

I N T R O D U C T I O N .

In opening this report on peasant agriculture in the Northern Range Mountains of Trinidad best results would perhaps be obtained by referring one to the speech made on peasant agriculture at a meeting of the Trinidad and Tobago Agricultural Society. ⁽¹⁾ Herein the general causes of poverty, failure and misuse of the land were discussed and the supreme importance of a flourishing peasant agriculture emphasized as a sound basis in the economy of most tropical countries whilst the tremendous lack of carefully sifted scientific data on this all important subject was made apparent throughout. To remedy this state of affairs and ensure that these problems would be kept in mind by tropical agriculturists in the future, various experiments and schemes to obtain information were devised at I.C.T.A., whilst the desire that students of tropical agriculture should become acquainted with peasant agriculture in all its crudity, actuated the writing of this report.

After careful thought amongst the syndicate of students appointed to the above task, it was decided that the best method of carrying out the report was firstly to visit, revisit and learn thoroughly the geography of the particular area chosen to be reported upon, obtain a general picture of the agriculture practised there and then prepare a questionnaire designed to cover such agricultural detail as could be simply explained by any peasant farmer. From the accompanying questionnaire it can be seen that the information desired was roughly divided into six portions, the questions being arranged in a sequence, such that the peasant was unfolding a logically continuous picture of his

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holding. Around the analysis of the answers to these questions this report has largely been written.

The portions of the questionnaire were as follows:-

1. The Plot Management Aspect.
2. The Crop Husbandry Aspect.
3. The Animal Husbandry Aspect.
4. The Mechanical Aspect.
5. The Time Aspect.
6. Special Information not previously mentioned.

After interrogation of numerous peasants with constant checking of their answers, a fairly detailed plan of the agriculture as practised in the areas was obtained. The next step of checking the history of the land, government policy in the areas, land taxes, etc. was done by application to the requisite Government Departments. Information concerning weeds, and plant associations was kindly supplied by the Botany Department at I.C.T.A.

As no soil maps of the Northern area were available the Soils Department, I.C.T.A. kindly offered to analyse such samples as were collected thereby offering another vista of agriculture under such conditions. The method of such sampling was calculated to give a representative picture of the soils in areas such as this, whether under cultivation, bush or secondary forest, and yet, as time was limited, could not be too numerous. Each student therefore was designated several chosen sites from which to obtain his samples and the resulting information pooled. Such geological data as is present was provided by Professor Hardy, who, at his own suggestion, kindly loaned an altimeter.

Unfortunately our stay in Trinidad did not enable us to follow cultivations over the entire year, thus in many cases the veracity of the peasants' answers was entirely dependant upon the peasant himself. However,

the complete freedom and honesty of the majority of the peasants in answering our questions is worthy of note for succeeding years of students engaged on similar tasks.

Finally, a word about the area itself - Although in actual fact the Northern and Southern areas are separated by some distance of savanna land, for the purpose of this report they are treated as adjacent, hence general information covering one area will unless stated otherwise, be taken to hold true for the other area also. The Northern area lies in the foothills of the Northern Range Mountains, has a maximum elevation of 1,800 feet, is extremely irregular in slope being intersected by numerous large gullies, and approximates in area to 450 acres. In direct contrast, the Southern area is very flat and regular, has a maximum elevation of 122 feet and an area of some 650 acres.