

Welcome Address from the FAO Cactus Net

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As General Coordinator of the FAO International Network on Cactus Pear I wish to address my most grateful wishes to the Organizing Committee of the second PACD meeting.

Since the beginning of its activity, PACD has complemented the role of the FAO Network. The FAO Network is intended to improve technical cooperation among the country members, with a particular preference to developing countries. So far, we have organized different meetings of the whole network and its working groups. Thanks to the members who act on a voluntary basis, we have been able to organize meetings in Argentina, Italy, Mexico, Peru and South Africa concerning genetic resources, cochineal, forage, and fruit production.

In San Antonio, we will have the first meeting of the Agroindustrial Working Group, that is chaired by Prof. Carmen Saenz. I believe that the opportunity we have to share experience and scientific knowledge during the PACD meeting in San Antonio is unique. The idea of putting together scientists, farmers, operators, brokers, chefs, and, why not, consumers, is excellent. There are many organization in the horticultural field that join together scientists and farmers.

Two goals are to set quality standards for the fruit and to organize the market for production from the two hemispheres. For instance, we have international agreements between producers of kiwifruit in Chile, South Africa, New Zealand, Italy, and France that regulate the export-import flow to Europe in order to have a continuous offer in the markets throughout the year.

The international cooperation within the FAO Network made possible the publication of a technical manual, edited by FAO, with the contributions from more than 15 authors. We are also publishing the Descriptor List for cactus pear that will be a useful document for horticulturalists and breeders. In the near future, we wish to be able to produce manuals, leaflets, and even videos or CD-ROM on the most peculiar aspect of the cactus pear industry. Pest control, nopalito production, and agroindustrial uses are the most important issues. All depend on the voluntary activity of the members.

As PACD, I believe we should try to set the quality standard for the fruit and the nopalitos, which means setting a harvest maturity index that should be considered to standardize the offer. In my experience, the presentation of the fruits in the market is still poor and highly variable. If you put a box of apples, loquats, or whatever close to cactus pear, you will see the difference. In South Africa we did notice a great effort in this direction. Excellent packaging, good preparation of the fruit with different standards. PACD could act as promoter of a common effort aimed to set the quality standards, taking into consideration the different cultivars. We should also try to survey the annual production of the different producing countries. Initially, this could be done on a voluntary basis by one country-member observer. Then, we should organize a regular service to forecast annual production and even the schedule of the offer during the year. It could be an ambitious undertaking, but we need this information. I can assure

you that only a few farmers in Italy are aware of the South African, Israeli and Chilean production. I believe that the world market for cactus pear fruit and nopalito can grow only with a common effort of the producing countries.

We currently act, country by country, to get a small piece of the cake. Why shouldn't we start to increase the size of the cake, together.

You have my best wishes for a fruitful meeting.