



Francis C. Byrnes

IRRI's first head of Communication
(1963-67)

When IRRIs director general Robert Chandler was in New York in October 1962 to present to the Rockefeller Foundation IRRIs 1963 operating budget estimate (only \$515,000 in those days) and to interview candidates for staff openings at the Institute, Albert H. Moseman, Rockefeller's deputy director for agricultural sciences, had received an inquiry from Francis C. Byrnes. Byrnes, who was about to receive his Ph D degree from Michigan State University in the field of communication, was wondering as to whether the Foundation might have an opening for him. Moseman felt that Byrnes' background, experience, and training would qualify him to take charge of IRRIs editorial and publishing program.

Arrangements were made for Byrnes and his wife to come to New York on 15 October 1962 for an interview. When Chandler described the duties of the post, Byrnes frankly declared that he had been a qualified and experienced editor before he started his graduate studies at Michigan State and that now he was seeking a position where he could exercise the training he had recently received in the rather newly developed (and increasingly important, as it turned out) science of communication. He indicated that, although he was investigating two other opportunities, he would

be interested in going to IRRIs if the Institute would broaden the responsibilities of the position so that he could play a role in training and in establishing better communication among scientists, extension technicians, and farmers—and provided IRRIs would hire others to take responsibility for the major load of strictly editorial work. Chandler was impressed with Byrnes' arguments for a communication program and agreed to implement it if he accepted the offer to join the Rockefeller Foundation with assignment to IRRIs.

Following an exchange of correspondence, this was arranged and Byrnes and his family arrived in the Philippines in March 1963, after he had received his doctorate from Michigan State University. On Byrnes' arrival, IRRIs created the Office of Communication and put him in charge as head with the title of communication specialist. In 1967, Byrnes left IRRIs to head the communication and training programs at the newly created International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Colombia.

Although overlapping somewhat in the early years, as late as 1967, IRRIs Office of Communication encompassed the activities handled after that by the Office of Information Services—later Communication and Publications Department (CPD) and then Communication and Publication Services (CPS)—and by the Rice Production Training and Research Department—later the Training Center.

In 1963, Byrnes and his staff edited the 24 papers presented at the Institute's first symposium on rice genetics and cytogenetics and the 28 papers from a symposium on rice blast disease. In addition, they handled all arrangements with printers for publishing the papers in book form. That year, Byrnes also organized and supervised the Institute's first Field Day, to which were invited heads of various government, educational, and business organizations. He helped the scientists prepare visual aids to tell the story of their research results. The field day was an extremely successful event attended by 116 people.

Byrnes started the bimonthly publication *The IRRIs Reporter*, which later became a quarterly published well into the 1990s; supervised the production of an IRRIs film entitled *Harvest of Energy*; and handled the

editing and publication of a series of IRRI technical bulletins. Moreover, he gave seminars explaining the principles of the science of communication, particularly in relation to interpreting scientific results for the extension worker and the farmer.

In short, the information services of the Office of Communication handled (as is generally true today, but on a broader scale) all editorial work for all printed material emanating from the Institute, undertook all negotiations with printers and publishers, organized field days and group tours of the experimental fields, prepared releases for the mass media, handled all photographic work and the operation of all projection equipment at seminars and other public meetings and conferences, maintained an art section for preparing graphs and other illustrative materials for scientific papers and publications by the staff, and continuously managed a set of demonstration plots to show visitors the latest findings of IRRI scientists.

Byrnes found time to conduct some communications research, chiefly through IRRI research scholars and graduate students from the nearby College of Agriculture (later University of the Philippines Los Baños) who majored in communications and did their thesis problems under his direction. Two important studies that had a bearing on transferring IRRI's technology to farmers were:

- Identifying the subject matter that extension specialists considered essential in rice production and devising a test system capable of measuring verbal knowledge and understanding with respect to such subject matter, and
- Analyzing the adoption of IR8 by a group of 75 farmers in a Philippine village. In the second year of this study (1967), when a large majority of the farmers were growing IR8, 70% said they had changed from the traditional variety to IR8 after they had seen it growing in a neighbor's field and realized that it was yielding better than the old variety.

In his 5 years at IRRI, Byrnes built a truly outstanding information and training program (with William Golden) that set a pattern for the growing network of agricultural research centers to follow. At CIAT, where he remained until 1975, his contribution likewise was notable.

Over the years, Byrnes authored numerous reports to reach a broader audience with information on how agricultural research and development programs are positively impacting on low-income communities in the developing world. These reports immediately engaged the reader with titles such as *Changing the change agent*, *No turning back: small steps lead Filipino farmers toward self reliance and increased income*, *In Mindanao's uplands: minds win over matter*, and *When villagers take charge*.

Following retirement from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1983, he was a consultant to many international organizations, including the U.S. Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the Asian Development Bank, the Management Training and Development Institute, and several international agricultural research centers such as the International Potato Center, Peru; the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, Mexico; and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture, Nigeria. The bulk of his consulting work had been for the Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development, Arlington, Virginia.

Byrnes' numerous recognitions include two major Iowa State University awards—the Henry A. Wallace Award for Outstanding Contribution in Writing, Teaching, Research, and Leadership, and the J.W. Schwartz Award for Distinguished Service to Journalism. He received the Outstanding Alumnus in Communication Award from Michigan State University; the Award for Excellence in International Affairs from the Agricultural Communicators in Education (ACE), the Special Service Award from the Association for International Agriculture and Rural Development; and the Outstanding Service Award from the Association for International Agricultural Education and Extension. He was an Honorary Founder of CIAT.

Byrnes died of liver cancer at his home in Reston, Virginia, on 5 July 1999.