Science Societies

Osorio-Hernandez named 2022 ICCA of the Year

First CCA from Mexico to win the award

By Denice Rackley

April 4, 2022

Juan Manuel Osorio-Hernandez of Toluca, Mexico was named this year's CCA of the Year.

A love for agronomy, the farmers he serves, and a commitment to his profession has led to Juan Manuel Osorio-Hernandez of Toluca, Mexico receiving the 2022 International CCA of the Year Award.

The award recognizes a CCA who has shown exceptional leadership in the field of agronomy and shares the latest science and innovations with farmers helping them succeed. The first CCA in Mexico to receive this award, Osorio-Hernandez has devoted his life to those in agriculture, advancing agricultural knowledge, translating science into practical management steps that address growers' concerns, and promoting soil conservation.

Osorio-Hernandez has served as the founding President of the Mexican Association of Conservation Tillage and President of the Mexican Society of Weed Science. He has authored a herbicide manual and founded an organization that promotes soil and water conservation and plants test plots for research to increase the profitability of corn acres. He has spoken to students, farmers, ag professionals, and government officials about ways to add value to crops, use of mycorrhiza, direct seeding, conservation tillage, crop management, soil conversation, and sustainable agriculture. He continues to educate others and act as an adviser through his own agriculture consulting company, Rega Consulting.

Love of Agronomy

His love of agriculture stems from a personal commitment to help people grow nutritious food. Osorio-Hernandez was first exposed to the countryside and farmers by an uncle working in a warehouse receiving grain. Outside the warehouse playing with other children, he noticed all the activity and began to realize the time and hard work farmers invest in growing food. This image remained with him as he started thinking of a career. "I was motivated to help farmers produce better crops."

Osorio-Hernandez began his agronomy career working with smallholder farmers who farm to feed their families and sell excess produce in the outdoor markets common throughout Mexico. His work has included assisting farmers with various crops—strawberries, mango, vegetables, agave, corn, wheat, and soybeans.

"As a CCA, we have to find a way to take the science and knowledge to each farmer and make it applicable to their specific situation, helping them meet their goals and improve their land," says Juan Manuel Osorio-Hernandez (pictured on the far right).

Early in his career, he worked as a farm adviser in a rural development program. During his work, he noticed idle backyards brimming with potential. Seeing the possibilities, he began a backyard garden program that taught wives, children, and school personnel how to grow nutritious food in small spaces. A year later, he created a program to instruct farmers how to sustainably control pests and correctly use pesticides to reduce the negative ecosystem impacts. This 33-year-old program continues today and has reached more than 90,000 farmers.

Smallholder farmers continue to hold a special place in Osorio-Hernandez's heart.

Agriculture Challenges in Mexico

He notes that there are 7.5 million farmers in Mexico, 85% of which are subsistence farmers with 5–7 ac of land. Large agriculture companies export produce or the products made from what is grown. Food, grains, and beverages are the main categories of agricultural products that are grown over a climate that ranges from the highlands and tropics to the subtropics.

While Mexico is famous for its tortillas made from blue corn or tequila made with the agave plants grown throughout the country, there are other crops like corn, wheat, soybeans, and potatoes that grow in the highlands. In addition, the tropical regions grow sugarcane, pineapples, and different corn varieties.

Osorio-Hernandez explains that agriculture in his country is complicated. “There are vast differences in climate, soils, and water availability throughout the country that dictate what crops are grown. Individual farmers also have very different resources and objectives.”

It’s important, therefore, for agriculture technicians to have a broad base of knowledge to suit the wide variety of food production systems. That is where the CCA program excels.

“The emphasis on a wide knowledge base, technical expertise, and the ongoing opportunities to meet, learn from each other, and share experiences made the CCA program tremendously appealing and a great fit for the complex agriculture sectors of Mexico.”

ICCA Program in Mexico

The CCA program in the U.S. began in 1992, but the Mexican program is considerably younger. “In 2010, Dr. Jerry Lemunyon (retired USDA-NRCS agronomist and CCA/CPAg) and Luther Smith (interim CEO for the American Society of Agronomy) traveled to

Mexico to evaluate the interest in an International Certified Crop Adviser (ICCA) program here."

Knowing a CCA program in Mexico would encourage agriculture technicians to keep pace with the latest science and technology, Osorio-Hernandez was excited about the program's positive impact from the very beginning.

He was instrumental in gaining support for the development of a CCA program from the agriculture technicians, agriculture industry, universities, and government entities. He also worked with Lemunyon and Dr. Bruce Erickson (Education Distance and Outreach Director, Purdue University) to evaluate the training curriculum of agriculture technicians and facilitate the initial CCA exam in 2012.

Osorio-Hernandez continues his support of the program and organizes multiple conferences and educational opportunities. For example, in 2014, he created Agriculture Technical Update Days, which encourages technicians to take advantage of the wide variety of training offered and assists them in maintaining their CCA certification. "Due to the cutting-edge agricultural topics and experienced speakers, the conference has garnered great interest among participants while also serving to promote international agriculture certification," he says.

"In 2020, with the help of the U.S. CCA program, we were able to offer this conference virtually and include speakers from the U.S. and Mexico. Taking the conference online enabled over 800 additional participants. The Zoom conference expanded our reach to serve more individuals throughout Mexico while also including participants in Central and South America."

The CCA program in Mexico continues to grow, attracting more technicians who can then deliver exceptional service to growers.

CCAs in Mexico

“As a CCA, we have to find a way to take the science and knowledge to each farmer and make it applicable to their specific situation, helping them meet their goals and improve their land,” Osorio-Hernandez says.

Transferring the needed knowledge to farmers and providing practical recommendations can be tricky. “Successful farmers are hesitant to accept advice. We have to understand many farmers are experienced. Sometimes, we need to convince farmers we are on the same team and have information that can help them.”

“It’s like a dance. When we begin to learn, we may step on toes. Once we build a relationship, little by little we build trust and understanding. This helps us begin to move as one and make large steps forward.”

Osorio-Hernandez points to soil health as one area where strides are being made in Mexico. With the assistance of the CCA program, everyone in Mexico is understanding that regardless of location, crop produced, or specific management practices, soil health and soil and water conservation are key. “Soil health is our most valuable asset as technicians, farmers, and as a society.”

More people news

Back to issue

Back to home
