

THE APPLICATION AND SCOPE OF MECHANIZATION
IN TRINIDAD'S NON-SUGAR AGRICULTURE

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

Aim:

The aim of the survey on which this report is written was to form a general picture of the extent of Mechanization in Trinidad's Agriculture other than Sugar, and also to become familiar with the many problems and difficulties facing the peasant and small estate owner which may directly or indirectly affect the scope of Mechanization. The attitude of the writer has quite unconsciously changed from that of an observer collecting information solely for examination purposes to an active interest in the lives of the people, and it was found that much time could be spent discussing problems in no way relevant to mechanization, and one found oneself acting as Veterinary Surgeon, plant pathologist, engineer and general advisor. However, it is hoped that the information (meagre though it may be), contained in this report may be of some use to those whose duty it may be to draw up a policy for the development of a mechanised system of agriculture in Trinidad, and that in so doing, the problems of the peasant may be alleviated and not complicated as in many such policies.

Approach to Survey:

In carrying out an island wide survey such as this the lack of general "Master Survey" on an island scale has been felt and because of this a general description of Trinidad's Non-sugar agriculture, as collected from Annual Reports etc., will be given before launching into the main body of the report. Considering the short irregular periods available for work and also lack of

transport it was quite impossible to investigate Peasant Agriculture in the island as a whole, so it was decided that a fairly detailed survey of a certain area should be carried out and so gain some idea of the island wide problems relating to mechanization and its scope. The aim in choosing this area was to obtain as representative a sample of peasant agriculture as possible and for this purpose three districts were chosen:

(i) The Bejucal Rice growing Area, serving a double purpose, in giving some idea of the development of a specialised farming area and also demonstrating the advantages and disadvantages of a Freehold system of land tenure.

(ii) Bamboo Grove Settlement, also interesting in gaining some idea of the attitude to, and possibilities of, mechanising a small scale market gardening system under a Government Leasehold settlements system of tenure.

(iii) Aranguez Estate, which in contrast to (i) and (ii) is held by tenants on a yearly rental basis and therefore portrays some of the obstacles to, and possibilities of, mechanising agriculture under such a system of land tenure. It is to be regretted that owing to Trinidad's prolonged wet season, information received from these areas is not as full as was expected, field operations being hindered, and conditions most unsuitable for the use of machines. Many photographs, also of machines at work in the field which should have been included have had to be omitted owing to pressure of time towards the end.

All possible means of transport was made use of, to visit as many estates as possible on the island, but again it must be confessed that only a fraction of these could be covered.

Scope of Survey:

Much difficulty was experienced in trying to fix the limits of the survey in one's mind and little attention has been given to land clearing operations being carried out on the island as these resemble in every respect those carried out in clearing sugar lands. The survey was confined entirely to cultural operations for all crops other than sugar, and nothing more than a mention could be made of other specialized operations such as poultry and dairy farming or the mechanical processing of agricultural products, some of which could only be classified as industry with a bearing on Agriculture.

The People:

The bulk of the population engaged in Agriculture in Trinidad are East Indian and were found to be a very reserved and suspicious people when first approached, and one could only view with suspicion any information gained on a first visit. A number of regularly repeated visits were necessary to gain the confidence of and familiarise oneself with families from which reliable information could be obtained. It was felt, having collected the necessary information that one was really only in a position to commence, having acquired some idea of the method of approach and the type of question understood by these people, as well as being familiar with many local terms and phrases which meant little in the earlier part of the investigation.