

Globalization of Teaching and Research

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These roundtable discussions are considered very important by the organizers of this conference, due to the fact that the opportunities for discussion and exchange of ideas have been somewhat limited during the more formal presentations of this fruitful gathering. Therefore, the methodology for this session is very simple: we are going to have a dialogue. For this reason, long monologues are strictly forbidden. Fortunately, within our academic life, dialogue is a recognized tool of scientific growth.

It has been emphasized by other speakers during this conference that globalization is a fact of life in terms of communications, trade, and capital movements. We can add here a sort of global trend for migration from poor countries to developed ones. Globalization means challenges, opportunities, and also problems. The idea is to take advantage of this process in the best possible way, to increase the participation of all countries in the benefits of social and economic development.

Allow me to make some brief comments on this issue from a Mexican perspective. Our international trade is today \$250 billion a year. In the last five years, this has meant new technologies and important international capital coming into the country, new jobs, and new challenges in terms of quality control and well-trained human resources. One cannot forget that this tremendous change has taken place while we have been facing and solving our most difficult financial crisis of modern times: the so-called “tequila crisis.”

In terms of agriculture, our international agricultural trade has been increasing steadily during the last five years, but not at the same speed as manufacturing products. Our balance of payments is positive. Nevertheless, this important process has not yet touched 20 million Mexicans living today in a very painful subsistence economy. As a framework for this information, I should say that our country had 50 million inhabitants in 1970 and has 100 million today. Due to this demographic expansion, we now have, in absolute numbers, a larger peasant population today than we had several decades ago when we initiated the agrarian reform after the Mexican revolution.

The graduate agricultural school where I teach and am in charge of international affairs was established in 1959 to face production issues related to meeting the country’s demographic requirements. The concepts of agro-industry, marketing, and agribusiness, which are new priorities closely linked to the globalization process, were not then an important part of our teaching and research system.

We are trying to adapt ourselves to this new reality without ignoring the other side of the coin: our rural poor. This is not an easy task. I will give you some examples.

To deal with the need for teachers, we are sending graduate students to MidAmerica International Agricultural Consortium (MIAC) universities to be trained in food processing and international marketing. We need young professors and the sooner the better.

We are working together with Ohio State University to create a new program in agribusiness. The main goal of this endeavor is to answer the need felt by new Mexican agricultural entrepreneurs who are operating under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

We are fostering an exchange between American and Mexican agricultural business people. In September 1999, several Mexican agricultural entrepreneurs will participate in the Farm Science Review organized by the College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences of The Ohio State University.

Along with the Regional Organization for Plant and Animal Health (OIRSA), we are programming a set of short courses on international laws and regulations vis-a-vis food security and related matters in Latin America.

To strengthen the understanding of Mexico by American students, we are offering a summer credit course related to agriculture and international affairs within the framework of NAFTA. We hope that next year students from MIAC will participate in this endeavor.

In terms of research, we are trying to establish a joint venture to deal with the internationalization of environmental costs within the prices of tropical or subtropical agricultural products. We believe that this applied research, if done well, can have an important impact on the development of rural productive areas in developing countries. This research could help to elaborate the human and economic aspects of the agricultural globalization process.

Since the formation and training of human resources is an essential element of the agricultural issues within the globalization framework, the ideas that we can exchange here and their follow-up that we can agree upon could become another important effect of this conference. Such agreement will be a good example of working together for change.