

ABSTRACT

Agricultural Determinants of Food Security and Nutritional Status in Rural Farm Villages on the Coastal Plain of Guyana

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Rural poverty with its interrelated problems of food insecurity and undernutrition continues to plague agricultural villages on the coastal plain of Guyana. Those who are amongst the most impoverished and who experience the brunt of these problems are the small farmers and agricultural labourers who reside in these settlements. This research assesses the food security and nutritional status of these vulnerable groups, examines the relationship between these outcomes, and explores the role of key agricultural variables. The agricultural factors examined are the natural, physical, and human resource components of the farming system, and agricultural land use.

Data for this study were collected through a pre-structured questionnaire that was administered cross-sectionally to 322 households in three agricultural villages that differed in their agro-ecological characteristics. Households were selected by means of a cluster sample technique, and include those who engaged in farming and/or agricultural labour, with less than or equal twenty hectares of land, and with a child under five years of age. Quantitative techniques were utilized for data analysis.

The results indicated that 41.9 percent of small farmers and agricultural labourers were food insecure, a proportion that is more than twice the national average. Undernutrition was concentrated at the lower end of the food security scale, but there was not a strong concomitant rise in nutritional status as food security increased. The agricultural resource components and agricultural land use were important determinants of food security and nutritional outcome. A greater number of these resource components were responsible for food security outcome than for nutritional status as the latter was also influenced by other non-farm factors. Farm size was the most important resource determinant of food security, and was the only natural resource component that translated into better nutritional status. These findings highlight the need for a re-organization of the farming systems to improve both the food security and nutritional status of the rural populace.

Keywords: Food security, nutritional status, farming system