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B. Alarcón-Zúñiga

Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, Mexico

E. Valadez-Moctezuma

Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, Mexico

T. Cervantes-Martinez

Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, Mexico

T. Cervantes-Santana

Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, Mexico

M. Mendoza-Rodriguez

Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, Mexico

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The XX International Grassland Congress took place in Ireland and the UK in June-July 2005.

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Genetic and molecular characterization of temperate and tropical forage maize inbred lines

B. Alarcón-Zúñiga, E. Valadez-Moctezuma, T. Cervantes-Martinez, T. Cervantes-Santana and M. Mendoza
Animal and Crop Science Depts. Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, Mexico, 56230, Email: camilaa@jastate.edu

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Introduction Livestock feeding in the Central highland of Mexico is based on harvest, grazing and annual forage conservation, with forage maize being the most important silage crop (Alarcón, 1995). Even though forage maize is extensively bred in Europe, USA and Asia since the 1900's, this started in Mexico only in the 1960's, and little is known about genetic diversity in both agronomic and nutritive value traits. Our breeding program goals are to analyze combining ability of biomass and quality predictors and to study the genetic relationship of inbred lines between lowland tropical and temperate races from Mesa Central, by genetic and molecular approaches.

Material and methods Fourteen inbred lines (IL) highly selected for forage biomass and quality value were used. 6 S₁ IL were collected from Mesa Central, Mexico, and 8 S₉ IL were originally single crosses from the tropical races: Tuxpeno, Vandeno, Olotillo, Naltel, Blandito, Reventador, Comiteco, Tepexintle, Celaya and Oloton. The single crossbred tropical races were recombined up to F₁₃, and selfpollinated up to S₉ (Cervantes *et al.*, 1978). In early 2004, the ILs and temperate x tropical crosses were field established in two locations, and agronomic and quality traits evaluated when the kernel 2/3 milklined. Traits included total and per component dry matter, plant height (PH), days at flowering; and soluble (SP) and insoluble protein (ISP), NDF, ADF & ADL, IVDMD, FAME, volatile fatty acids, sucrose and starch, were assayed. 27 out of 40 SSR markers were used to estimate genetic similarities among ILs, and to compute a discriminatory analysis by PCGA. The genetic components of variance, additive genotypic correlations and narrow sense heritabilities were estimated by MANOVA and standard errors computed by the delta method (Lynch and Walsh, 1998).

Results Genotypic effects were highly significant for all investigated traits ($P < 0.001$), and much higher than genotype x environment interaction effects in all tropical ILs, but only higher in two of four temperate ILs. Transgressive segregations were observed in both tropical and temperate ILs for traits related to total DM, plant height, LSR, fiber predictors, free and volatile fatty acids. However, for each of the investigated digestibility traits, sucrose and starch, transgressive segregations were observed only on temperate Cacahuasintle and tropical ILs Tuxpeno y Vandeno. Narrow sense heritabilities on an entry basis ranged from low (~0.15; total and per component DM, IVDMD, FAME, ADL), medium (~0.3, PH, ISP, NDF, ADF, sucrose) and high (~0.6, days at flowering, volatile FA, starch). The average dry matter ear content was 51%, with a range of 2-3% among ILs, and a high heritability (0.5). High DM ear weight was found in ILs Cacahuasintle, Vandeno and Tuxpeno x Naltel. Positive additive genetic correlations were found between ear size, sucrose, starch and ADF content or IVDMD which had similar absolute values (0.55). So each of these traits was an important but not a unique determinant of silage maize quality. A low genetic correlation was found between ADL/NDF and IVDMD, suggesting that digestibility can be improved in both tropical and temperate ILs independent of lignin content. The 27 SSR marker primers detected 86 alleles, with a range per locus from 2 to 7 (average=3.19). The PIC values ranged from 0.09 to 0.75, with an average of 0.48. On the basis of the marker analysis the 14 inbred lines were classified into three distinct groups: temperate inbreds were included in group 1, with two distinct subgroups: Cacahuasintle and Chalqueno. The tropical inbreds were clustered into two groups: group 2 derived from dent grain germplasm and included Tuxpeno, Blandito, Comiteco, and Tepexintle; and group 3 (flint germplasm) included Vandeno, Naltel and Oloton.

Conclusions These results suggest that tropical ILs Tuxpeno and Vandeno can be used as top parental ILs for forage maize in the highland Mexico. The same was observed for Cacahuasintle as a temperate IL. The primer loci of SSR markers did not cover all genomes completely but enabled a determination of genetic similarities among ILs. More SSR primers and ILs are being used to associate with loci that positively determine heterotic groups, supported by a field diallel analysis in 2005.

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