?]

Dr. Iwanaga expressed appreciation for the generous support of the State of Puebla in local infrastructure development, particularly of the approach road between the highway and the station. **[Masa: A particular statement on this or another issue?]**

Dr. Pandey thanked station head, Raymundo López XXX, for an excellent opening presentation, and López and maize breeder, Hugo Córdova, for organizing the inauguration. "I think special gratitude should be given to maize pathologist, Dan Jeffers, and maize entomologist, David Bergvinson, for land and infrastructure development, duties which they carried out in addition to their normal research responsibilities," Dr. Pandey said. "Finally, I'd like to recognize all the dedicated station personnel whose hard work helped bring the new station to fully-operational status in a remarkably short time."

The formal ambience surrounding the day's oratories loosened somewhat when, to the amusement of listeners, Dr. Borlaug recounted his first meeting with Dr. Sprague in the 19XXs. He said he found the latter in a remote area of India where locals and visitors often died of infection from tropical diseases. Dr. Sprague was in his shirtsleeves on a bulldozer, clearing the land where he had been charged with setting up an experiment station. "That's the kind of man he was and is," Dr. Borlaug said, "So it's fitting that this station receive his name."

Other items that will be linked to this report:

- A selection of photos: station views and development; field visits; unveiling ceremony; speeches.
- The text of Alex McCalla's speech (I don't have full text of any others; should we still include this one?)
- A list of special dignitaries in attendance:
Mr. Francisco López Tostado, Undersecretary of Agriculture, Mexico

Mr. Jesús Moncada de la Fuente, Director General, the Mexican National Institute of Forestry, Agriculture, and Livestock Research (INIFAP)

Dr. Sebastian Acosta Nuñez

Mr. Enrique Zunzunegi, Undersecretary of Rural Development, State of Puebla

Authorities from Municipality of Agua Fria

Dr. Norman E. Borlaug

Dr. and Mrs. Sprague

Dr. Masa Iwanaga

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