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Author: Liburd, Oscar E.

Source: Florida Entomologist, 92(4) : 689-690

Published By: Florida Entomological Society

URL: https://doi.org/10.1653/024.092.0433

FOSTERING COLLABORATION AND LINKAGES WITH OUR LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN NEIGHBORS

OSCAR E. LIBURD
Department of Entomology & Nematology, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-0620

The title of my Presidential Address to the 2009 annual meeting of the Florida Entomological Society (FES) was carefully chosen because one of my goals as President of the Society was to amplify our presence in the region, specifically Latin America and the Caribbean. The society has always maintained fairly good connections with Latin American and Caribbean countries. In fact, we have had 4 meetings in the region within the last 15 years (Table 1). In 2004, we attempted to arrange a meeting off-shore and ended up meeting in Fort Lauderdale, which was referred to as our 5th Caribbean meeting. And, in 2008 we again attempted to arrange a joint meeting with the Colombian Entomological Society. But, due to cost and other logistic problems we ended up sending a delegation of FES professionals comprised of students, faculty and USDA scientists to Cartagena, Colombia where their annual meeting was held.

The FES society has maintained a mandate in its by-laws to institute a meeting in the Caribbean once every 5 years and to foster good relations with organizations in the region. The publication of the Spanish abstract in *Florida Entomologist* that was initiated in 1981, and the placement of *An International Journal for the Americas* on the cover of the journal were designed to increase readership in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Immediately after becoming President of the society in 2008, I immediately initiated protocols with the goal of having the 2010 or 2011 annual FES meeting at some location in the Caribbean. I revived and reestablished the Long-range and Caribbean sub-committees and asked Drs. Howard Frank and Stephen Lapointe, respectively, to chair these sub-committees. Both subcommittees worked together to conduct an informal survey of potential meeting sites for the 2010 or 2011 FES meeting and agreed on the Dominican Republic as a possible site. The decision was based on the fact that there was local interest, inexpensive hotel rates, and direct flights from Florida to the Dominican Republic. In addition, there was potential for FES amateurs and professionals to do some insect collecting on the island. However, there were some disadvantages with the Dominican Republic site including finding an appropriate hotel with sufficient space to hold an entire FES meeting, language barriers (Spanish versus English), and different ways of doing business. For instance, when meetings are held within the state of Florida, the FES business manager negotiates a contract with the hotel that contains all of the details of the meeting 6 months to a year prior to the meeting. This is not possible in the Dominican Republic because some hotels are reluctant to negotiate contracts 1 year prior to the meeting.

Some of the FES members may question the reasons to foster ties and build relationships with Latin American and Caribbean countries. There are several reasons for this, as follows:

(1) The strategic location of the state of Florida and the goals of the FES society mandate that we maintain a strong presence in the region. The Caribbean is right in our backyard and many of the pest complexes that we are currently working with have their origins in the Caribbean. One of the goals of the FES is to establish programs to prevent the introduction of these pests into the US.

(2) To provide training to pest management specialists (identification, monitoring and management) in Latin American and Caribbean countries. If individuals are not trained in effective pest management techniques, pest populations can explode increasing the threat to US agriculture.

(3) To facilitate the collection of specimens and search for natural enemies. Many of our taxonomists and pest management specialists who are FES members have spent time in Latin America and the Caribbean collecting specimens and searching for natural enemies. In cases where the pest source of origin is in Latin America or the Caribbean the natural enemies that regulate its population are also there.

(4)To establish collaborative research to study the biology of insects in their native countries. In most cases, Florida residents can only spend a limited amount of time in these locations. This mandates the need to be working with local scientists who can carry out the research in our absence.

(5) To provide better food security in the region. Insect pests and disease problems account for up to 41% of the losses in food production in developing countries. As an FES entomologist we can volunteer our services or provide services at reduced cost to provide better food security for farmers in the region.

Background on Caribbean Agriculture

Caribbean agriculture is complicated because it is characterized by subsistence farming, where several crops are grown and many different types of livestock are reared. This situation generates a multitude of pest problems. In many instances, there is only one entomologist serving 5-10 islands. The shortage of trained pest management personnel produces ineffective programs that result in major pest outbreaks. The problem is augmented by the semi-tropical environment in the region, which facilitates year-round growing season and continuous generations of pests.

Fortunately, the newly formed Caribbean Pest Diagnostic Network (CPDN) will be able to take advantage of the Distance Diagnostic and Identification System (DDIS) developed by the University of Florida to help in the identification of pests and pest-related problems in the Caribbean. Several of our FES members including Dr. Amanda Hodges, Dr. Norm Leppla, and Mr. Lyle Buss are involved in this program.

Ways the FES can Improve Entomological Services in Latin America and the Caribbean

- Identify research priorities and possibly areas of cooperation. For example, prioritize the pests associated with various systems and develop contingency plans to manage such pests in the event of outbreaks.
- Provide technical expertise to various islands through organizations such as the Florida Association for Volunteer Action in the Caribbean and the Americas (FAVACA); a voluntary organization established in Florida to address technical issues in the region.
- Establish formal linkages with regional and international organizations that are operating in the Caribbean, e.g., Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and Food and Agriculture Organizations (FAO). This would include participation in joint projects, sharing of research and study tours.
- Encouraging academic institutions to undertake research projects in the Caribbean
- Invitation (possibly through USDA-APHIS) to Ministries of Agriculture to participate in training programs.
- Put protocols in place to help strengthen plant quarantine throughout the region to keep out pests that could be introduced.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I acknowledge Augustine Merchant, coordinator of IICA in St. Kitts-Nevis for providing information on technical requirements for the Caribbean and Dr. Lisa Myers, Senior Research Director for Plant Protection, Jamaica Ministry of Agriculture. I thank my graduate students Elena Rhodes for reading the first draft of the speech and Teresia Nyoike for assistance in preparing the slides and organizing the format of the speech.

TABLE 1. FES MEETINGS HELD IN LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES.

	Year	Location of Meetings
1st	1985	Ocho Rios, Jamaica
2nd	1990	Cancun, Mexico
3rd	1995	San Jose, Costa Rica
4th	1999	San Juan, Puerto Rico