



Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Collaborative Research Support Program

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Trip Report:
University of Chapingo, the Agroecology Center at Las Cañadas,
and the TOSEPAN Cooperative, Mexico
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Executive Summary

The purpose of this trip was to gain a better understanding of the state of the science in sustainable agriculture and natural resource management (SA/NRM) in central Mexico. The Autonomous University of Chapingo (UACH) was selected as the host institution for this program based on its position as one of the leading agricultural universities in Mexico, its connections to community-based SA/NRM programs in Mexico and throughout Central America, and the existing relationship between the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) and UACH. Through meetings with UACH professors, program leaders, and students, and visits to university regional research centers, cooperatives, and NGOs, we aimed to:

1. Gather informational material for the purpose of developing case studies of notable SA/NRM programs
2. Identify and characterize major trends in SA/NRM (ie organic production, community-based watershed management)
3. Identify potential resources for the SANREM knowledge base
4. Initiate contacts for future consultation on SANREM activities

Activities

Table 1 provides an overview of activities completed during our nine-day visit. The schedule was coordinated by Dr. Jorge Ocampo of the Department of Agroecology at UACH. The following narrative provides an overview of each activity/site visit. Additional information about each site is available in supplementary reports (contact Denise Finney, denise_finney@ncsu.edu).

Autonomous University of Chapingo

Located in Texcoco, State of Mexico (east of Mexico City), UACH is one of Mexico's most important agricultural education institutions. The primary focus at the University is undergraduate education, which includes a curriculum in Agroecology. We had the opportunity to meet with a number of faculty members in the Agroecology Department, as well as those in other Departments who lead research and teaching programs related to agroecology, sustainable agriculture, and organic production. Student education includes a significant experiential learning component through work with community-based development programs throughout the country. Two field research facilities on the Chapingo campus house the majority of research related to SA/NRM: an agroecology field site and an organic production field site. Both sites focus on research relevant to small-scale subsistence agriculture.

In addition, we met with several of members of CIESTAAM (Centro de Investigaciones Económicas, Sociales y Tecnológicas de la Agroindustria y la Agricultura Mundial), an internationally recognized center for research on social, economic, and technological aspects of agriculture. Strategic themes of the center's work include analysis of agricultural and agroindustrial policy, sustainable rural development, agricultural history, and agriculture for the future. A current project is the development of local, organic agricultural markets in Texcoco and other locations in Mexico through which CIESTAAM provides assistance to transitioning growers and consumer education programs. One highlight of our time at the University was a visit to the weekly organic producers market in Texcoco.

Las Cañadas

The Agroecology Center at Las Cañadas is an independent center for research, demonstration, and education in agroecology, organic agriculture, permaculture, and biointensive food production located near Huatusco, Veracruz. Coupled with the Agroecology Center (7 ha) are facilities to support ecotourism, a dairy (30 ha), and an ecological reserve (365 ha). We had two opportunities to visit Las Cañadas, first for a tour of the Agroecology Center and then for a conversation with the founder, owner, and operator of Las Cañadas, Ricardo Romero. The center regularly hosts visiting scholars (international researchers and graduate students) and community training programs for local producers and has led local efforts to improve management of the Jamada River watershed.

Beneficio Mixto Prof. Manuel Sedas Rincon

The Beneficio Mixto Prof. Manuel Sedas Rincon is a cooperative of coffee producers in the state of Veracruz. The cooperative currently has 1,980 members, many of whom have organic, shade grown, and/or fair trade certification. The main functions of the cooperative are to operate the coffee processing center (*beneficio*), market coffee sold to the *beneficio*, provide technical assistance to grower members, and develop a strategic plan for further development of products

which may be processed and marketed cooperatively. Our time with the cooperative included a visit to one organic producer's farm to discuss organic production practices and their perceived impacts and a tour of the processing plant operated by the cooperative. The visit offered insight into the role of cooperatives in helping small producers enter international markets. We also discussed the strategies used by such cooperatives to remain competitive in light of the growing number of transnational coffee processing facilities. As reflected in the cooperative's strategic plan, their approach includes increasing product quality, diversifying production and processing, and fostering a greater sense of grower pride in both their product and the process by which it is grown.

TOSEPAN TITANISKE

TOSEPAN TITANISKE is a cooperative of small scale indigenous Nahuatl agriculturists founded in 1977. The cooperative currently has 5,800 members from 60 communities in 6 counties in the northwestern portion of the state of Puebla. The cooperative's mission is to improve the quality of life of its members and communities by using methods that improve families, communities, and the region in a sustainable manner. To overcome obstacles derived from globalization, the deterioration of the environment, and poverty, the cooperative has developed a series of long term strategies that include goals to conserve the ecology of the region and develop social, cultural, and economic projects. Current projects of the cooperative include promotion of certified organic, shade-grown, and/or fair trade coffee production by members, a savings and loan program, ecotourism, community education, and model sustainable home and farmstead.

Colegio Postgraduado

The Colegio Postgraduado (CP) is an agricultural university located near Texcoco. Formerly part of the UACH, CP is now an independent institution focused on graduate level education and research in the agricultural sciences. We had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Fernando Manzo Ramos, a member of the Department of Extension and Adult Education at CP and graduate of NCSU. Dr. Manzo provided an overview of current federal farm policy and primary drivers of change in the agricultural sector in Mexico.

Cases/programs of interest to SANREM-CRSP

Canasta de Semillas project

The Canasta de Semillas project aims to commercialize organic seed production of native horticultural species through participatory plant breeding. NCSU has access to sufficient information to write a brief case study on this project in the context of the field-level system.

Website: www.canastadesemillas.org

TOSEPAN Cooperative

As described previously, TOSEPAN is a 5800-member agricultural cooperative in the state of Puebla. The cooperative provides several opportunities for SANREM case studies, including a study of the project as a whole. At the field-level, the cooperative has developed and transferred several management strategies for the production of organic coffee and allspice that are of interest. At the farm-level, the cooperative is in the process of developing demonstration homestead that will serve as the basis for education programs on farm-level sustainability. Case

study documentation would require on-site follow-up work, to which cooperative leadership is amenable in exchange for technical assistance. Website: www.tosepan.com

Las Cañadas

The agroecology center at Las Cañadas leads numerous community education programs on sustainable crop and animal production, agroforestry, and soil conservation (see additional information above). The Center's approach to community-based watershed management represents a possible subject of a watershed-level case study. On-site follow-up work would be required to document various aspects of the watershed management initiative. Website: www.bosquedeniebla.com.mx

Mexico City Green Stamp program

The Green Stamp Program enables producers in the Federal District (Mexico City) to obtain "green" certification for use of prescribed environmental conservation practices. This certification is recognized by consumers and often results in the payment of premiums to certified producers. The program represents an innovative policy-level approach to promoting sustainable urban agriculture. Dr. Jorge Ocampo (UACH) can provide additional information on the program and its impacts. Website: www.sma.df.gob.mx

MESMIS

MESMIS is an interdisciplinary framework for sustainability evaluation that is widely used throughout Mexico and Latin America. The framework provides guidelines for the selection of economic, environmental, and social indicators for the evaluation and characterization of natural resource management systems. This tool was developed by a multi-institutional team in Mexico, led by the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Tecnología Rural Apropiada (GIRA), Pátzcuaro, Michoacán. NCSU is gathering additional information on the structure and applications of the MESMIS framework. Website: www.gira.org.mx

Resources to review for SANREM knowledge base

1. University of Chapingo electronic library
2. Colegio Postgraduado electronic library
3. *80 herramientas de trabajo participativo* (book)
4. *Abriendo Horizontes* (book on TOSEPAN)
5. Conference proceedings collected

Follow-up activities

SANREM student training program

The TOSEPAN cooperative presents several opportunities relevant to SANREM-CRSP objectives. The cooperative has expressed an interest in receiving technical assistance for several current projects. In addition, the cooperative's programs in organic production technology development and transfer provide an exemplary case study of SA/NRM at the field level. These opportunities may be combined through a graduate student overseas program with three components:

1. Through correspondence with TOSEPAN, the student, a sponsoring professor and TOSEPAN leadership will identify a technical program the student is capable of carrying out through preliminary literature review in the U.S. and small-scale

- experimentation in Mexico. (Current suggested topics include small-scale biogas digestors, potential secondary products from mamey, and biological control for greenhouse production of horticultural crops)
2. The student will spend 2 to 4 months living and working at the cooperative's headquarters in Cuetzalan, Puebla. The cooperative regularly utilizes student interns from Mexican universities (including the University of Chapingo) and therefore has the capacity to sponsor this type of experiential education program.
 3. While at the cooperative, the student will write a case study relevant to the field-level system.

We propose using SANREM funds to cover travel and international insurance expenses for the student. Additional living expenses will be covered by the student's graduate student assistantship. SANREM funds will also be used to carry out a training or informational program to TOSEPAN cooperative members on the student's technical program. The student will be required to have advanced knowledge of the Spanish language.

Fourth International Seminar on Agroecology in Mexico and Central America

Faculty members of the Department of Agroecology at the University of Chapingo will coordinate an international seminar on agroecology in Mexico and Central America in fall, 2006. The aim of the conference is to provide a forum for researchers from agricultural universities in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the US to discuss the design of interdisciplinary agroecological and sustainable agriculture research and strategies to integrate such research with community-based natural resource management programs. We would like to investigate the possibility of SANREM-CRSP co-sponsorship of this program, including assisting in the design and coordination of the seminar, participation in the seminar, and provision of funds to support participation by researchers from Guatemala, Honduras, and/or Nicaragua.

Table 1. Daily activities in Mexico

Tuesday, Nov. 15	UACH (Texcoco)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Germplasm Bank• Agroecology field research visit/class discussion• Organic Agriculture Research at UACH• Presentation on CEFS & SANREM to UACH faculty and students
Wednesday, Nov. 16	Huatusco, Veracruz	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Las Cañadas tour• Coffee Cooperative farmer visit• Regional research station visit (UACH)
Thursday, Nov. 17	Huatusco, Veracruz	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Las Cañadas presentation• Coffee Cooperative processing facility tour
Friday, Nov. 18	UACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organic field research site• CIESTAAM/Organic marketing discussion
Saturday, Nov. 19	UACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organic market visit
Sunday, Nov. 20	Cuetzalan, Puebla	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• TOSEPAN Cooperative
Monday, Nov. 21	UACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow-up discussions with UACH faculty
Tuesday, Nov. 22	Colegio Postgraduado (Texcoco)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion of agricultural policy and exemplary SA/NRM community development programs