

A SOIL AND AGRICULTURAL SURVEY OF PART OF THE SAN FRANCISCO LANDSETTLEMENT, FREEPORTTHE REASONS FOR THE SURVEYA. Land Pressure in Trinidad.

At the present time it is the policy of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to produce as much food for domestic consumption as is economically feasible. (Report of the Agricultural Policy Committee Trinidad and Tobago, 1941.) In addition the Government aims to maintain and encourage the production of export crops, now worth about \$50 million a year. The amount of food required by the colony is increasing steadily as a result of an improvement in living standards together with an annual population increase of about 20,000.

An appraisal in 1944 of the Island's land resources, based on an unpublished, provisional soil map and other data, (A Proposed Land Allocation Policy for Trinidad, 1944) concluded that only 37% of the Island's total area was really suitable for agriculture. At the same time it was estimated that 14% of the area that was being cultivated was definitely unsuitable for permanent agricultural use. Of the land suitable for Agriculture noted in this report a large proportion is devoted to the production of the important export crops, chief of which are Sugar and Cocoa. This leaves only a relatively small area of land fitted for the production of food crops for an island whose population is rapidly approaching half a million.

Thus at the present time reserves of land suitable for agriculture, as defined by the standard of the authors of the 1944 report, are virtually non-existent. In addition considerable areas considered unsuitable for cropping in 1944 have not yet been taken out of agricultural use. The most urgent case is an area estimated in 1944 as covering some 30,000 acres of the steep hill sides of the Northern Range where continued cropping gives rise to an increasing danger of serious soil erosion, flooding and loss of water control in this important catchment area. It was suggested in 1944 (A Proposed Land Allocation Policy for Trinidad) that these areas should not remain in cultivation, and if this urgent recommendation is ever implemented alternative agricultural areas will be required.

B. Possibilities of Extending Cultivated Areas in Trinidad.

Thus there is considerable need for more food production in Trinidad, and although there is great scope for intensifying present production of food crops in the good agricultural areas, attention must also be given to the possibilities of reclaiming land at present considered unsuitable for agriculture. In Trinidad there are three main reasons for land being considered unsuitable. The first reason is the danger of soil erosion in mountainous terrain as mentioned above. Secondly a permanent high water table renders the large areas at the mouths of many of Trinidad's

rivers unusable. Thirdly poor soil quality is a major limiting factor. Dr. Greene in his visit to the Island in 1956 suggested that the resources required for the swamp drainage projects at present being considered by Government might be more profitably spent in the agricultural development of land in areas of poor soil at present considered unsuitable. That such development might require considerable initial investment in some method of building up soil fertility to a level at which economic agriculture could be maintained is only to be expected. The question posed by Dr. Greene is which investment will give the greatest return on the capital. The Government is already studying the possibilities of swamp drainage: this paper reports a small part of an investigation into the alternative.