IPM IL Trip Report

Country Visited: Ecuador

Dates of Travel: June 8-July 9, 2014

Travelers Names and Affiliations: Elli Travis (Virginia Tech)

Purpose of Trip: Observe the data collection efforts of PhD student Vanessa Carrion including the interview of blackberry producers in two regions of Ecuador. Farmers received text messages encouraging them to adopt IPM measures on their blackberry farms. After observing for several weeks, I met with INIAP extension specialists to design a similar survey for potato producers. I conducted a small test of the survey in Carchi, Ecuador and received comments from farmers and extension agents to improve the questionnaire, which will be rolled out in early October.

Sites Visited: Quito, Bolivar, Tungurahua, Carchi

Description of Activities/Observations:

Day 1 (June 8): Travel Day

Day 2 – 6, 9-10 (June 9 -13, 16-17): Attended Spanish language classes (Critobal Colon Spanish School) for 6 hours per day in order to improve spoken and written Spanish. The purpose of this was to better understand farmer feedback and work more effectively with INIAP counterparts. In the evenings, I finalized the text messaging system. (June 14-15 rest days)

Day 11 (June 18): Met with Dr. Victor Barrera, Luis Escudero and Vanessa Carrion at the Santa Catalina Experiment station outside of Quito to discuss Vanessa’s data collection efforts. Then traveled to Guaranda, met the team of enumerators and observed a short training and test of the questionnaire on one blackberry producer.

Day 12 - 19 (June 19 - 26): Visited numerous communities in Bolivar and Tunguruhua to observe and conduct interviews with blackberry producers who attended the Farmer Field Day. Shadowed each enumerator to observe and make note of both successful and unsuccessful questions and interview techniques to inform the design and implementation of my own upcoming potato survey. Approximately 140 interviews were conducted in total.

Day 20 (June 27): Sick Day

Day 21 (June 28): Rest Day
Day 22 (June 29): Potato survey preparation: Compiled list of observations from blackberry questionnaire and began designing the potato survey. (In Tunguruhua)

Day 23 - 24 (June 30): Travel to Quito from Banos (Tunguruhua), potato survey design work at hostel in Quito including finalization of first draft of questionnaire.

Day 25 - 27 (July 2-4): Worked at the Santa Catalina Experiment station with Fernando Cholis (INIAP potato expert) on further refining the survey according to local potato farming techniques. Review of questionnaire and further refinement with Dr. Victor Barerra.

Day 28 (July 5): Half day rest, 4 hours spent finalizing the survey in preparation for trip to Carchi.

Day 29 (July 6): Rest Day

Day 30 (July 7): Traveled to Carchi with Luis Escudero and Vanessa Carrion. Met with Jovanny Suquillo (head of experiment station in Carchi) to review the questionnaire and amend as necessary, based on his comments and concerns. Printed surveys and travelled to Santa Marta de Cuba to test them among 9 potato farmers who had attended the farmer field day held in May and are receiving text messages about IPM practices.

Day 31 (July 8): Conducted after action review of the survey with Jovanny Suquillo, revised the survey per his comments and the comments of Vanessa Carrion, who also administered the survey, and returned to Quito.

Day 32 (July 9): Continued survey revision based on feedback from farmers, Vanessa, and Luis. Traveled to US in the evening (arrival on July 10th).

Observations/ Recommendations/ Follow up:

(i) Thorough and complete training of enumerators is necessary, as is adequate testing of the survey before it is conducted. This is in part to prevent enumerators from interpreting questions in their own way when farmers don’t understand them as they are written, biasing results.

(ii) Many farmers in Carchi report not planting potatoes, and it is possible that during the 5 month trial, many farmers will have times when they receive messages that they cannot apply to a potato crop. Therefore, it is necessary to 1) include questions about their farming behavior since May to identify the percent of time during which the farmer received messages and had the potential to apply them to his crop, and 2) include IPM knowledge questions to determine whether or not farmers who receive messages have increased IPM knowledge. Increased IPM knowledge could translate to higher levels of IPM adoption in the future.
Follow up: Jovanny will identify and train enumerators beginning in September, and Elli and Dr. Alwang will travel to Carchi to conduct a final training and test the survey before it is implemented in the second week of October.