

# Sonora '81 fair shows Mexico's potential

by Dolia Pettingell

The government of Sonora is perhaps among the few governments in the developing countries that are proposing the construction of nuplexes as a key component for their industrialization plans. Those plans were the background of the Sonora '81 Industrial Prospects Fair on Oct. 10 in that northwest state's capital city of Hermosillo. The Fair was a rare occurrence in a depression-ridden world economy. As an American citizen visiting the Fair put it, "This is the type of thing that one could always see in the U.S. in the 1960s. Not anymore."

The central theme of the Sonora Fair, sponsored by the state government with the strong backing of the federal government, was industrializing Sonora, a state with massive raw material resources. The political purpose was to educate the population on the possibilities for development.

The Fair was inaugurated by Mexican President José López Portillo on the night of Oct. 10. It was organized into three huge pavilions: one covered everything related to agriculture and ranching; a second for fishing; and a third one for mining—Sonora's four major economic activities.

Industrialization being the goal of the Sonora planners, several computer terminals were set up in the Fair in order to provide all the information that every potential investor—local and foreign—would need. Full data on present and prospective production levels, industrialization and marketing prospectives, how each product is presently utilized, the level of production necessary to make it profitable, technology availability, and the economic feasibility of other potential uses was provided upon request. As a fair organizer commented, "We are setting the table, it is up to them (the investors) to take the opportunity."

## Where to invest

The main problem that Sonora's planners face is that products are being exported primarily to the U.S. or shipped to the center of Mexico with no value added, that is, as raw materials. Many of these products return to the state as industrial goods where they are sold in the retail market. This is the case for example for cotton.

The most attractive areas of investment are those related to the industrial processing of agricultural and fishing goods which would increase Sonora's already leading role as food producer.

Sonora is currently the leading producer of grain in Mexico. Sonora's crops of wheat, cotton, soy beans, safflower, sesame seed and grapes have reached the highest yields in the entire country. The key in this is Sonora's highly mechanized, American style agricultural production.

In 1980, Sonora produced 1.2 million tons of wheat. 950,000 tons were shipped to Mexico City, Jalisco and Nuevo León. Only 25 percent of the total production was processed into wheat flour in local mills. Building more advanced flour mills is an investment priority.

Cotton production faces a similar problem. Sonora is now producing 27 percent of Mexico's yearly cotton crop. However, 54 percent of Sonora's 1980 total production of 460,000 bales of cotton was exported raw to the Middle East. The rest was shipped to other parts of Mexico. Sonora's textile industry hardly exists. This represents another key area for investment.

The food processing industry also has big potential. Sonora is currently a leading producer of citrus fruits, fish, beef and pork. Large percentages of those products are exported unprocessed. The processing of the by-products of these goods is also an area that needs to be developed.

With a total cattle population of 2 million, Sonora produced in 1980 530,000 bull calves. Out of the 106,000 head butchered, 89 percent was consumed in the local market; the rest was sent to Mexico City. However, the entirety of leather produced was sent to other parts of Mexico to be used in the shoe and leather industries. Sonora has no leather industry.

Only 23 million dollars worth of new investment projects were consolidated during the Fair itself. However, due to its political and educational success, much more investment is likely in the following months.

The Fair organizers, however, realize that one of the key problems holding back investment world-wide is the high interest rates imposed by the U.S. Federal Reserve. Soaring interest rates are one of the main causes of the economic crisis that the Alfa industrial group from Monterrey is currently going through. In a normal situation, the Alfa group would have been one of the first to invest in the Sonora project. Due to the crisis, Alfa has been forced to restrict investments for industrial expansion.

## Sonora in the year 2031

The commitment of the Sonora government to the industrialization of the state was best seen in the projected Annual Report from the Sonora governor for the year 2031, and in the booth that the Sonora Secretary of

Planning and Budget put together for the Sonora Fair. Thousands of the Annual Report of the year 2031 were distributed at the Fair. It presents the results of a 50 year industrial development plan. By that year the population of Sonora would have grown from the current 1.5 million to 5 million. The standards of living of the population would be the highest in the entire country and many new cities would have been built. (See box.)

The Sonora government booth presented the same concept of what Sonora would look like by the year 2031, employing audiovisual and other displays to show the advanced development that the state could achieve. A key feature in the Sonora development plan is the installation of nuclear-based agro-industrial complexes, known as nuplexes. According to a video tape shown in the booth, by the year 2031 Sonora would have two pairs of nuclear power plants that would be the center of two new agro-industrial cities. The energy, and especially the waste heat from these plants, would be used to desalinate water. This water would be used for irrigation and would start solving one of the major

obstacles for agricultural production in the region.

### **Nuclear energy, a political fight**

The emphasis put by the Sonora planners on nuclear energy has nation-wide political significance. Until recently, Mexico has consistently postponed the initiation of a full-scale nuclear development program due to political sabotage from inside the government of López Portillo. In addition, several attempts to at least start researching nuclear energy in Mexico have been countered by local authorities. This is the case of a project for a nuclear research center planned to be built in the state of Michoacán where the governor, a devoted environmentalist, turned down the federal government proposal in the name of "protecting the environment."

Reliable sources report that the Sonora government is fighting behind the scene to get approval for building the research center in the state of Sonora. Although the government of the state of Nuevo León also wants it, it is known that Sonora has excellent possibilities of gaining the project.

*The AMEF exhibit:  
at left is Director  
Cecilia Soto de Estévez.*



### **AMEF exhibit draws a gigantic response**

Out of all the hundreds of booths that integrated the Sonora '81 Fair, the booth sponsored by Mexican Association of Fusion Energy (AMEF) was the most visited. Hundreds of businessmen, hundreds of potential investors, hundreds of professionals, and thousands of students from five-year olds to college students, stopped at the AMEF booth to ask questions, ranging from the technical to intensely political.

The feature that most absorbed the visitors was a half-hour videotape explaining how nuclear fusion energy works, and polemicizing against the international environmentalist movement. Many visitors re-

turned several times to the AMEF booth with further questions.

The AMEF, publishers of the Spanish magazine, *Fusión*, borrowed several scale models of American nuclear plants to be exhibited at the booth. Two of those models were the Clinch River liquid-metal fast-breeder reactor, and the high-temperature gas-cooled reactor under construction by General Atomic of San Diego. The walls of the booth were covered with enlarged photos of nuclear plants in various stages of construction, and the latest discoveries of the solar system, including Saturn pictures taken by Voyager.