

Minutes of Texas Prickly Pear Council
22 August 1990

An enthusiastic group of 22 people attended the 22 August meeting of the Texas Prickly Pear Council. The names and addresses of those in attendance is attached. Mr and Mrs Hinojosa graciously provided homemade prickly pear jelly, homemade cookies and coffee for refreshments.

The first item of business was comments on the trip of the council to the cactus meeting in Zacatecas Mexico. Joe Martinez, the conference organizer, reported that 64 people went on the trip. He said that the Mexican people went out of their way to make it a wonderful hospitable trip. On one occasion when the tour was late, the Mexican hosts provided sandwiches to the U.S. guests. Joe said that there were lots of tours to cactus growing areas and special entertainment every evening.

Joe Martinez stressed that the Mexican organizers wish to have a joint meeting with the U.S. people to focus on marketing and promotion. The next meeting in Mexico will be in Guadalajara, but it was hoped that a joint Mexican-U.S. meeting could be organized in the Rio Grande Valley before the Guadalajara meeting.

Joe proposed a motion that the Texas Prickly Pear Council send an official thank you letter to the organizers of the Mexican conference to thank them for their wonderful hospitality. This was moved, seconded and voted for approval. Joe Martinez and William Garza will write the letter in Spanish.

Gilbert Hinojosa said that the Mexicans have been trying to improve the crop for 5 years and now they have lots of production but very little market. They want to quit selling it on the corners of the streets and begin to organize their markets. Gilbert said that it was obvious from looking at the extensive plantings on the hillsides that trainloads of cactus fruit were going to waste.

William Garza of Mission stated that Mexico needs cooperation from us on the marketing. He restated that the Mexicans were willing to come to McAllen to jointly work on marketing. Bill Maltzberger said that since it would be 4 or 5 years since Texas farmers could have significant production of cactus fruit, that we should use the Mexican fruit to establish the market. He restated that this was the major objective of the business meeting after the annual Texas Prickly Pear Council Meeting in which key Mexican and U.S. scientists were present.

William Garza also met a lady who made drinks and very different foods from the tunas. This woman went to school for 2 years in Mexico to learn how to do this. In the future there will be much more demand for cactus as a health food in Mexico and we should also try to develop this in the United States.

Sonny Martinez said that he enjoyed the meeting. His interest in attending the meeting was to learn more about feeding cactus to cattle. He was impressed to learn that forage cactus types could have 40 ton/hectare (about 20 tons/acre). He noted that cactus has a great deal of medicinal value in Mexico and this should also be pursued in the United States. Sonny stressed the need to assist the Mexican growers with marketing. He felt HEB should be contacted for a meeting in the valley with Mexican and U.S. growers.

Rene Garza reported that the Mexican scientists were working on a seedless tuna. They were doing this by both selection and by spraying the fruit with a hormone spray. Rene felt the Mexicans needed to do a lot more in packaging and sizing of similar sized fruit.

J.T. Garcia found the trip very worthwhile and was astonished to see so many kinds of tunas. J.T. made a video tape of many aspects of the conference and the fields around Zacatecas. He reported that if the cactus seed were soaked for several days in water, they would germinate in about 18 days. When you grow fruit cactus from seed it takes 6 years but if you grow it from pads it takes only 3 years to get fruit.

Lloyd Potts said that "it could never have been a more hospitable trip". He said that Dr. Barrientos asked him at least twice a day if there was anything he could do to help.

Manuel Cortez found it useful to see how the nopalitos were packaged. He also found it useful to see how the Mexicans placed hay around the cactus to protect them from freezing weather.

Jackie Carrill found one of the most interesting foods prepared was a special dish with nopalitos. The nopalitos were boiled whole in garlic water. A sharp knife was then used to cut the nopalitos in two halves similar to pita bread. Cheese was then placed between the halves and the nopalitos were then grilled.

Following the reports of the meeting in Mexico, considerable discussion was held on future objectives and goals of the Council.

Peter Felker moved that a cookbook/food committee be formed to develop guidelines for next years cookoff, to find some way of organizing the many recipes, to work on development of a cookbook and to work with food editors of magazines for promotion of nopalitos and tunas. The motion was seconded and passed.

There was also discussion that we needed to do more for the ranchers who wanted to feed prickly pear. Bruce Kraatz also wanted to investigate possibilities of cactus for wildlife habitat. There was a need to begin to register herbicides, insecticides and fungicides for use in commercial production of cactus. Joe Martinez felt, that in conjunction with the TDA, we should produce a series of pamphlets on growing tunas, feeding cactus to cattle etc.

In order to focus our attention and get more accomplished committees were formed in five major areas. After an initial 10 minutes of reviewing common opportunities, the council will break into 5 committees for about 1 hour. Each of the committees will then report on their programs to the entire council. The committees and committee chairpersons were as follows; Food and cookbook- Jeanette Mick, International relations- Joe Martinez, Pesticides- Robert Mick, Marketing and promotion- Eddie Garza of the Texas Department of Agriculture, Forage cattle and wildlife- J.T. Garcia. A list of those volunteering for the committees is attached.

The next meeting of the Council will be Wednesday September the 19th at 7:00 p.m. in the Benavides Elementary School. Note the time has been changed from the regular time of 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. to allow more time for the members from the Valley to attend. Robert and Jeanette Micks have invited use to have one meeting at their home to see the nopalito and forage species in their collection. In the future we will also meet in the Valley to avoid the members having to come all the way to Benavides (Perhaps we could alternate - every other month having a meeting in McAllen or in Benavides).