

## **CFC/ISO/20 project gets excellent rating**

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The 5-year CFC/ISO/20: Sugarcane Variety Improvement in Southeast Asia and the Pacific marked a sweet end after sugar experts from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand gave it a thumbs up for meeting all targets set.

"We are very happy over the results of the evaluation because it demonstrates that CFC/ISO/20 has accomplished its objective to deliver programs that will ultimately benefit the region's sugarcane producers," PHILSURIN Director General and CFC/ISO/20 Project Manager Leon Arceo said.

Giving ratings which ranged from "very satisfied" to "satisfied", two representatives each from the 4 collaborating countries noted the program's success, expressing their satisfaction with all outcomes in a project evaluation session. The activity capped the 5-day International Sugar Development Forum and CFC/ISO/20 Project Results Dissemination Workshop hosted by PHILSURIN, the International Sugar Organization and the Common Fund for Commodities from April 24 to 28.

The verdict: all targets were met, and in many cases exceeded, including (1) a regionally-coordinated exchange of elite varieties and breeding lines of sugarcane; (2) an enhanced germplasm collection and improved sugarcane varieties adapted to participating countries' major ecological conditions; (3) the sharing and dissemination of results within and outside the region, (4) upgraded technical research capabilities of national sugarcane breeding institutions; and (5) sharing new varieties and elite breeding material with other sugar-producing countries.

Following a 5-point scale with 5.0 as the highest possible score, Bangladesh gave the project a perfect rating for all 5 objectives, followed by Indonesia at 4.6. Thailand and Malaysia ascribed scores of 4.2 and 3.6 respectively. The Philippines did not participate in the evaluation process as PHILSURIN was the Project Executing Agency. CFC Project Manager Eltha Brown and ISO Senior Economist Lindsay Jolly supervised the evaluation exercise.

"Questionnaire responses show that among 8 project components, all member countries agree that the variety exchange program is the most important," Mr. Arceo said. Between 2001 and 2004, over 56 cane varieties of diverse genetic backgrounds were shared among the 5 collaborating countries. The promising varieties are expected to help enrich the genetic base for hybridization in the region.

An enriched germplasm collection, as well as the development of human resources, ranked second in importance in the roster of project outputs. Representatives believe that the CFC/ISO/20 project has accelerated the transfer of sugarcane technology and know-how among consortium members by means of training seminars and visits to member countries.

Sharing the 3<sup>rd</sup> spot in the list of components deemed most vital by members are the exchange of ideas and experience among countries; the upgrading of research facilities; and the good relations among participating countries.

Participants were also asked to offer suggestions on how to improve similar projects. One respondent said that a study to develop cane varieties which produce high total sugar at an earlier stage must be conducted to support the bio-alcohol industry. Another representative suggested that the sustainability of

post-project impact be included in the project design because sugar is a relatively long-term crop. Topping the list of member countries' project ideas are visits to more sugarcane producing countries to foster skills and the exchange of ideas.

Also highlighted in the project evaluation session is the need for a continued collaboration among participating countries. Member-countries believe that networking is key to maximizing the undertaking to come up with better varieties.

The CFC and the ISO took the opportunity to laud PHILSURIN for a job well done as project leader. "PHILSURIN has to be congratulated for being such an efficient and professional Project Executing Agency. This project will contribute to improving and sustaining the market competitiveness of the region by enhancing the productivity and quality of sugarcane and will bear fruit in many years to come," ISO Executive Director Peter Baron said.

For CFC's Ms. Brown, CFC/ISO/20 is "one of the best run and best implemented sugar projects." One of 9 sugar development programs funded by the agency, the project was endorsed by the ISO in 2000.

In sum, the US\$2 million project consolidated the resources and expertise of top sugarcane research institutions from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand to increase sugarcane productivity in the region. The program resulted in a string of accomplishments in the areas of germplasm exchange, disease indexing and quarantine, as well as biotechnologies that enhance the breeding process.