

The sting...

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Jorge and Armando left their beds early and boarded a flight in the dark. Stepping off the plane in Toronto's Terminal X, they found their way to Terminal Y, caught a flight to Vancouver and disembarked on Canada's west coast. Six million had this spring gone before them. A further eight million were to follow in two day's time.

The first émigrés had been given a good send-off. But for this next group, the largest yet, Jorge and Armando were taking special measures: they would fly ahead and be in Vancouver to greet them when they arrived.

There was another reason, of course, for their travel. Aided by an accomplice – a Canadian blonde - they were in Vancouver to set up THE STING.... Make sure it goes right; witness it, then (if things went as planned) move the whole operation to Havana. Everyone wanted it to go right; this could be the start of a beautiful relationship.

I got to ride shotgun as Jorge, Armando, the Blonde and the Translator drove to the airport to meet the new arrivals. No dice. Plane delayed.

That night, under the cloak of darkness, they arrived.

By next morning, everyone was in place. In a converted pumphouse in a remote corner of a farmer's field in Langley, Jorge and Armando, the Blonde and the Translator watched and took notes as the Sting unfolded.

Slowly at first — it took a while for things to warm up — and then, success! Under the watchful eye of the two Cuban scientists, Canadian IPM professional Dr Deb Henderson and Spanish-savvy colleague Tina Buijs, fifty percent of the 8 million Cuba-raised *Sitotroga* eggs were parasitized by sting-stock *Trichogramma sibericum* (predatory wasps). Canadian mothers. Cuban surrogates.

In ten days, the parasitized *Sitotroga* eggs will produce a new generation of tiny wasps for field release to control economic pests such as fire worm in cranberries.

Why import eggs from Cuba? Economics. Although Henderson's Guelph supplier has not changed, its mid '90's takeover by a US company — Beneficial Insectaries — has meant Henderson pays US dollars, putting BC farmers at a competitive disadvantage when the Canadian dollar is low relative to the US. Falling crop prices have made things that much tighter.

Henderson was looking for a new supplier when the Cuban delegation toured BC farms in 1999 under the Canada Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project. "They visited an organic farm where my company was doing field trials using biocontrols for caterpillars in vegetable crops. The beneficial insect we were using was a *Trichogramma* species native to Canada that we had spent some years studying and learning how to produce for use in field crops. It was a pleasant surprise to find a related *Trichogramma* species was used regularly in Cuba to control similar pests. That summer, we discussed the idea of an exchange."

Two years and one trip to Havana later, Cuba offers "technical expertise, a different, less costly rearing host (*Sitotroga*), facilities available when we need them and the potential for significant future projects."

The next step? Cuba will add value by moving the "sting" to Havana and sending Henderson already-parasitized eggs.

Before returning to Havana, Jorge and Armando watch the release of the newly bi-national wasps in a cranberry bog in Delta.

“The use of beneficial insects is particularly important for cranberries” says Henderson “because we are losing registrations of all insecticides now used. Not a bad thing unless there aren’t any options available. The BC cranberry industry has funded our research to look for, rear and field apply a suitable Trichogramma species for several years. They should be given credit for being a progressive commodity group. I really love working with them.”

Henderson is also using Trichogramma sibericum experimentally in greenhouses, on raspberries and for stored food products.

Henderson’s professional passion to wean Canadian farmers off chemical methods of pest and disease control in field crops caused her to pursue the Cuba connection. Through her company, ES CROPCONSULT, Henderson hosted the Cubans’ visit to further their co-operative project and explore more opportunities to work together. “The timing of IFOAM was a bonus,” she adds.

A bonus indeed; communication is also part of how real change happens... The success of their first Canadian sting made the chance to join my IFOAM presentation (Building bilateral capacity: The Canada Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project) just icing on the cake for Jorge and Armando.

Now that’s a good news story....

THINGS TO DO WHEN YOU GET OUT OF THE HAMMOCK

REGISTER FOR THIS WINTER’S CUBA FARM TOURS. The scary news is THIS YEAR, tour registration closes October 31st. CBC-TV’s Country Canada’s fall feature on last March’s tour means we will sell-out early. So BOOK NOW... (It’s later than you think...)

THE WATER RESOLUTION – clip it from PAGE ____ bring it to your farm organization and get it passed and back to me in time for Valentine’s Day Presentation to the PM (whomever that may be). holm@farmertofarmer.ca, www.farmertofarmer.ca, 604.947.2893