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Seed Teams Help...build a better world

H. D. Bunch

SEED TEAMS HELP . . .

Agriculturalists from throughout the world come to the U.S. each year to study principles underlying improvement, distribution and use of good seed.

build a better world

by H. D. Bunch

The Author

H. Dean Bunch is professor of agronomy at Mississippi State University, State College, Miss. Dr. Bunch, in charge of the Seed Technology Laboratory, has worked closely with the ICA seed team program since its beginning. Here, he gives testimonial to the value of such international efforts to build a better world through agriculture.

TWO BASIC NEEDS for a successful crop are *(1)* good soil and *(2)* good, healthy seed.

Most farmers have little choice in the type of soil they must till. They take what they have and improve it.

Nearly all farmers, however, do have a choice in the quality of seed they plant. And, choosing high quality seed of an adapted variety or hybrid is often the cheapest single way to increase total production on a given area of land.

This fact has no national boundaries. It is just as true in Thailand, Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Greece, or any other country, as it is in the United States of America.

Since food shortage is a most critical problem in many countries of the world, seed improvement and the increased use of quality seed would seem to present a basic means of raising living standards.

To help train key personnel in those nations receiving foreign aid, the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and the International Cooperation Administration (ICA—now the Agency for International Development) cooperated with certain land-grant universities in initiating a "Special Course in Seed Improvement." This program began in the summer of 1956 and has been repeated each year.

The 10-week course, which started at Mississippi State University on June 11 this year, now is the seventh such session. To date, 80 persons from 31 countries have participated. Half of the course is presented by staff members of the Seed Technology Laboratory at MSU. Here, instruction and actual laboratory practice is offered in seed processing, testing, drying, storing, seed treating and other technological problems.

The remaining 5 weeks are spent "on the road." This international team visits land-grant universities in Louisiana, Nebraska, Illinois and Minnesota where studies are centered about the increase and distribution of improved varieties and hybrids.

During their travels through the U.S., the men study the organizational and financial structure of foundation seed and certification programs. Also, they observe and participate in demonstrations and gain first-hand experience in roguing seed production fields, detasseling hybrid corn, inspecting storage facilities and in carrying out many other tasks involved in the production of good seed.

Under guidance of university personnel, course members visit seed pro-

J. C. Hackleman, public relations officer of the Illinois Crop Improvement Association, briefs group. H. V. Geib, U.S. team leader, stands at right.

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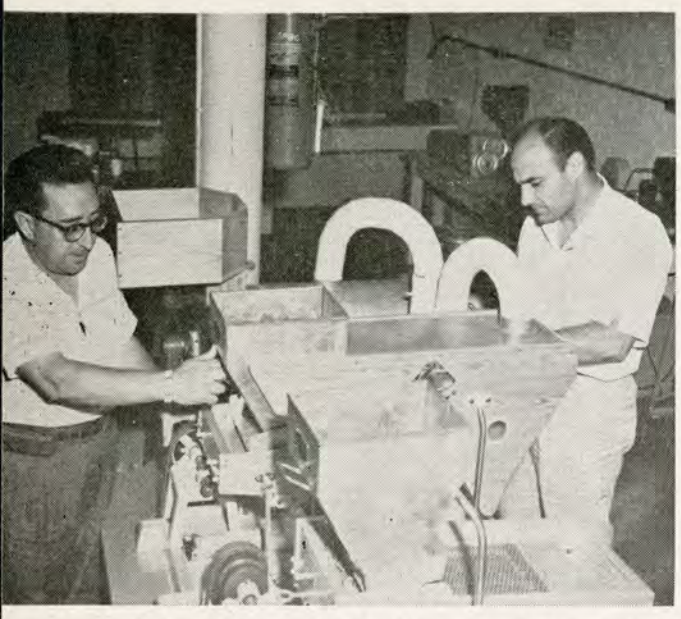
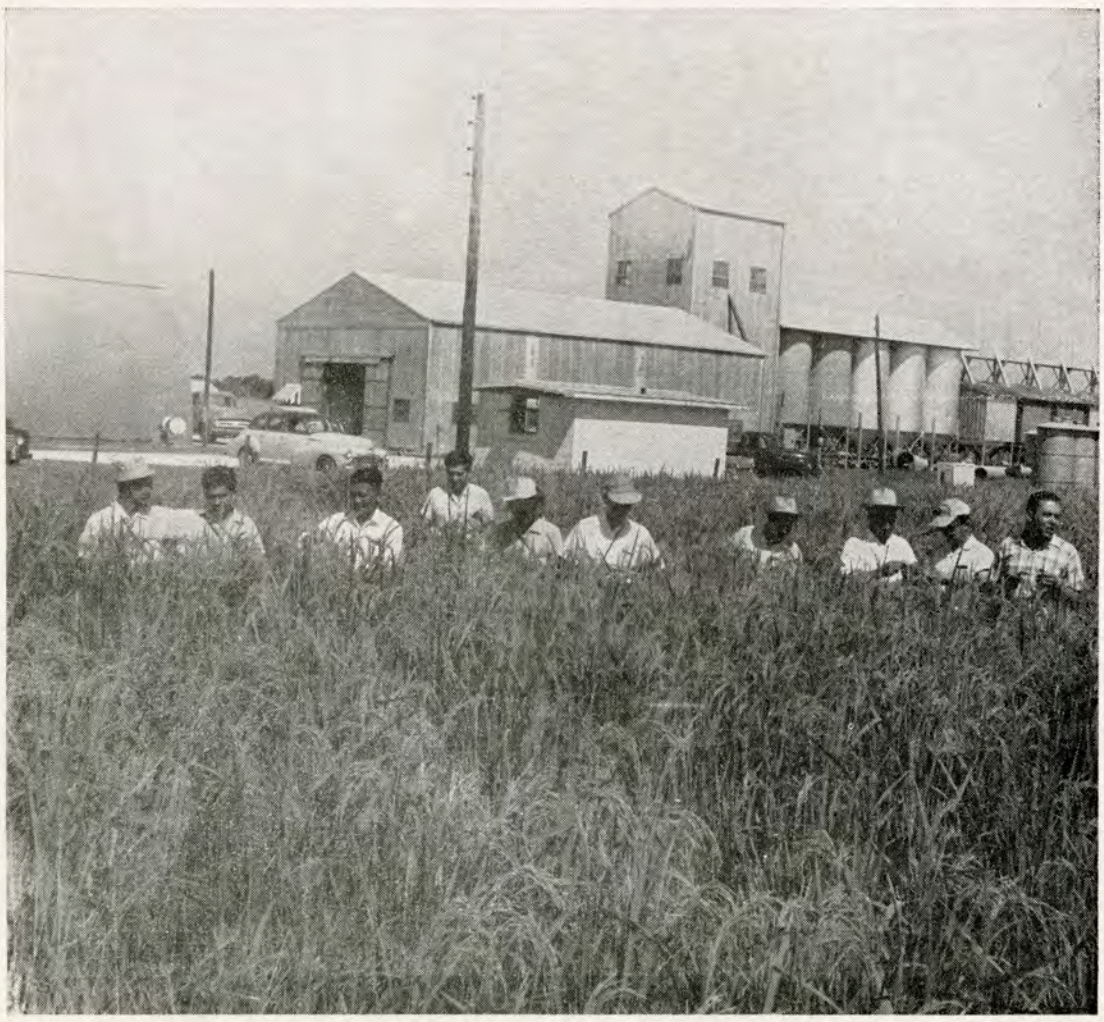


Seedsmen from Chile and Argentina work with a model seed cleaner at MSU Seed Technology Laboratory.

Two men from Central America learn about a seed treater from Charles Vaughn of the Mississippi seed lab.



ICA-FAS Seed Improvement Course participants also receive training in the practical aspects of seed improvement work. Here, one team rouges a rice field in Louisiana.

duction farms, commercial seed companies and equipment manufacturing plants, as well as local scenes of interest. In Michigan, the A. T. Ferrell Company is host. Here the group observes the manufacture of Clipper cleaners, visits the Crippen Manufacturing Company, and the establishments of various seedgrowers and processors.

During one year the course was divided so that a special section in Western seed production could be offered. Most of this instruction and field work occurred in Washington, Oregon and California.

The entire program is directed toward the establishment of basic principles underlying the improvement, distribution and use of good seed. Travel through the states under organized instruction illuminates the various methods by which the several states approach these problems. Since any one method cannot be used in its entirety in all other areas, an important part of the course deals with the adaptation of systems and ideas to conditions in those individual countries that are represented.

The thinking and farsightedness behind this endeavor can be attributed largely to Mr. Joe Walker, formerly of the ICA in Washington, D.C. (now in Sudan), and Mr. Dennett Guthrie of FAS. These men pooled their ideas and talents to create an effective, specialized seed training program.

To be sure, their efforts were combined with those of staff members at Mississippi State—who provided information about specialized seed technology facilities, and others in Minnesota, Illinois, Nebraska and Louisiana —who provided a review of their excellent seed improvement programs and training in a large number of crops.

It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of this type of training. However, during travels to 30 other countries in the past 3 years, the writer has visited many of these "former students" and found that they are applying diligently the knowledge gained from this course.

Many are building sound seed programs under the most difficult conditions. Often they have little good seed, no seed producers, no seedsmen, no seed laws; in fact, no seed industry at all.

In spite of these serious handicaps, seed programs in many countries are progressing rapidly. If this training course is helping to alleviate hunger pains any place in the world, its success rests as much with the high caliber of individual selected for training as with the training itself. The great majority of these scientists and technicians are highly intelligent, congenial and dedicated to the task of benefiting their countrymen.

No attempt will be made to discuss the pros and cons of foreign aid. But it is the considered opinion of this writer that programs such as the one described here, can help the U.S. as much as they help the recipient country, and at a fraction of the cost of many other programs.

Having citizens of other countries study and visit in our country is probably the most effective way of creating the best image of America abroad. Once a man has lived with the truth, he is much less susceptible to propaganda based on half-truths. ★

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