

2014-01-31 Meeting Notes

Hal Culberson - ND Kroc Institute:

- worked with soybeans in Bangladesh 92-95; wife is soybean agronomist
- soybean program started in 1970
- Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)
- cultivated vs. indigenous varieties of crops
- soybeans have 30-40% protein; cultivated to battle malnutrition; rice and lentils were the core of the diet (lentils low in protein)
- program: production → upstream and downstream activities; look at whole value chain
 - consumption
 - marketing
 - seed procurement
 - inoculum (bacteria soybeans are planted with)
- problem was consumption: people didn't want to eat soybeans
 - started kitchen lab to develop soybean recipes
 - recipe trainers would go around to the various villages
- is there enough in the market → are you going to go out of your way to get this [amaranth]?
- chicken farms were potential customers
 - didn't help nutrition of the poor
 - but poor farmers liked chicken forms (steady demand for soybeans)
- MCC ended the program about about 30 years → set it on its own, self-sustaining market
- can we use amaranth oil to get this into the diet?
- What could you have done differently?
 - have an anthropologist - someone who understands the culture, the food, cooking, etc.
 - the chicken market saved the project but no one saw that coming
 - find other uses of soybeans in the beginning?
 - more research beforehand might have stopped the whole project
 - overall: has probably improved nutrition in Bangladesh
 - know where your market is going to be and be very cautious in your assumptions of how people will change their habits, especially in rural areas
- What are your thoughts about exports?
 - What is your goal? If nutrition, exports don't necessarily help. If improving income for farmers, could be a good way to go
 - It is really difficult to set up new markets → much easier to use existing markets
 - sold through other organizations: 10,000 villages, department stores, etc.
 - farmer's may be sensitive to the possibility of an international market could dry up overnight
- Trade-offs of market approach
 - want to look at how they sell crops normally → most rural farmers are quite conservative/hesitant to try something new
 - introduce farmers to buyers to boost their confidence in trying a new crop
 - amaranth trade into Mexico?
- Anything to know about CRS/Caritas/Bishop relationship?
 - important to be respectful/understanding
 - very easy for outside groups to make a lot of assumptions that make no sense to the locals
 - example of indigo production in Bangladesh

- What cultural associations are there with amaranth in Guatemala?
 - the indigenous/Mayans might be more of the poor farmers we are working with → what associations might they have with amaranth
 - Bangladesh ~20 years till insiders were really pushing it → needed so they have ownership of the project
 - **Scope of our project**
 - What is our goal?
 - To improve nutrition?
 - To improve the wellbeing of poor Guatemalans? (may be expanded to include things other than nutrition)
 - To successfully introduce amaranth?
 - Once we have our goal, what are solutions other than our scope of work (amaranth, etc.) that can address this goal?
 - Once we're on the ground in Guatemala, we need to keep an eye out for other problems that we are equipped to solve.
 - "They don't care about your development work if their farm is flooded, so you need to address what's first."
 - farmers are really sensitive to complexity in the growing process
 - talking to farmers is important
 - don't focus just on amaranth, but try to get a picture of the bigger picture
 - we need to do some research on the practical psychology of habit forming and changing (how are we going to incentivise the behavior we want?)
 - What is a reasonable goal for us in our two week time in country?
 - Get a temperature reading on a few things
 - Is there a market?
 - How likely is it that this market will really pick up on this? Are there cultural/ social/political reasons this market might not take off?
 - There might be an agricultural research center in Guatemala for amaranth → this is someone you need on your side

Discussion

- BOTFL class as a training ground
 - we need to do a better job explaining the meaning behind the terms we are using
 - Kool-Aid commercials
- What's our focus?
- Issue tree
 - might be good to reconnect with CRS now that we have our heads wrapped around the issues
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Action Items

- Jess
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- Adam
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- Carolyn
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- Kerri
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- David
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- Matthew
 - pretty up issue tree
- All
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