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Panama Agricultural Technology Development
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For The Period July 1, 1983--- October 1, 1983

DESCRIPTION OF PAST, CURRENT, AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES OF PERSONNEL

Dr. Pedro Argel, Pasture Agronomist

Much of Dr. Argel's effort in recent weeks has been directed toward planting much of the tropical pasture germplasm which he introduced to Panama in early May. Other pasture management studies have also been planted in the Gualaca research farm, Finca Chiriqui east of David in Chiriqui, and near Los Santos in the Azuero Penninsula. Dr. Argel has also established studies to investigate pasture fertilization practices on the highly weathered soils on the Calabacito Research Farm near Santiago.

Large amounts of additional seed of improved pasture germplasm has recently been broght to Panama by Dr. Argel from the Tropical Pastures program at CIAT. Dr. Argel will be using this seed to establish a number of pasture management and grazing experiments and to increase the seed for distribution to livestock farmers.

Four of IDIAP's young livestock researchers have recently returned from a six month training course at CIAT in Cali, Colombia. They will be stationed in different sites across Panama and will provide valuable support to Dr. Argel's and other on-going research programs. They also will no doubt benefit from working closely with Dr. Argel on a continuing basis.

Dr. Argel attended the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Agronomy in Washington, D.C. in August and then visited the Cook College campus at Rutgers University. This visit provided Dr. Argel the opportunity to meet with the Rutgers/Cornell project technical committee, other Rutgers administrators, and various support faculty from a number of departments in Cook College.

Dr. Mark Gaskell, General Agronomist

Dr. Gaskell has continued the research work which he initiated in the Cerro Punta/Caisan area of Chiriqui Province. Working closely with IDIAP agronomist Franklin Atencio, Dr. Gaskell has established onion varietal trials of 10 commercial and experimental onion varieties. These experiments have been placed in four different agroecological sites in the area and include a July 1, August 1 and September 1 planting date. Other experiments have been planted which are designed to determine the most promising among four different seedbed preparation practices. Experiments designed to investigate the relative effectiveness of five different oinion seedbed weed control practices were also initiated on collaborating farmer's fields.

In addition to the applied research focused on onion production during the rainy season, Dr. Gaskell has launched an efffort to search for low-cost on farm onion drying systems for use during the rainy season. Onion production during the rainy season presents real problems for onion growers but these problems are then confounded by the lack of a means of drying the onions that are harvested. Dr. Gaskell and collaborating IDIAP researchers have recently constructed a solar energy collector based onion drying system for onions based on designs used by USDA scientists in the midwestern U.S. for grain drying. This system uses materials available locally and at a reasonable price. The system is still in the early stages of evaluation but collaborating farmers are enthusiastic about its potential and that an effort is finally underway to deal with the problem.

Other recent research activity of Dr. Gaskell's has been directed toward the design of dry bean fertilization studies planned for the Caisan area during the coming growing season. These studies will begin in mid-October and will be conducted jointly with IDIAP researchers in the area.

Dr. Gaskell attended the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Agronomy in Washington, D.C. in mid-August and then visited Rutgers University to consult with the project technical advisory committee and departmental and college colleagues. Dr. Gaskell also presented a seminar for Rutgers faculty and students on some of the work going on in Panama and Panamanian agriculture generally.

Dr. Tom Scott, Soil Productivity Specialist

Dr. Scott spent much of July attending to the needs of on-going research which he had established in farmer's fields in Zona. These trials involve the testing of the relative advantages of three possible improved technology packages over the current rice production practices of small farmers in the area.

Dr. Scott also worked jointly with Dr. Argel and IDIAP collabortors to establish fertility management experiments for six tropical pasture species in the Calabacito area near Santiago. These experiments are potentially of great importance to Panama because of the large areas covered by these highly weathered, acidic soils. These experiments will hopefully provide insight into possible means of economically improving the productivity of these soils. In late July, Dr. Scott visited the Caisan area with Dr. Gaskell to discus dry bean fertilization experiments planned for October.

At the end of July, Dr. Scott returned to New York to visited his wife in the hospital. Dr. Scott learned during this visit that his wife is too seriously ill to allow him to return to Panama. Dr. Scott will continue to follow the progress of the ongoing work in Panama from the U.S. Meanwhile, Cornell administrators are attempting to replace Dr. Scott's technical assistance services to IDIAP with someone of similar background and training. Drs. Argel and Gaskell plan to continue with the collaborative work which they had initiated with Dr. Scott while a replacement is being sought.

RESULTS OF RUTGERS/CORNELL MEETINGS IN THE U.S.

The Rutgers/Cornell technical advisory committee met with Drs. Argel and Gaskell at Rutgers on 22 August 1983 as part of their visit to Rutgers. The group considered an agenda which included: 1)the strategy for replacing Dr. Tom Scott as rapidly and effectively as possible, and the critical focus areas of this replacement from the committee's viewpoint; 2)the content of a recent review team's report on the progress of the overall Agricultural Technology Development Project; and 3)what possible steps might be undertaken to make the overall project work plan more quantifiable.

AREA-FOCUSED RESEARCH PROGRAM.

The relocation of Dr. Gaskell to Chiriqui Province was approved by USAID/Panama and Rutgers administrators and Dr. Gaskell is planning to be permanently in place in the area by October 1, 1983. This change will greatly increase Dr. Gaskell's effectiveness in addressing the research and training needs in these areas.

Dr. Argel now has research planned in two of the priority areas and Dr. Gaskell is working in two others. IDIAP's limitations in terms of trained personnel and physical resources greatly restrict the depth of activities undertaken in all eight priority areas, particularly when one considers the Institute's responsibilities to other geographic areas and other commodity areas of the agricultural sector. There is a constant pressure upon the Institute to overextend itself and thus limit its capacity to produce sound investigative work..

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Budgetary problems continue to affect IDIAP research programs. These problems originate from a wider budgetary problem within the Panamanian government and are further confounded by the increasing political activity as Panama approaches its first national elections in 15 years. The budgetary problems cannot to a large extent be avoided, but an effort must be made by IDIAP administrators to plan for these problems and attempt to sufficiently limit the activities undertaken so as to provide sufficent resources to maintain the quality of the work that is conducted.

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