

Thus, the action program of the Puebla Project was organized initially to include four major components: (a) varietal improvement of maize, (b) research to develop efficient recommendations on maize production practices, (c) assistance to farmers in proper use of new recommendations, and (d) coordination of the activities of the service agencies, the Project team, and the farmers. Another component – socio-economic evaluation – was added during the first year.

A key concept within the philosophy of the Project has been that the production and dissemination of information are parts of a development continuum that should not be compartmentalized in program operations. Constant interaction among staff members and feedback of information have been viewed as integral functions of the Project – from planning of research through delivery of findings to farmers and evaluation of results.

Thus, it was planned that the staff consist of a small team of capable, well-trained scientists with an adequate budget and freedom to operate at any political or technical level. The team lived and worked in the Project area, cooperating closely in conducting the field trials, demonstrations, farmer meetings, etc.

The selection and training of team personnel was seen as the crucial element in determining success. The work of the team was expected to be exceptionally arduous due to heavy demands by the large numbers of farmers in the Project area. In making decisions, team members would have to take into account, simultaneously, knowledge and expectations related to weather, attitudes of farmers, institutional organization, the personal goals of individuals in key positions, and other factors. Great skill is required in assessing and giving appropriate weight to these varied and interrelated factors. Thus, strong effort was given to acquiring the services of well-trained, capable, and innovative young agriculturalists.

PREREQUISITES

Initially, the two conditions considered necessary in selecting the Project area were: an ecological environment that would permit substantial yield increases, and a political environment that would be favorable toward Project objectives.

The main requirements of the physical environment were: (a) rainfall and temperatures adequate for good-to-high maize yields. The total amount and distribution of rainfall should be such that maize would suffer severe drought damage in less than 10 percent of the years and moderate damage in no more than 30 percent of the years. There should be only light frosts, limited to the first quarter of the growing season; and (b) reasonably deep, permeable soils free from toxic amounts of salts.

The essential aspect of the political environment was that government should strongly support the Project operations and have the will and the power to modify existing policies and agencies as necessary. This factor was especially important in respect to availability of key inputs, orderly marketing of the grain, and the relationship between the cost of principal inputs and the price of grain at the farm.

As the Project has evolved, these aspects of the ecological and, to some extent, the political environments have been recognized, not as prerequisites, but as factors that influence the strategy to be used in a particular program. The basic approach used in Puebla should be applicable in most regions of the world, when adequate attention has been given to the specific environmental, social, and economic conditions in areas where the approach is to be used.