

SURVEY OF THE PRACTISE OF MIXED CULTURE & INTERCROPPING

By

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INTRODUCTION

In any study of native agriculture and peasant methods in the tropics the widespread practise of mixed cropping is immediately apparent. This fact has been reported in the literature from all the main tropical areas though very little work appears to have been done to examine this practise critically in any region. The prominence of mixed cropping in tropical countries provides a major difference from temperate systems of agriculture and may seem to be at variance with many accepted agricultural principles, but indigenous agricultural systems have been developed over very long periods and result from the experience of many generations and are adapted to suit local conditions of climate, soils, labour and implements. However, in recent years conditions in many areas have changed from the times in which these systems were evolved with increasing population and a transition from a subsistence to a cash economy and new methods and developments have been necessary to meet changing conditions. Drastic changes to established systems are rarely welcomed by farming communities but modifications within the framework of existing systems are more readily accepted and provide the means of incorporating modern knowledge into indigenous systems. Any changes recommended must be preceded by careful investigation of the methods and economics of various systems.

The terms 'mixed culture' and 'intercropping' overlap to a very great extent and many gradations exist from the mixed culture of the typical Trinidad household garden with its apparently haphaz^{ed} collection of annuals and perennials, trees and herbs, to the systematic cultivation of rows of spaced vegetables with intercrops planted between in the more specialised market gardens. Mixed culture implies a lack of definite arrangement of the

The usual crop mixture is one of striking variations. This components of a crop mixture and intercropping a more precise distribution of plants but in many cases it is impossible to assign a crop mixture into one or the other category. Crop combinations vary from those planted simultaneously for harvesting at different times or less frequently for harvesting together to combinations where short term crops are interplanted amongst established long term crops.

The survey was carried out principally in the locality of St. Augustine. The Southern area was enclosed by the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, the Tacarigua river and the Southern Main Road. The Northern area was the St. Marguerita Valley. Within these areas some of the principal systems of Trinidad peasant agriculture were found. Sugar cane farmers, rice growers, provision and vegetable gardeners were all well represented. The method of collecting information was partly by observation and partly by questioning of the peasants. It was generally found that the peasants were quite willing to give information about their holdings but their reasons for various practices were more difficult to obtain.

The survey was not commenced until October which meant that the main planting season of May - June had passed and observation had to be replaced by interrogation but it is thought that a fairly accurate picture of the operations during that period was obtained.

No true subsistence farmers were found, in that they lived entirely or almost entirely on the produce of their holdings, the majority selling a large proportion of their crops after household requirements had been satisfied. Where only a small household garden was owned the produce was normally entirely consumed by the family but the holder invariably had some other main occupation. In the survey area agriculture is affected by the proximity of good local markets and a ready demand for produce from a large urban population so that perishable market garden crops can be grown. Many farmers have other seasonal occupations. During the cane cutting season many of the cultivators work on the sugar estates for varying periods.