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Small-Scale Farm — Planning and Land Settlement

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It was realized that under the broad heading of Farm-Planning, there was planning at the marco level - e.g. land use zoning; planning at the micro level, e.g. a state farm project; planning the individual farm; regional planning within territories; and inter-regional planning. The workshop-group, however, discussed the topic within the context of small-scale agriculture.

It was difficult to define small-scale agriculture in such a manner as to cover all the Caribbean territories, as there was much regional variation. For example, in Jamaica, farmers owning less than 25 acres were considered small-scale, but this excludes heavily capitalized commercial chicken farms. The small farm is therefore based on size, enterprise-mix and income-potential and the small farmer has a reserve price of approximately £1,000 per annum before he will leave agriculture.

In Guyana, a 15 acre farm planted in rice is considered a small farm but a 15 acre farm planted in vegetable crops is not considered small. The criterion seems to be based on income, and a farm of less than $2,000 (Guyanese) per annum is considered small.

In Dominica, a small farm is dependent on the area of land which is capable of cultivation. Income is, however, more important and the small-scale farm is defined more on an income-basis than on size.

After much discussion, it was agreed to broadly define a small farm as a unit of land providing an income equal to or less than that of an unskilled urban industrial worker. Size could be used as a measure for farms with the same crop but not for the whole agricultural sector. The level of technology e.g. mechanization, fertilizer inputs, credit and use of recommended cultural practices, was important. In Trinidad, for example, only farms using a low level of technology and with a size of 25 acres or less, are considered small.

It was agreed that the small-scale farmer in the Caribbean was generally commercially oriented. He produced by far the greater proportion for the local market, and had a reasonable share of the export trade. This was in contrast to some countries in South America in which many of the small farms were traditionally below subsistence level with very few commercial crops.

It was observed that the proportion of total improved agricultural lands in the hands of small-scale farmers varies throughout the Caribbean, but that this proportion was generally less than that in the hands of large-scale farmers. Small-scale farm land tends, in general, to coincide with Land Capability, Classes 3, 4 and 5. However, in certain territories, especially in Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica, some small farms have better land. A wide range of response to this type of land had been observed throughout the region.

It was felt that the major success of small farming was that it persists and accounts for an increasing number of the proportion of farms. The majority of small farms have not produced desirable levels of income, but there is inter-regional as well as intra-regional variation.

The workshop appreciated the shortcomings of small farming and attributed the major failures to:

(a) marketing - often poorly functioning organization;

(b) limited resources and land fragmentation which inhibits successful management;

(c) inability to take risks which limit innovativeness;

(d) communications; and

(e) lack of motivation and commitment.

Some advantages of small farming were also recognized, such as:

(a) stable society located on the land;

(b) the provision of employment and income;

(c) a source of local food-supply.

It was felt that the goals and policy-objectives of small farming should be directed to:

(a) raising farm income;

(b) stabilising the farm-family and reducing the drift to towns;

(c) improving the quality of living on the land, including rural amenities;

(d) improving educational levels and removing the stigma against agriculture in education;

(e) preventing fragmentation, which hinders optimum management.

As far as the research aims were concerned, it was unanimously accepted that the available data were insufficient. Even data obtained from censuses were inadequate for planning. It was felt that there was need to persuade technicians and extension workers to get into the rural areas and collect detailed data over long periods. As many resources as possible should be allocated to the collection of data from this sector. The group also expressed the hope for some form of an integrated regional research programme, possibly launched by the CARIFTA Secretariat.

As far as the planning of small farms was concerned, it was agreed that major limiting factors were as follows:

(a) availability of inputs;

(b) variability of outputs;

(c) markets, the inefficient organization of marketing has presented serious problems to the planning and development of small farms;

(d) technical skills and know-how. These are still lacking among a high proportion of small-scale farmers;

(e) management.

It was observed that for the planning of small farms to be successful, there was need to produce a format for the collection of information so as to aid the easy comparison of data. There was also the need for more detailed case studies. Extension workers and students should be encouraged to work with farmers.

Finally, the group observed that within recent years, there was the establishment of Agricultural Planning Units, particularly in the larger territories. Though favouring this development, it was agreed that planning had to be done at the farm level, i.e. from the bottom up, and it was hoped that agricultural planners would perhaps utilize less resources on planning small farms within the framework of an overall macro model, i.e. from the top down. Both approaches were necessary but it seems that at the current stages of development of small farms in the Caribbean, a greater proportion of resources should be directed to planning at the farm level.

As regards land settlement in the Caribbean it was agreed that policies for settling persons on land were implemented because of several reasons. The most important would seem to be:

(a) to solve social problems;

(b) to take over heavily tenanted areas;

(c) to provide land for bona fide present (or would be) farmers.

It seemed, therefore, that land settlement policies could be broken down under two broad headings, namely:

(a) the welfare type;

(b) the true agricultural type.

The true agricultural type could be further divided into:

(a) the individual-holding type; and

(b) the communal-holding type e.g. co-operative farming.

It was recommended that the accent should be placed on true agricultural settlements. Welfare considerations should be incidental, such as where the settlements also provided welfare benefits along with their major agricultural aims. It was also stressed that only land with a reasonable chance of being brought under profitable production should be utilized.

A distinction was made between natural and applied resources. It was agreed that in order for a land development scheme to have a reasonable chance of success, not only would suitable natural resources need to be available, but also that the governments would have to be prepared to supply applied resources, such as:

(a) the necessary infra-structure, and

(b) the major technical inputs.

Incentives should also be provided for technical officers who are to provide services for the schemes.

It was agreed that one of the most critical problems affecting the success of land-settlement schemes was the choice of settlers. The participants, therefore, recommended that, bearing the objectives of the scheme in mind, only persons with farming experience, or those with both interest and aptitude for potential development and who are willing to be trained, should be settled, It was strongly recommended also that adequate training of settlers and the supervision of operations should be provided.

As regards the choice of crops and livestock, it was agreed that this was dependent on:

(a) the availability of markets;

(b) land-use capability;

(c) advice of technical staff and the availability of technology;

(d) provision of the necessary technical inputs.

The group expressed great concern over the economic viability of land-settlement schemes and recommended that in dealing with such schemes, the ultimate aim should be to eliminate subsistence holdings.

As regards the size of holdings and projected income, no minimum was suggested. It was, however, recommended that the size should be adequate to enable the farmer to generate a level of income which would allow him to obtain an adequate standard of living.