Caribbean Conference

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF FLORIDA AGRICULTURE:
A SYNOPSIS

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ABSTRACT

There are very close bonds that exist among agricultural scientists and practitioners in the Caribbean Basin. Florida shares a common ecology and common crops with Caribbean nations to a greater degree than with most states in the contiguous United States. Thus, continuing and emerging entomological problems in Florida require sharing of information and cooperative research efforts with other members of the Caribbean community.

RESUMEN

Existen estrechos vínculos entre los científicos agrícolas y practicantes en el área del Caribe. La Florida comparte una ecología y cultivos en común con naciones del Caribe en un mayor grado que con la mayoría de los estados contiguos de los Estados Unidos. De aquí que continuos y salientes problemas entomológicos en la Florida requieren el intercambio de información y esfuerzos cooperativos de investigación con otros miembros de la comunidad del Caribe.

We truly live in an interdependent world. In entomology, perhaps more than any other science related to agriculture, both our problems and their solutions are often to be found in some other country. This is especially true throughout the Caribbean Basin where a large number of tropical and sub-tropical countries are in close proximity. The United States is clearly represented in the region through the state of Florida. This explains, to a great extent, Florida's affinity to the Caribbean and underscores the importance of international programs (Fig. 1).

Florida is a peninsula surrounded by water. It doesn't share common ecology or common crops with other states. We actually have more in common agriculturally with nations to the south than with most states in the contiguous United States. Thus, since Florida shares agricultural and urban problems related to entomology with virtually every country in the Caribbean, information is shared across international boundaries.

An opportunity exists for us to conduct cooperative research on incipient pests, those that have been controlled or eradicated but remain a constant threat, and even some that are currently of unknown importance. Hopefully, these activities will continue to serve as an early warning system and prepare researchers to deal with damaging insects that are detected within our borders. The international dimension of this work allows us to be prepared for the current and potential realities of introduced agricultural pests.

In Florida agriculture, entomologists have been repeatedly called on to solve novel problems, in record time, to save growers, producers and consumers estimated millions of dollars. This phenomenon has become an expectation rather than an extraordinary feat. Through the cooperative efforts of our international programs we are often able
to anticipate problems before they emerge and predict the outcome of available insect control practices. This shared knowledge and the collaboration of international scientists has proven its worth time and again.

Recent examples of continuing or emerging problems and allied foreign research programs include work on mealybugs, citrus blackflies, mole crickets, fire ants, sugarcane rust, citrus canker, and lethal yellowing of coconuts. We also have cooperative projects on insect-related livestock diseases; African swine fever, heartwater disease, blue tongue, and equine encephalitis have been of particular importance.

International programs also give us an opportunity to better manage our crops, develop new commodities, and open or expand markets. Increasingly populous and cosmopolitan societies of the Caribbean community (including Florida) demand a greater quantity, quality, and variety of food and fiber. Therefore, we have established cooperative efforts on various crops including winged bean, malanga, carambola, sugarcane and rice.

Specifically, the Government of Jamaica and the University of Florida have had cooperative projects in such diverse areas of mutual interest as: agricultural mechanization and dairy cooperatives with the Ministry of Agriculture; the Jamaica School of Agriculture through the Ministry of Education; Lethal Yellowing of coconut in conjunction with the Coconut Board; and, more recently, the Farming Systems Support Project and agricultural marketing with EXPO 21. We have also had individual scientists working on muck soils, sugarcane, root crops, aquaculture, and parasites to control insects and nematodes.

The Florida Entomological Society is to be commended for its decision to hold its 68th Annual Meeting in Jamaica, emphasizing the international dimension of its activities. It is a fitting recognition and a tribute to the very close bonds that exist among agricultural scientists and practitioners in the Caribbean Basin. Hopefully this is a precedent for future opportunities for the Society to be hosted by other countries in the region, to exchange information, promote friendship and further collegial relations.