

OUT OF ONE SEED GROWS MANY

Through the development of winter breeding programs, Alvaro Eyzaguirre builds local economies and helps in the fight to end food insecurity. **Julie Deering**

AS A YOUNG research manager for Pioneer Hi-Bred International in the late 1980s, Alvaro Eyzaguirre worked with Fernando Ruiz to develop the company's first winter nursery programs in Chile — something the country was not known for.

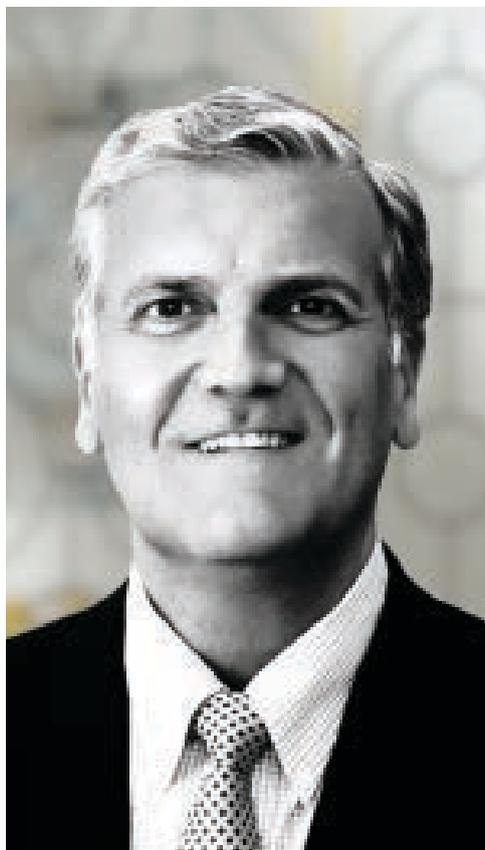
Eyzaguirre recalls that it was 1984 when the United States was hit by a severe drought, and there was growing concern about a seed shortage. It was Ruiz who convinced company leaders to plant 10,000 acres of seed corn in Chile to offset the loss. "This test worked perfectly: the seed made it to the United States at the right time, yields were high and the quality was excellent," Eyzaguirre says.

This put Chile on the map as far as the seed industry was concerned. Eyzaguirre explains that Chile is like an island from a phytosanitary perspective. "There's the Pacific Ocean to the west and a desert to the north," he says. "We have snow and ice in the winter and no rain in the spring and summer. It's perfect for vegetable production, hot and dry during the day and cold at night."

In the years following, Eyzaguirre and his team provided counter-seasonal production for many North American and European companies.

"My only concern was a lack of heat units. I could help many in the northern part of the United States but fell short in full season corn," he shares. After searching the country for a location that could meet the needs of full season corn, Eyzaguirre finally found a spot where he could grow corn all year. It was here he established a formal breeding program and offered services to not only Pioneer but also to Monsanto and Syngenta.

As often is the case in the seed industry, success leads to leadership opportunities. In 2002, Eyzaguirre moved to Pioneer's U.S. headquarters in Iowa and oversaw winter nurseries in Chile, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and Puerto Vallarta,



Alvaro Eyzaguirre wraps up a two-year term as president of the ISF board of directors.

Mexico. In 2005, he returned home as Pioneer Chile's assistant country manager and was elected as first vice president of ANPROS, the Chilean National Producers' Association. Just a year later, he was promoted to country and supply manager for Semillas Pioneer Chile. Since then, Peru and Bolivia have also been added to his list of responsibilities.

As Chile's reputation as a counter-seasonal production location grew, so did its seed exports. Today Chile is the fifth largest global exporter of seeds, and, as such, is represented with a seat on the International Seed Federation's board of directors. In 2009, Eyzaguirre was asked to represent ANPROS on the board and in

May 2014, he was elected as president.

He is the first ISF president from South America and has focused much of his attention on Africa's potential and issues in South America. During his tenure, Eyzaguirre attended the African Seed Trade Association's (AFSTA) annual congress — also a first for an ISF president. He also visited Cape Town, South Africa, which will serve as the location for the 2020 World Seed Congress.

Together Eyzaguirre and former ISF president Tim Johnson have put forth a proposal to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to help secure more resources that would better position AFSTA for future growth.

"There's tremendous opportunity," Eyzaguirre says. "I'm convinced Africa can surprise the world and be really strong in the area of food production. The mission and work of ISF fits the current environment in Africa. Many of our initiatives and programs align, and we can serve as a resource."

During his time as ISF president, Eyzaguirre has had the opportunity to rub shoulders with, and have the ear of, country presidents, ministers of agriculture and government officials. He's worked to improve relationships with non-member countries with the aim of bringing them into the folds of ISF and furthering conversations to improve the movement of seed throughout the world.

In reflecting upon his experience, Eyzaguirre is humbled by the opportunity and hopes to continue to serve the seed industry. "I'm really grateful to ANPROS and ISF for the experience," he says. "Since I was a very young boy, I've had a passion for nature, animals and flora ... it was seeds that became of particular interest to me. You plant one seed and get so much more.

"When you realize that you can contribute to feeding the world, it's a very powerful concept." **SW**