

**Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations (FAO)
Cactus Net Activities
and Complementary
Professional Association for Cactus Development**

Judith Ochoa de Cornelli
Facultad de Agronomía y Agroindustrias
Universidad Nacional de Santiago del Estero
República Argentina

As I am going to make a special effort to speak English, I am asking you now to be gentle with me and forgive my poor language, so I invite you to start to learn my rich language, Spanish.

I always wonder whether I like cactus more for the people who work with cactus or like the people because they work with cactus.

I thank those colleagues who dedicated their effort to organizing this meeting. This is an opportunity to create a working group on cactus and I hope that more members will join it.

As you can see, we are expending a great effort to spread the knowledge about the cactus species, particularly cactus pear, which in recent years has grown significantly. FAO does not want to be like an enclave; we do want to share our efforts with an increasing number of people like you: scientists, trading companies, consumers, and farmers. All of those interested in the cactus pear must be included.

When the cactus-pear network became a working group in Chile in 1992, we were a small community, with a single enthusiastic leader, Eulogio Pimienta Barrios, who wished to organize a network of interested people in every country. Now we must realize that it is basic to develop cooperation between the PACD and FAO, which are playing a very important role in arid countries that have underdeveloped crop improvement programs.

Maybe we are going too fast, considering the small size of our community, but when I think about the potential of this crop and the role it plays in the development of arid countries, I conclude that the data are officially greatly underestimated and that we are going in the right way.

During the International Congress in South Africa in January 1996, we held a meeting sponsored by the International Horticultural Science Society. The proceedings are being published in *Horticulturae Acta*, edited by ISHS. All participants greatly appreciated the proposal to unite all the potential and actual members of the ISHS with the Cactus-Pear Working Group. We consider this a very important step for us.

The final version of the Descriptor List was introduced and approved by the members. The list will be published very soon.

All the associations like CACTUS-NET and the Professional Association for Cactus Development may become some of the best tools to spread the interest among people about our activities. A newsletter is one of them, although up to the present, contributions of the members was poor, particularly from South America. We plan to have two issues by year so we need more articles and reports as well as news and abstracts, etc., that are apt to appeal to more readers.

It is important to encourage cooperation, so that members get information interchanged through the use of the Journal, the Newsletter, and e-mail.

There are many ways to obtain or increase funds for research and development among the countries; however, many people do not know how to do it. Many times we are faced with the lack of funds to do research, because the real importance of cactus pear to the international agricultural economy, industry, and trade is underestimated. It is important that all the regional coordinators as well as all the working group coordinators contribute to making the value of cactus known; otherwise, all the efforts will be useless.

There were also many meetings to attend in the last 10 months:

September: 11-14, 1995

Round Table: "Perspectives and Problems of Cactus Pear in Argentina and Possibilities for Technical Cooperation Between Countries". XVIII Horticultural National Congress. Santiago del Estero. Republic of Argentina. Sponsored by FAO.

September 14-16, 1995

First Meeting, Professional Association for Cactus Development, San Antonio, Texas.

November 6-10, 1995

VI National and IV International Congress "Conocimiento y Aprovechamiento del Nopal." Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico.

January 29-1 February, 1996

III International Congress of Cactus Pear. Midrand, South Africa.

August 5-9, 1996

I Seminario Internacional de la Cochinilla. Ayacucho, Perú. Sponsored by FAO.

September 11-14, 1996

II Meeting of Professional Association for Cactus Development. San Antonio, Texas.

I wonder if we have enough new information or needs for personal networkers to have such many meetings. I understand that it is important to have regional meetings involving the cactus-pear workers; therefore, these meetings should continue. However, the international meetings should focus on the central organization, leaving to e-mail communication through the cactus list the task of sharing all the information. Thus, we will be able to improve the use of our time and money. As a bonus, we will be able to attend the more important international meetings.

Let us now consider how the PACD can coordinate its activities with the cactus network.

PACD and FAO Cactus net are independent but complementary organizations. The activities and the people involved in them are complementary too.

PACD should try to offer services to the professional involved in cactus-pear production and trading, while the Cactus net should improve cooperation among research institutions and develop and bring knowledge to the developing countries.

We will have many occasion to share common interests and projects, but we should avoid overlapping interests.

Since the best facilities organization is in the U.S.A., I wish we could organize a joint effort to issue an annual Journal. This will do as a convergence point.

We need an international association to join us. Many things have been done jointly over the last two years and we also understand that a foundation has been laid down for a future development. Perhaps this is the time for some proposals.

The next cactus-net meeting will be held during the IV International Congress of Cactus Pear in San Antonio, in the year 2000, but this is not soon enough. I suggest a coordinated meeting with FAO and PACD next year, perhaps in Argentina, with special activities for the agroindustrial working group. In Argentina, there is an excellent coordinator for this work and the possibility of technical travel through northwestern Argentina, where the cactus pear is more developed.

I cannot finish without mentioning our great friends Fusa Sudzuki from Chile and Ardu Wessels from South Africa, who retired in 1995. Thanks to both for what you have been doing for our network in the last year. Your friendship is a great gift for all of us. Many thanks.