

Jose D. Drilon, IRRI executive officer (1959-71)*

Jose D. Drilon, Jr. (at right in photo with IRRI Director General Nyle Brady) joined the Institute as administrative assistant on 1 December 1959.

Drilon had had extensive experience in the National Rice and Corn Corporation, serving as its assistant manager at the time he joined IRRI. D.L. Umali, then newly appointed dean of the College of Agriculture at Los Baños, recommended Drilon, citing his intelligence, honesty, and energy. “He



gets things done,” Umali told IRRI Director General Bob Chandler. Drilon, then 31 years old, stayed with IRRI for about 10 years, serving (after the Institute's formal organization) as executive officer. In that key position he was responsible for all of IRRI's nonscientific operations, including buildings and grounds, cafeteria-dormitory services, security, secretarial and clerical appointments, employee relations, and more.

His ability to deal with people diplomatically and to take quick, decisive action and his flair for good organization contributed greatly to the construction and staffing of the Institute and, subsequently, to its day-to-day operation. In the days of IRRI's founding, Drilon played a significant role in getting a law through the Philippine Congress granting IRRI tax exemption and visa privileges on a more secure basis than was possible under the President's executive order.

Getting of House Bill 5005 passed. During 16-19 May 1960, Drilon practically lived in the Halls of Congress making every effort to get action on the bill. Congress was to adjourn at midnight on 19 May. Many bills awaited action and lobbyists were exerting maximum pressure for their passage. At midnight, the clock was stopped so that the members of Congress could continue to pass legislation. During that time extension, House Bill Number 5005, granting tax exemption to IRRI, came up for consideration and was passed.

Although there was no real opposition to the bill, there was so much competition from other bills and so much agitation by their adherents that IRRI's bill would have been buried in the shuffle if it had not been for the skillful and persistent, yet diplomatic, efforts of Drilon as the Institute's executive secretary. The passage of House Bill 5005, which then formally became Republic Act 2707 (reproduced in Appendix 5; page 206 of [Chandler's book](#)), has provided IRRI to this day with its special tax privileges.

At the 5-6 October 1960 trustees meeting, Drilon was appointed secretary of the Board and served as secretary as long as he remained at IRRI.

The Drilon family and other families moved into their assigned houses between 11 and 14 August 1961. The entire housing area project was completed, and most of the houses were occupied, by January 1962.

The evolution of IRRI's logo. Bob and Sunny Chandlers bought a painting (at right on page 43 of [Chandler's book](#)) by Felipe in 1960. In 1961, Drilon showed it to a local artist who came up with a design (bottom left, page 43 of Chandler's book). After discussion between Drilon and the artist, it was decided to embellish the scene with a view of Mt. Mayon.

Security. Drilon, as executive officer, stated that without question it would be necessary to have round-the-clock security guards at both the staff housing area and the research center, including roving guards for the experimental fields. There was a head security guard, but Drilon was responsible for the operation of the security system. Having been an officer in the Philippine armed forces, he put the patrol through weekly drills and had the group participate in athletic games to keep physically fit.

Drilon used his first study leave to get an extra degree right in the Philippines. That degree prepared him for a career outside of IRRI, including appointment to important positions in the Philippine Government.

Employee strike. On the evening of 4 March 1970, Drilon, Zosimo Pizarro, and Federico Ramos (executive officer, associate executive officer, and associate agronomist-farm superintendent) met with the leaders of the IRRI employees to try to avert the strike, but they were unsuccessful. I was alerted early on 5 March and arrangements were made for Drilon and me to address all employees in the auditorium later that morning. At the same meeting, Drilon and Director General Chandler patiently emphasized the advantages of working for IRRI.

Mercy Drilon, Jose's wife (at right in photo with Sunny Chandler), presented her well-trained young dancers, from College and Institute families, who performed a versatile repertoire of ballet, hula, and Tahitian dances. She raised pedigreed dogs and orchids and, a dancer herself, gave inspiring instruction (as noted) to others.



Jose D. Drilon, Jr. (1928-81) passed away on 13 June 1981. Drilon had left IRRI in 1971 to serve his government in a series of important positions from general manager and chairman of the Board of the Rice and Corn Administration to undersecretary of Agriculture and director general of the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Resources Research (PCARR). Concurrently — from 1972 onward — he continued his distinguished international career as director of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA).

*Source: [Adventure in Applied Science: History of the Science: A History of the International Rice Research Institute](#), by Robert F. Chandler, Jr.