

Grant Thomas in Latin America - A Fruitful Partnership. (S02-mcmahon093200-Oral)

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Abstract:

After spending twenty five years dedicated to soil chemistry and agronomy research in a university setting, Grant Thomas developed a career in international agricultural development, bringing with him his wide experience in soil chemistry and no-till agriculture. Most of this effort was focused on Latin America. While he worked with various collaborators in many countries across the region, his major efforts were in conservation work in the Dominican Republic and in no-tillage in Argentina. Both areas offered great contrast in terms of agricultural production, soils, topography, farmers and approaches to development. He resided in the Dominican Republic for over two years in the nineteen eighties working with subsistence farmers on soil conservation problems and the general agronomy of crop and pasture production. The work was focused on on-farm trials that sought conservation and production alternatives in a highly vulnerable and risk-averse environment. His insights gained from that experience provide good lessons for agricultural development in such an environment. Dr. Thomas got involved in the development of no-tillage agriculture in Argentina in the late 1970s and this collaboration continued until his death in 2001, including a sabbatical leave in the country in the early nineties. This lengthy collaboration covered the whole spectrum of development of no-till technology from initial experimentation, through on-farm collaboration, and adoption. In this process he served as an advisor to researchers, extensionists and farmer groups, and became widely known in the country as one of its principal international

collaborators in this endeavor. An area of over 10 million hectares is now under no-till in Argentina. The paper covers the development of this technology in Argentina and Dr. Thomas' role in it.

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