



September 2020

Origin and History of the National Pepper Conference

In August 1972, Dr. Ben Villalón, Plant Virologist-Breeder TAES, Weslaco visited Dr. Tom Zitter, Plant Pathologist, I.F.A.S., Belle Glade, Florida to discuss *Capsicum* spp. (pepper) virus diseases and breeding programs. Discussion led to the idea of organizing all *pepper research scientists* to exchange information and germplasm of mutual interest, Zitter consequently gave Villalón a partial list of federal and state pepper workers. Villalón compiled a list of 65 workers and mailed a questionnaire to ascertain potential interest in a pepper conference for spring or fall 1973. The positive response was tremendous, and the list of cooperators grew to 120. The first National Pepper Conference (NPC) was held in McAllen and Weslaco, Texas, on April 25, 1973.

Among the 100 persons attending the first conference, twenty *research scientists* from California, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Texas presented their latest research findings. Of the speakers, 17 had doctorates and this group included plant pathologists, breeders, horticulturists, geneticists, physiologists, and virologists. Virus diseases and their control was the most intensively discussed subject as a variety of pathologists and breeders discussed their work. Other research areas covered during that first session included bacterial diseases, breeding, mechanization, processing, cultivar evaluation and physiology. All pepper types including *bell*, *long green/red chile*, *high color paprika*, *ancho*, *pimiento cayenne*, *tabasco*, *jalapeño*, *yellow pickling*, *serrano*, and *cherry* types received their share of attention.

Objectives of the National Pepper Conference

During the conference, an organizational committee composed of: Dr. Paul Smith, Professor, University of California at Davis; Dr. Tom Zitter, Plant Pathologist, I.F.A.S., Belle Glade, Florida; Dr. Lowell Black, Plant Pathologist, L.S.U., Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Joe Freeland, McIlhenny Company, Avery Island, Louisiana; Phil Villa, Breeder, Heublein Inc., Oxnard, California; and Dr. Ben Villalón, Plant Pathologist-Breeder, TAES-Weslaco, Texas, was selected to help determine direction of future pepper conferences.

The committee made the following recommendations:

- The pepper conference should be organized as the Pepper Improvement Committee (later changed to National Pepper Conference - NPC, making it easier for USDA and state scientists to attend).
- The conference should be held once every two (2) years.
- Conferences should be held in the major production areas such as California, Florida, Louisiana, New Mexico, New Jersey, Georgia, Texas, etc.
- Sub-committees, representing specific discipline areas, i.e. *breeding, horticulture, processing, pathology*, etc., should be organized and meet whenever necessary.
- NPC would adopt, as a parent organization, the *Pickle Packers International, Inc.* (PPI). PPI would serve as a central clearing-house for maintaining a central bank of names of the committee membership. PPI would provide and exchange of information between meetings, and work with the appointed chairman for coordination.
- The committee, with approval of all members, would select the next meeting site and appoint a local area coordinator as chairman.
- There would be no officers or annual dues, totally non-profit.

Importance of the National Pepper Conferences

Economically, peppers are no longer considered a minor crop and have merited attention by several federal and state experiment stations, as well as other public and private research and development agencies. NPC has served as an extremely useful tool in rapid dissemination of capsicum research information. Subsequently, other pepper-promoting groups have organized, such as:

- *California Pepper Improvement Foundation,*
- *California Pepper Commission,*
- *Texas Pepper Foundation,*
- *New Mexico Chile Improvement Foundation,*
- *New Mexico Chile Commission,*
- *International Connoisseurs of Green and Red Chile at Las Cruces,*
- *New Mexico and Florida Pepper Commission.*

The NPC membership consists of over 2,100 names and many maintain membership in one or more of the smaller groups.

National Pepper Conference's Scope

Virus diseases and breeding for virus resistance continue to be the primary concern of the capsicum industry. The organization continues successfully without officers, structure, dues, etc. Interest in *capsicum* improvement and diversity continues as the demand for better peppers increases annually.

NATIONAL PEPPER CONFERENCES HELD SINCE 1973

Date	Site	Coordinator	Attendance
May 1973	Weslaco, TX	B. Villalón Texas Agricultural Experiment Station	120
January 1975	West Palm Beach, FL	<i>T.A. Zitter</i> University of Florida, Belle Glade	110
September 1976	Davis, CA	<i>P.G. Smith</i> University of California	110
September 1978	Baton Rouge, LA	<i>L.L. Black</i> Louisiana State University	105
September 1980	Las Cruces, NM	R. Nakayama New Mexico State University	200
June 1982	San Miguel de Allende, GTO, México	J.A. Laborde INIA, CIAT, Celaya, Guanajuato, México	120
August 1984	Beltsville, MD	<i>R.E. Webb</i> USDA, ARS, Beltsville, MD	95
June 1986	Weslaco, TX	B. Villalón Texas Agricultural Experiment Station	160
June 1988	Raleigh, NC	<i>D. Sanders</i> North Carolina State University	110
July 1990	Wilmington, DE	<i>Ed Kee</i> University of Delaware	95
August 1992	Monterey, CA	<i>R.W. Scheuerman</i> University of California	200
August 1994	Las Cruces, NM	<i>P. Bosland</i> New Mexico State University	250
December 1996	Naples, FL	<i>D. Maynard</i> IFAS, University of Florida, Bradenton	300
October 1998	San Antonio, TX	B. Villalón Texas Agricultural Experiment Station	200
November 2000	Lafayette, LA	<i>C. Motsenbocker</i> Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge	200
November 2002	Tampico, TAM, México	J.M. Gochicoa Tierra Fértil de las Huastecas	514
November 2004	Naples, FL	<i>Gene McAvoy</i> University of Florida-Hendry Co Extension	200
May 2006	Palm Springs, CA	<i>Glen Fischer, Saticoy. Foods</i>	177

September 2008	Atlantic City, NJ	<i>Andy Wyenandt, Rutgers Ext.Serv. NJ</i>	150
August 2010	Las Cruces, NM	<i>Paul Bosland, NMSU</i>	150
November 2012	Naples, FLA	<i>Eugene McAvoy University of Florida-Hendry Co. Extension</i>	183
November 17-20, 2014	Viña del Mar, Chile	<i>Maria Teresa Pino Q, INIA, Santiago, Chile</i>	225
June 15- 17,2016	Trujillo, Peru	Andre Casas, Chairman, UNALM, Renzo Gomez, Chairman, ADEX	525
November 4- 7, 2018	Fort Myers, Florida	Gene McAvoy, University of Florida-Hendry Co. Extension	150
September 2020	Tucson / Pearce, Az	ED CURRY, PEARCE, AZ.	POSTPONED UNTILL 2021

COUNTRIES THAT ATTEND: CANADA, MEXICO, USA, US VIRGIN ISLANDS, BOLIVIA, BRAZIL, CHILE, COLOMBIA, EL SALVADOR, PERU, BELGIUM, PORTUGAL, SPAIN, CHINA, HUNGARY, INDIA, INDONASIA, ISREAL, JAPAN, KOREA, PAKISTAN, NIGERIA.

The Texas Pepper Foundation was organized by Dr. Ben Villalón in 1976. The first Texas Pepper Conference was held in Weslaco in 1977 following alternate years.