

Presidential Address

ISTRC : NECESSARY STEPS FOR ITS ACTIVATION

SIDKI SADIK

International Potato Center
P.O Box 2416
Cairo, Egypt.

On behalf of all members of the International Society for Tropical Root Crops, I would like to thank the authorities of Guadeloupe and the Republic of France for hosting this symposium and for their financial support and hospitality. Special thanks are due to Dr. L. Degras and his organizing committees for their dedication, hard work and superb arrangements.

Mr. Chairman : Scientists from many parts of the world are gathered here today to report and discuss their research findings on tropical root and tuber crops which are vital staple foods for about a third of the world population located in the less developed countries of the tropics and subtropics where poverty, malnutrition and hunger are frequently encountered.

We are also gathered here today to pay tribute to the memory of D.G. (Pat) Coursey who passed away on Dec. 31, 1983. Pat Coursey was one of the leading authorities on tropical root crops, a founding father and a staunch supporter of the ISTRC. All of us are indebted to Pat Coursey's contributions for which he will be long remembered. In recognition of his contributions, the Council of the ISTRC is dedicating this Symposium to his memory and has unanimously approved the establishment of a "Pat Coursey Prize" to be awarded for the best contribution on yams, a crop that he dedicated most of his scientific life to its improvement.

Mr. Chairman and Colleagues :

In his presidential address to the last symposium held in Peru, Dr. Donald Plucknett talked about "Tropical Root Crop in the Eighties" and the role of the ISTRC in the improvement of tropical root crops. My address today will be devoted to important business issues related to the Society's present and future. These important issues may have a long time effect on the future of the Society.

It is true that our Society has made many significant achievements since its formal inception in 1970. It formed cohesiveness and strong links between scientists from distant parts of the world. It organized seven symposia and published their proceedings. It published a newsletter. It organized regional sections, meetings and workshops. It esta-

blished working groups on important topics and finally it increased interest in root crop research and production to an international level.

While the contributions of the Society, and those who made them, deserve every credit, yet we must admit that the Society can and should achieve much more to its members, farmers and the scientific community in general. I feel that the Society because of past and present problems must face the future with a strengthened organization and commitment capable of satisfying its purpose.

The ISTRC is an important Society especially for members from developing tropical and subtropical countries. The Society is perhaps the only organization that links between scientists from developed and less developed countries where strong societies do not exist. Therefore it must survive its present problems and that can be achieved only by recognizing squarely our problems and by finding practical but effective solutions that will strengthen and vitalize the Society.

What are our problems ?

The constitution of the Society

During the Council meeting in Peru, a Council member raised the question regarding whether the Council was making decisions in line with the Constitution of the Society. The embarrassing answer was : we do not know, because we do not have a copy of the Constitution to guide the meeting. For your information, I would like to state that it took me almost six months, after I assumed the presidency, to obtain a copy of the Constitution from an old friend in Egypt. Upon reading the Constitution, I found it out-dated, unworkable and nonspecific. Furthermore, I found that some of the decisions that were taken previously by Councils and the General Meetings were unconstitutional although they were correct. I can add more adjectives to describe the present Constitution and I trust that anyone of us who takes time to read it will arrive to similar conclusions. With the help of the present Council and other long standing and respected members of the Society such as Drs. Hahn, Terry and Cock I submitted a new constitution for the Society that hopefully will meet your approval. The new proposed constitution was written taking in consideration new developments in the Society that had taken place in recent years ; it restructures the Council and defines the responsibilities of each member ; it introduces new articles to avoid many constitutional loopholes ; it describes precisely how elections should be conducted and it reduces the number of Council members that will be elected by shifting that responsibility to regional sections or geographic entities. Many new articles were also introduced in the new proposed Constitution which were missing in the present Constitution. I urge all of you to read it and compare it with the present one. The new proposed Constitution was not prepared for the sake of change, to the contrary, it was changed because there was urgent need for it. It took almost a year of hard work to prepare it before it was submitted and approved unanimously by the Council. I feel the change was necessary and by adopting it without lengthy parliamentary debates you are helping toward vitalizing the Society.

Newsletter

The Newsletter of the Society has served a very important role and purpose. For many years it has been the only link of communication between members of the Society between Symposia. Thanks to Dr. F.W. Martin of the Mayaguez Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Puerto Rico and to Dr. Ramon S. de la Pena of the University of Hawaii for their hard work and dedication in collating information, editing, printing and distributing the Newsletter free to members and non-members alike. Drs. Martin and de la Pena produced the Newsletter under difficult circumstances because our members did not contribute enough printing materials for the Newsletter. Many of our members justify their reluctance to publish in the Newsletter by the fact that the Newsletter is not a recognized publication. Perhaps they are right, and if so we must find an answer to their concern and reluctance.

Symposia Proceedings

We all recognize the perennial problem of being behind in printing and distributing the proceedings of symposia. Based on my experience with the publication of the proceedings of the 6th Symposium, I feel that many of us should be blamed for the delay. Many authors present poorly written and lengthy papers that require considerable editing. They do not follow instructions from the organizers of symposia regarding style, length and format. To make things worse they do not respond promptly to comments and queries from editors. No wonder we experience delays in publishing our proceedings. Another problem associated with the proceedings is finding an organization that has the technical and financial capabilities to edit, print and distribute the proceedings. This problem should not be underestimated. The cost of publishing and mailing the proceedings of the 6th Symposium is estimated at \$ 10/copy. Will the ISTRC be able to find organizations that can handle the preparation of future proceedings? This is something to think about especially when we look for future hosts of Symposia.

Another question that we should think about is do we need the proceedings in their present form or can we present our research findings through other methods ?

Financial Constraints

A society such as ISTRC can not operate effectively without dependable sources of funds. Up till now the ISTRC has managed to survive on a very limited budget financed by annual subscriptions in addition to donations from international organizations and governments. I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to IFS of Sweden, GTZ of W. Germany and some of the IARC's for their financial support. Although we are grateful for their contributions,

yet we must recognize that their contributions are hardly enough to support the objectives of the ISTRC. Our Secretary/Treasurer will report on the financial situation of the Society during the business meeting. Two words can describe it : very bad. Dr. Caesar will tell you that at the beginning of 1985 he had only several thousand dollars in the ISTRC's account. From this he is supposed to support travel grants, secretarial help, aid to regional sections, stationary, mailing, printing of proceedings... etc. Unfortunately, all of the ISTRC budget is hardly

enough to support the travel of two scientists to symposia.

I am very concerned about the ISTRC financial limitations for two main reasons :

- 1) The ISTRC has not been able to provide travel grants for scientists to attend Symposia. Scientists from developing countries can not easily obtain travel funds from their own governments and hence they are deprived from participating in symposia.
- 2) The ISTRC has not been able to provide meaningful financial assistance to regional branches.

The question then is how to extricate ourselves from this mud hole. I think that should be seriously considered by the next Council. Nevertheless, I will present some suggestions and solutions to this problem as well as the others mentioned before.

The above are four major problems that our Society should study urgently and carefully to find solutions. There are many other minor problems than can be handled simply by better organization and by the help of the new proposed constitution.

Proposed Solutions

A new journal :

This question has been discussed repeatedly in general meetings of the Society and a decision was never made.

I would like to suggest for your consideration the possibility of publishing a quarterly journal for the Society. Such a journal can substitute for the Newsletter especially if we devote a section to announcements, news and reviews (e.g. see HortScience format). The journal can also be a substitute for the proceedings of symposia. In addition, the journal can create possible small income to the Society and can improve the image of credibility of the Society in the eyes of potential donors. I must hasten to mention that the creation of a journal for the Society will require additional funds most of which must come from increased annual dues. Members must be given a choice however. Some may prefer to continue their membership at a reduced rate without subscribing to a journal.

For some time I have been in contact with the Indian Society for Root Crops regarding the possibility of an affiliation of their Society with ISTRC and using their journal of Root Crops as a joint publication. I have also been in touch with Cambridge University Press in England about the possibility of publishing a quarterly journal for the Society. Their response has been favorable.

Proceedings of Symposia

In case the General Meeting decides to continue the publication of the proceedings, we should try to overcome our chronic problem of its publication in several ways :

1. Contract with a permanent publishing house to edit, print and distribute the proceedings. Because of the commercial nature of publishing houses, their editorial policies and requirements are very stringent and with ruthlessly eliminate many I think that the ISTRC may lose its flexibility and some independence through this method.
2. Contract on a continuous basis with one of the international centers dealing with root and tuber crops or universities... etc. to publish the proceeding.
3. Eliminate the proceedings and instead print a book of abstract of all papers presented at symposia as practiced by many leading societies. Papers presented at Symposia can be published in the Society's journal if they meet journal's standards.

By simple analysis, the last solution is the most logical and practical.

Finance

In order for the ISTRC to meet most of its objectives such as journal publications, travel of 10-15 scientists from developing countries to symposia and other meetings, financial assistance to regional sections and other miscellaneous expenses, the ISTRC would require a 3-year budget of \$ 75,000. How do we raise funds ?

There are three international agricultural centers that are involved in tropical root and tuber crops research and at least five potential donor organizations to the ISTRC. They are : IITA, CIAT, CIP, GTZ, IDRC, FF, RF and IFS. I believe we can raise from these organizations at least \$ 60,000. If we increase membership dues to \$ 30 per three years then its possible to raise \$ 15,000 on the basis of 500 memberships. I have already established contact with the directors of IARC's and their response has been favorable but non-committal.

Society Council

The Society is in desperate need for a strong and active Council to solve its problems during the next three years. The Council must be composed of dedicated, interested people of recognized leadership who are willing to accept and perform their duties faithfully. In the past, the burden of the Society was unfairly loaded on few Council members. It is needless to say that the Society can not be run through the good will of few Council members.

I urge all members to keep these points in mind and to put the interest of the Society above every thing else when they elect the new Council.

Regional Branches

The success of the African Branch of the ISTRC proved the importance of creating more regional branches for the Society. It also proved that the mother Society was helpless in supporting its branch. The ISTRC needs to create more regional branches, yet the ISTRC must

be able to provide moral and financial support to new branches.

Mr. Chairman and Colleagues

After being a president of the Society for two and a half years, I am more convinced of its importance and the significant role it can and must play. I feel that the Society is now at a crossroads. It can succeed or it can fail. Fail it must not but succeed it must. The outcome is up to all members of the Society for the Society will be what we make of it.

And now it gives me a great pleasure to declare this Symposium officially opened. I wish all of you productive discussions.