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Land-based Screwworm Fly Production Facility Planned

The joint Mexico-U.S. Commission for the Eradication of Screwworms approved a plan to construct a sterile fly-rearing factory on land rather than on salvaged naval vessels as had previously been considered.

Meeting at the U. S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) sterile fly production factory at Mission, Tex., May 14-15, the Commission also tentatively approved a proposed operating budget for fiscal year 1974 of \$8,670,225, and administrative regulations to guide the Commission staff in its campaign to eradicate screwworms—a serious

pest of livestock—from Mexico and the southwestern United States.

The Commission was established and the joint eradication program authorized under an international agreement signed Aug. 28, 1972, by the Secretaries of Agriculture, Earl L. Butz from the U. S., and Manuel Bernardo Aguirre from Mexico. The Commission's first meeting was held Feb. 6 and 7 in Mexico City, shortly after the 10 members had been designated by their respective governments.

Mexican and U. S. agricultural and veterinary officials are

equally represented on the Commission—two of whom serve as full-time director and co-director.

Officials of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) explained that screwworms—the larvae of the screwworm fly—are a deadly parasite of warm-blooded animals. They feed on the living flesh of host animals, which they attack through open wounds or sores.

The principal weapon being used to eradicate the screwworm is the artificial raising of millions of screwworm flies, sterilizing them with radiation, and releasing these sterilized flies by low-flying aircraft to mate with native flies. Such matings produce eggs that will not hatch. Since the female fly mates only once in her lifetime, the natural reproduction of screwworms can be stopped when enough sterile flies are released to mate with fertile native flies.

The revised plan to build a sterile fly-rearing factory on land in southern Mexico was proposed by the Commission's co-directors following a study of updated engineering surveys, which indicated that substantial increases in construction costs would be incurred under the original plan to use salvaged naval vessels docked on the coast of Mexico at Salina Cruz. The Commission discussed possible sites for such a land-based fly factory, but a decision on its location was scheduled for the next meeting.

Under the proposed operating budget approved at this meeting by the Commission—80 percent of which will be funded by the U.S., and 20 percent by Mexico—actual construction of the factory is scheduled to begin in December 1973 or January 1974. When completed and in full operation, the factory will produce 300 million sterilized flies for aerial release each week.

The goal of the Commission is to expand the release of sterilized flies throughout southern Mexico. As the screwworm is eliminated from Mexico, a new barrier zone

can be maintained across the 135-mile wide Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico, to replace the present 2,000-mile barrier zone along the U.S.-Mexican border. This would reduce the cost of screwworm protection to American and Mexican livestock industries to about one-fourth its present cost.

At this, its first meeting in the U.S., the Commission recognized the extensive work done by the Southwest Animal Health Research Foundation to bring about the joint screwworm eradication program SWAHRF's Board of Trustees, represented by T. A. Kincaid of San Antonio, Texas, and Dr. Robert L. Anderson of Marshall, Texas, hosted the Commission at a dinner Monday evening, May 14.

Commission members from the United States are

-- Dr. Clayton, Yeutter, assistant secretary of Agriculture for marketing and consumer services.

-- Dr. Francis J. Mulhern, administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

-- Dr. Ernest E. Saulmon, APHIS associate deputy administrator for veterinary ser-

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