

## INTRODUCTION:

The object of this introduction, is to give a brief account of the position and problems of Agriculture in Trinidad, and the bearing that the following surveys of two district agricultural areas have on these factors:

### 1. Position and problems of agriculture in Trinidad

Most of the facts here are gained from a Royal Commission Request of 1939 (Ref.1). Though conditions have changed slightly since then, they are not enough to alter the main issues, and, if anything, emphasise the conclusions. Reference is also made to 1949 article in the Economist (Ref.2).

Mineral exports, of which oil products form the vast bulk, are approximately double the value of agricultural exports. Agriculturally, Trinidad is markedly dependent on export crops of which sugar and cocoa make up 73% and 16% respectively of the total. Approximately half the population is dependent on the agricultural industry for employment. This reliance therefore, on two main crops, the financial status of which depend entirely on the notoriously hazardous world trade in primary products, is most unhealthy - witness the tremendous social and political requirements in the British West Indies, as a result of the economic depressions of cocoa and sugar in the inter war period. This danger is further emphasised by the island's dependence on imports for its food supply, this being much greater than any other West Indian Dependency. In 1938 the total agricultural exports were only slightly higher in value than the imported foodstuffs. The value of imports of food per head of population then equalled £3.1.4. - much higher figure now. Pre-war the proportion of home produced food to imported food was slightly under one fifth. The largest items of import were wheat, flour, rice, meat, milk, fruit and vegetable provisions, in that order of magnitude.

Compared to approximately 200,000 acres of land on the island producing sugar cane and cocoa, there are only 20,000 acres producing internally consumed food crops, half of which is rice. Livestock production is almost negligible and occupies a very subsidiary position to that of food crop production.

Some of the reasons for this inattention to internal food production are:-

1. A large proportion of the population, employed in mineral industries, grow little or no food at all.
2. High prices for export crops in the last century, and the island's suitability for these crops, caused over specialisation.
3. The soils of Trinidad are, generally speaking, poor and not very suitable for food crop production.
4. Little attention has previously been paid by the Government to the marketing and production of food.
5. A local belief that imported food is ipso facto of a better quality than home grown food.

Coupled therefore, with an agricultural income dependent on the world trade of two primary products, is a marked dependence on an imported food supply; a highly dangerous economic situation. For example since 1948, cocoa prices have dropped 30%, and the sugar industry is clamouring for a long term sale guarantee, to save it from the inevitable slump in the world market, expected as soon as 1952.

That is the position at present, but looking to the future a further problem presents itself, viz: overpopulation. The population at present is about 600,000, or 328/sq. mile, quite a dense population, considering that geographical and agricultural pastures make at least 1/5th of the land agriculturally useless. The average natural increase of population in the last 5 years, equals 2.5%, which means that the population will double itself in 28 years. No future vistas

of employment appear, as oil ( $\frac{3}{4}$  of the island's total exports) is rapidly running out. There are no projects of deliberate birth control and the suggested emigration schemes to British Guiana and British Honduras are too small to be effective, even if they are successful, which at the present seems doubtful.

It seems inevitable that finally the island will have to be aided externally. Meanwhile agricultural remedies that can be suggested are, that the industry should be made less dependent on two export products by diversification, and especially a more balanced and efficient system of food production should be fostered, thus reducing the colony's dependence on food imports.

2. The objects of the two surveys following

Food production is, at the moment and likely in the future, to be dependent on the peasant smallholder. He adopts, except in the rice areas, a farming policy based on shifting cultivation - a wasteful use of land. Livestock have played a very minor part in farming. Any attempt therefore, to increase the output of peasant produced foodstuffs, will probably be dependent on finding a suitable system of mixed farming, to replace shifting cultivation

(a) Survey of the St. Augustine Rice Area

The Agricultural Society of Trinidad (Ref.1) have suggested a rice development scheme on 8-10,000 acres of the Caroni plain, costing \$250 per acre to develop. The survey area is on the borders of this plain, and ought to provide some useful indication on the development of the proposed scheme. The survey attempts to discover:

1. What natural factors are essential for optimum rice growing.
2. What form of land tenure is most suitable for the peasant producer.
3. What irrigation and water supplies are necessary.
4. What is the best system of farming to follow.
5. What is the place of livestock in that farming system.
6. What are the problems of peasant holders in that area.

(b) Survey of a  $\frac{3}{2}$  mile area N.W. of St. Joseph in the foothills of the Northern Range.

Along the whole North coast of the island, and forming perhaps  $\frac{1}{5}$ th of the island's total acreage, is a mountain range. This land assumes quite a high proportion of the total area which has not been alienated for export, plantation crop production. 75% of this range lies beneath 1,000 ft. and is therefore, not too inaccessible for peasant cultivators.

In the foothills many peasants eke out a living growing food crops on a basis of shifting cultivation, and the purpose of this survey is to discover:

1. The density of gardeners per unit of land.
2. The output per unit of land in relation to the input of labour.
3. Whether the dangers of erosion through shifting cultivation are so great that the land should be afforested or planted to tree crops.
4. Whether the wasteful system of shifting cultivation cannot be replaced by any other farming system, preferably mixed farming. If not, is the present form sufficient to maintain soil fertility.
5. To find the particular problems associated with hill farming and see if they can be overcome.
6. Whether smallholding food crop production on the hill is economically profitable, or can be improved sufficiently to make it so.