

and **furthermore**, from the desk of the dean



Dean Jerry G. Schickedanz

**With science on our side,
we hope New Mexico
always will be a part of
cotton country.**

New Mexico cottons to the fiber industry

In the world of agricultural teaching, research and Extension, people are not surprised that NMSU is the center of the chile universe. Nor do they blink when we claim to have the premier range livestock program in the nation—a claim with which many around the country would agree. It is not a surprise that our biggest crop—alfalfa—was backed by an internationally known breeding program. Still, there are few research programs that have had more impact in the world than our cotton breeding work; and it is an impact that has been confirmed through study by scientists from other institutions and written about in scholarly journals. In other words, we're not just bragging.

Cotton? In New Mexico? The phrase "cotton country" elicits images of the hot humid southland of the old Confederacy. The key ingredient for cotton, however, is heat, which we have in abundance.

Cotton reportedly has been grown in New Mexico as a source of fiber for many hundreds of years. Cotton threads found in Tularosa Cave in western New Mexico were dated around 300 B.C., and remnants of cotton trash and cloth dated after A.D. 700 have been found at many New Mexico archeological sites. The conquistadors reported cotton growing as far north as Española.

Despite the early culture, cotton did not become well established as a modern commercial crop until about World War I, when high prices encouraged production. At that time, Durango was a favored variety. Variety tests at NMSU first included an Acala

variety from California in 1921. Named for a village in Chiapas, Mexico, where the type was found, Acala was the highest-yielding variety in tests.

Today, Acala 1517 cotton and the association that developed under that name to produce and distribute seed is known worldwide. The association's offices are located on the NMSU campus. The germplasm from the work of our cotton hall of fame researchers mentioned in this magazine has influenced upland cottons around the world, and we graduated such influential scientists as H. B. Cooper, who made his own mark with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and private industry.

In the 1990s, Roy Cantrell did a fine job of taking a world-renowned program to a new level of sophistication in genetic work, before becoming vice president of agricultural research at Cotton Incorporated.

Most importantly, we made cotton possible in New Mexico, which is not only important to the \$40 million industry, but also to the chile, onion and alfalfa industries that depend on cotton in their rotations. Cotton continues to struggle today, far from "cotton country." If you don't believe me, let me point out that there is no longer any cotton in Cotton City, N.M.

We are committed to keeping our industry with the addition of our new cotton breeder Jinfa Zhang, who came to us from Monsanto, where he used all the tools available to a genetic program. With science on our side, we hope New Mexico always will be part of cotton country.