

On Certain Aspects of Agricultural Co-operation in
Trinidad and Tobago.

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INTRODUCTION

I have devoted part of May and June, 1947 to the study of Agricultural Co-operation in Trinidad and Tobago. This essay is the outcome of my study. It is not the result of an investigation. On the one hand, the Department of Agriculture did not favour such a course; and, on the other, the time at my disposal did not allow it.

The information I have gathered has been gleaned from official reports and eked out with what could be gathered from talks and discussions with many Co-operators and the Officers of the Marketing and Co-operation Branch of the Department of Agriculture. I was unfortunate in not being able to visit the Ste. Madeleine Sugar Estate and the credit societies under the supervision of the Ste. Madeleine Sugar Company.

An inference drawn from my study is that it would be of interest to survey Agricultural Co-operation in Trinidad and Tobago since its inception. To that end at least six months of assiduous analysis would be required; and, to be complete, the survey would have to go deep enough into the development of peasant agriculture in the Colony and into the factors governing that development.

The main difficulty I came across has been the lack of co-ordination between the information obtained from official reports. In some cases the reports refer to the "Co-operative Year" i.e. from the 1st. of July of one year to the 30th. of June of the following years. In others, they refer to the Calendar year. The process of introducing a common basis to these reports is full of pit-falls especially where the documents available are incomplete or lack

continuity in their aspects. It is only of recent years that a comprehensive system has been introduced.

I had intended at first to survey Agricultural Co-operation throughout its progress and to present an analysis of the activities of the Co-operative Societies both in their dealings with their members and with the Government and other outside agencies; and, to supplement this study with a criticism of the administration of these societies. I regret that this was not possible. Instead, I have confined myself to a brief and complete review of the growth of Co-operation in the Colony; and, to a short survey of the legislation under which Co-operative Societies are administered. I have added a few notes on some of the Societies now operating.

It may be of interest to note that the administration of Co-operative Societies holds an untapped and important source of information. The applications for membership, those for loans, the valuation schedules, the balance sheets, etc., could be made to yield profuse information that would be of interest to the students of agriculture of peasant farming and of sociology. In their present form these returns are not very helpful and it might be worth while bringing these points to the notice of the Director of Agriculture with the end in view that they should be so framed as to give readily the information they contain. Such information would indicate trends in the size of holdings, the cropping system, the degree of indebtedness etc., and would be valuable to the agricultural economist.

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