Building a South American Network

By Jan McCoy

Mutual trust is an important factor when building international relationships—in business or politics. For Barbara Timmermann, a University of Arizona associate professor of arid lands studies and pharmacy, scientific exchange between countries is an important first step toward building that trust.

Her research, collaborations and network of scientific contacts in South America are making important inroads toward possible future economic alliances with the United States.

"Countries wanting to do business with another country don't just go in and start knocking at doors; relationships have to be built. The people who already are 'in' are the ones who get first chance. That's why I am interested in developing research connections in South America," says Timmermann, a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's U.S.-Chile and Western Hemisphere Cooperation Program, which promotes research between the United States and Chile.

"The Chilean government, particularly, is supportive of its scientists, and I've made many contacts there," she says.

"I've gotten a lot of support from the Chilean ambassador to the United States (Patricio Silva Echenique) and also from the Chilean Academy of Science. The ambassador is excited by the work we are doing now in Chile."

Timmermann has two ongoing research projects in Chile. She is working with the University of La Serena to examine the native vegetation of Chile's arid lands for specialty chemicals and biologically active materials. Her work with the Catholic University in Santiago is designed to identify and develop an arid land cash crop for the hyperarid desert of northern Chile. In addition, she is planning a third research project that will involve Japan.

"This is a good way to work with people and start to develop trust," Timmermann says. "When you work on a small project, you develop a network of people. Then, when the next project comes along, you continue to seek out the people you know and trust. You don't go to somebody new."

Timmermann was a member of a UA delegation to "The Latin American Connection: Business Opportunities in the 1990s" seminar in Washington, D.C. in April 1990. Organized by the Smithsonian Resident Associate Program, the seminar also was attended by representatives of Arizona business, academe and government.

There, she spoke with Peruvian, Mexican, Venezuelan and Chilean ambassadors to the United States and their scientific and technical attachés, to promote the College of Agriculture's willingness to collaborate with South America in diverse areas of arid lands agriculture.

Timmermann also is coordinating the assembly of a directory of Chilean scientists working in American universities. The directory, produced for Chile's Academy of Sciences, will serve as a resource for possible collaborative work between American and Chilean scientists.

The United States, Timmermann says, appears to be making a change toward viewing South America as a cooperator rather than as a competitor. It's a logical move, considering international economic realities and recent political changes in South America.

But, she stresses, "if you're going to do business, you better trust your partner."

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Competing in the Complex World of Textile Marketing
An increasingly bitter conflict over free trade and textiles. By Angela Woida

Textiles were the United States' first industry; arguments for government protection date back to the 1700s.

"Textiles were a part of our country's growing up and have become a focus for establishing free trade," says Soyeon Shim, a University of Arizona professor in merchandising and consumer studies. "We lead the world in raw cotton production, exporting six million bales in 1989."

In fact, the United States is the second largest world producer of cotton. Japan, South Korea and other Pacific Rim nations accounted for the majority of the purchases of U.S. cotton. Arizona cotton growers exported $22.3 million in 1988, about one-third of the total value of its agricultural exports.

"Our contributions to raw cotton production will likely help continue to place the U.S. as a major exporter of raw cotton, but we really are most efficient at textile production," Shim says. And therein lies the problem.

Textiles and apparel manufacturing are often the only industries that permit developing nations to engage in international trade. Compared to other types of industries, textiles are a relatively low-technology, non-capital but high labor-intensive process. They are