

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

The title suggests a purpose which is purely that of an investigation of "peasant" practises in the Aranguez area, ^{but} the real value of the project cannot be written in this report. A student in England generally tends to associate the word "peasant", though possibly unconsciously, with a relatively simple person resigned to his meagre position and accepting a subsistence form of agriculture as the inevitable. This idea was found to be false in the area surveyed, as, it is hoped, the report will disclose. It was only when the student realised this that he made any positive steps forward with the people on the estate, gaining some measure of their confidence and it is hoped, goodwill.

Another fact which became apparent is that it is useless to expect immediate co-operation and hence positive results. Much time was spent in talking to the people on a myriad of non-agricultural topics in an attempt not only to understand their attitude to life, which has a direct bearing on their work in the field, but also to help them understand the student's. In short, a certain degree of real friendship was necessary before any correct information could be gained. This is even more essential in an area where the Government extension officer is more or less unknown and certainly not trusted. An officer in British Guiana, with twenty years experience in the field was heard to remark that it takes at least a year of visiting the people before any concrete results can be expected. Perhaps the failure of many projects can be largely attributed to over-enthusiasm on the part of Government or to the mysterious practice of

The purpose of the questionnaires was originally of constantly "re-shuffling" officers from one district to another.

The purpose of this exercise was, therefore, that the student should gain experience in dealing with people so that, eventually, he might use his knowledge and theirs in an effort to help them improve their position in the world. It is not for him to say how far he progressed. In any case, in view of the fact that one can learn new facts about people and their behaviour until one's dying day, it is probably fair to say that only a very small start was made.

The investigation was divided into two parts. From mid October until December, a map was made showing the cropping of the area. Rain hampered its progress, but in such times much experience was gained by chatting to peasants in their small huts. During the three months a plan was gradually formulated, based on observations already made and, by the time January arrived, a series of questionnaires had been compiled for the dry season. Originally it was intended to concentrate on ten farmers who had been chosen by their willingness to co-operate during the wet season. Accordingly, they were asked to supply any information which may be required. In fact, they were visited twice.

However, it soon became apparent that they were not representative and it was decided to choose another ten by making a random sample, based on position of holding along the traces. It took some time to contact these people and in the end the number was reduced to eight. This change of plans caused a serious set-back to the investigation but it was thought to be a fortunate decision in that the holdings were far more varied and also more experience was gained by dealing with one or two less amenable, more suspicious members of the Aranguéz community.

The purpose of the questionnaires was originally to answer as many questions as possible about each operation which the farmers carried out and to gain some idea of the economics of their systems. After a time it was realised that this was a task too large for the scope of the survey. Therefore it was decided to treat it as a pilot scheme, the results of which would serve as a guide for a more detailed investigation, or for a series of investigations to be carried out at some future date. For instance, it would appear that there is a correlation between soil type and crops grown at any particular time, but this is not proven. Again, although quite a lot of information was acquired regarding the irrigation given to the crop, it was not known what the water holding capacity of the soil is and thus no reliable conclusion can be drawn as to whether too much or too little water is applied. Similarly, a detailed investigation into the soil nutrient status would have to be carried out before it could be shown what the fertiliser requirement is for each crop type. In fact, the questionnaires only showed what happens and would only be of real value when compared with the ideal which is, as yet, unknown.

It is proposed to divide the report into a further five sections dealing with:

- 1) A general consideration of the area,
- 2) The wet season,
- 3) The dry season,
- 4) A detailed discussion of results obtained from the eight farmers,
- and 5) will be in the nature of a summary of conclusions and recommendations.