

# **Education for the Use of Cactus in Northern Mexico: A Model**

M.E. Murillo-Soto and Jesus M. Fuentes-Rodriguez  
Universidad Autonoma Agraria "Antonio Narro"  
Buena Vista, Saltillo, Coah. Mexico

## **INTRODUCTION**

In a paper presented last year in this forum (Fuentes and Murillo, 1996), we visualized some scenarios for enhanced use of cactus, of which the best had education as a required variable. It was established that, to have a better future, education of people was a must in order to preserve the ecosystem. That education includes:

- \* Awareness of the use of cactus to control erosion in the northern areas of Mexico and southern areas of the USA
- \* Promoting consumption of cactus products

However, it is very easy to say what to do, but it is difficult to know how to do it. In this article we propose a methodology based on persuasion and communication principles and studies of Mexicans' value systems that establish knowledge about cultural characteristics useful in defining a sound extension program.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

We base this model on communication theories established on persuasion principles, such as:

- \* The main purpose of communication is persuasion, that is, anyone who pretends to relate to others has as a goal to convince the other person.
- \* In order for communication to be effective, persuasion must be intentional.
- \* In order to persuade, the emitter must understand the receptor very well and identify the person's values, needs, ideals, and expectations (Reardon, 1981).

### **Philosophy**

This model is based on the principle that to really educate through the transmission of information, this should be highly persuasive. The messages used to persuade should be designed with a profound knowledge of receptor's characteristics such as his/her values.

### **Objectives**

To educate people from Northern Mexico to use cactus as a tool to benefit the ecology. To educate people from Northern Mexico to consume cactus and integrate it into their diets.

To educate people from Northern Mexico to produce cactus for maintenance of their livestock

### **Syntax**

This model establishes the following phases:

To determine the characteristics of people being persuaded

To design the messages to be delivered based on the objective to be accomplished

To evaluate the effect of these messages

**Target Learner**

- The rural person as cactus consumer and producer
- The urban person as consumer of cactus products

**Educator or Persuader**

- A person knowledgeable of and convinced of the advantages of cactus
- A person with sales abilities

For this proposition we used the results of a national study by the Center of Educational Studies (Hernández, 1987) about the values of Mexicans. The study differentiated rural from urban areas; the northern, central, and southern regions; adults, youngsters, and older citizens. They synthesized the values of Mexicans from a general perspective.

In this paper we present a general overview and basic aspects that could be useful for our objectives, with a focus on the rural, urban, and northern (general) people's values; the following table summarizes the characteristics of these populations.

Urban	Rural	General
Happy	Happier	
They feel free to make decisions	Less free to make decisions	
They have control over life developments	Less control over life developments	
		They are very proud about their job
	They feel less exploited	They do not feel being exploited
	They tend to trust people more everyone	They tend not to trust
	They share values with parents more frequently	They share values with parents
Values to develop in children: Good manners Responsibility Honesty	Values to develop in children: Good manners Obedience Responsibility	
Less faith on religion	More faith on religion	
Satisfied with home life	Less satisfied with home life	
		Freedom is more important than equality
	More proud of being Mexican	They feel proud of being Mexicans

In northern Mexico and along its northern border are the highest proportions of happy Mexicans who are satisfied with their current life and are optimistic about their future. They

think their life has a meaning. They feel free to control and make decisions about their development and seldom feel alone. They look at the USA with admiration.

For most of the Mexicans, family is their motivation and has a high sense of priority. These Mexicans feel that the family belongs to them and they belong to the family. In family, they feel safe and protected; it has calm, trust, loyalty, love, etc. They could risk their own life for their family. It is the space and environment everyone looks for, even on their free time.

The image of "parents" is highly significant. They must be loved and respected, despite their behavior. Most of the population think that parents must provide the best for their children even if they risk their own welfare.

Utilizing these parameters, messages designed to promote cactus must be designed accordingly to the target group. Some of the themes and lifestyles necessary to impact changes should include:

**\* Rural people as consumers**

Images, such as a setting with a happy family where children share with their parents the same ideas about healthy eating habits. These images should include the entire family at the table using good manners and praying before having their meals. The images should emphasize the Mexican origin of cactus and the pride of consuming Mexican food. The discourse must use words such as: freedom, proud, family, home, Mexican, Mexico, trust.

**\* Rural people as producers**

Images such as a happy, free farmer with a Mexican dress, very proud about being a cactus producer for the future benefits for his land and family. He talks with his children about the responsibility to preserve and make the land profitable.

**\* Urban people as consumers**

The setting could be a western American environment, in a pleasant, home family environment, eating a combination of Mexican and American food, with the children using very good manners. The recommended words to be used could be: free, honesty, responsible, and control over life development.

## CONCLUSIONS

To accomplish significant positive changes in a cactus promotion and marketing program, it is important and recommended to know the characteristics, interests, and values of the people toward whom it is directed. In northern Mexico we need to make people aware of the advantages of cactus consumption, but first we need to be able to obtain their attention. Any promotion program must send messages involving those people and situations that serve as models for the common citizen.

## REFERENCES

- Fuentes, J. M. and M. E. Murillo. 1996. Prickly Cactus 2010: A Prospective View. *Journal of the Professional Association for Cactus Development*. 1:67.
- Hernández, M. A., R. L. Narro, G. A. Alvarez, P. Latapi, O. L. Leñero, I. C. Muñoz, S. Schmelkes, and I. Zavala. 1987. *Cómo Somos Los Mexicanos*. Centro de Estudios Educativos.
- Joyce, Bruce and Marsha Weill. 1990. *Models of Teaching*. Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Reardon, K. K. 1981. *La Persuasion en la Comunicacion: Teoria y Contexto*. Paidos Comunicacion. Mexico.
- Tanner, Daniel and Laurel Tanner. 1989. *Curriculum Development*. The Macmillan Co. New York.
- Wolf, Mauro. 1985. *La Investigación de la Comunicacion de Masas*. Editorial Paidos., Mexico