

INTRODUCTION

The survey was carried out by a group of eight post-graduate students of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture as an exercise in statistical sampling and as part fulfilment of the regulations governing the Diploma in Tropical Agriculture of the College.

The writer supervised the selection of the sample and the subsequent analysis; as a result, this report is based mainly on the statistical and associated administrative work of the survey.

CHOICE OF THE SURVEY

After considerable discussion it was decided not to repeat work similar to that covered by previous teams, which consisted of a land utilization survey (Buckler et al 1956; Castle et al 1955), but instead to consider a topic that allowed different information to be collected and the application of different sampling methods to those used in the previous surveys. The subject decided upon was an investigation to determine the composition and hence the possible productivity of food crops grown in peasant gardens on the island of Trinidad.

A factor which influenced this decision was that the Government Central Statistical Office had recently (June 1956) carried out an Agricultural Survey of Trinidad and Tobago and the Department was willing to allow the team to use the data already collected.

AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS IN THE COLONIES

In the Report of the First Conference of Colonial Government Statisticians (1950) it is noted that "there was complete agreement on the urgent need for the fullest possible information on agricultural output. The dependence of the people in most Colonial territories on agricultural resources makes it essential that every endeavour should be made to ensure that adequate statistics are available for planning the development of

these resources".

The Conference divided the problem into three parts:

- (a) the output of estate plantations and farms from which individual returns could be obtained;
- (b) peasant-grown commercial crops; and
- (c) subsistence crops and livestock numbers.

The Conference recommended that a dual approach be made to the problem,

- (i) detailed studies of a limited number of small areas; and
- (ii) extensive sample surveys of areas under the more important crops."

Whilst returns of a reasonably accurate nature can be expected from operators in section (a), and from the marketing organisations on section (b), the obtaining of accurate data on section (c) can only be gained, in even the most advanced territories, by a survey carried out by Government trained enumerators.

In the latter case a complete census would be too costly and would take far too great a period of time to complete. A sample survey is considerably less demanding on financial and labour resources; estimates are available much sooner; and whereas the results of a complete census can only be average figures over the whole period, due to the changing crop patterns from season to season, the estimates from a sample survey are more precise in that they refer to a definite time of the year.

Throughout the published Agricultural Survey Reports of the various Colonies, it is noted that little or no attempt has been made to evaluate the production of food crops on peasant holdings. The Second Conference of Colonial Government Statisticians (1953) recognised the difficulties of

- (i) recording crops in peasant gardens especially in areas where mixed or double cropping was practised; and
- (ii) making estimates of yields of such crops.

Though certain recommendations were made, it was con-

sidered that a relatively large amount of work was needed to be carried out in the field.

Finally, with industrial competition for labour and capital in Trinidad, it is essential that some definite policy be formed if the island is to have an economically sound agriculture. Jolly (1954) has stated that if only the idle resources of labour in the Caribbean can be combined with capital wisely invested in productive farming systems, the area can be turned from a wilderness into a garden.

The present survey may thus be considered in the light of the two Colonial Office Conferences, i.e. any work done on the surveying of peasant crops is a useful stepping-stone in devising methods of enumeration, etc.; and also as an advance in the formulation of agricultural and marketing policies in order to assist the local peasant farmer.