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Book Reviews

Syndication: A Way to Better Farm Profits. Bartholomaeus, M. K. Australian Rural Adjustment Unit Publication, Griffin Press, South Australia, 1981. Pp. 61. \$4.95 (paperback).

Group Farming. Powell, R., Bartholomaeus, M. K., Glasson, R. and Blessing, D. Australian Rural Adjustment Unit Publication, Griffin Press, South Australia, 1982. Pp. 172 (hard cover) \$12.00.

The impetus for these related books developed through Australian Rural Adjustment Unit during 1977 and formed the basis of a three day seminar at Roseworthy Agricultural College in November, 1978. Together, they provide the first comprehensive description of farm syndication in Australia and replace the previous piecemeal treatments of the subject in this country.

The books are pitched at two levels of readership. The first—*Syndication: A Way to Better Farm Profits*—outlines the basic principles of farm syndication and will appeal to those requiring an easy-to-read summary of the basics of the concept. The second book, *Group Farming*, embodies considerably more detail. Both books are similarly structured. Each contain sections on the economic and social benefits of group farming, and detailed case studies of Australian farm syndicate experiences (including machinery, crop, fixed structure, livestock breeding, and fully integrated farm syndicates). The second book has additional chapters on organisational structures, managing group operations, human problems in the formation, growth and development of groups, and conflicts in group farming. These sections contain good cross-referencing to earlier material which enhances this book's value as a reference.

Because of the common subject matter, both books exhibit similar strengths and weaknesses. The strength of both is that the analyses draw heavily on the Australian experiences from farm syndicate operation. Overall, the case studies are well documented and even where the presented figures are now well dated, the cost saving potential from syndication is readily apparent. One notable feature is the useful discussion on the perceived advantages of each type of syndicate. Whilst this discussion tends to be repetitive, especially in the second book, the authors might be excused as the reader who uses the book as a reference will only be referring to specific types of syndicate operations at any one time and will not be likely to be reading the book from cover-to-cover.

The major weakness in both books is perhaps, a strong dose of over-sell. Throughout the reader gets the impression that every syndicate has been successful and has resulted in increased farm profits for those involved. With the second book in particular, this reviewer had the sensation of having to endure a diligent salesman who was prepared to go to any length to highlight the merits of the product. There are several other minor faults which will warrant attention in any future editions contemplated by the authors. For example, both books unnecessarily digress into technical aspects such as shearing shed design. Similarly, this reviewer regards an improved explanation of the derivation of machinery costs is required to allow farmers to calculate just how far they may be operating from the point of minimum average total cost per unit of output.

Both these books on farm syndication should have individual appeal. *Syndication: A Way to Better Farm Profits* will be useful to those requiring a sketch of what farm syndication is all about. Alternatively *Group Farming* is by far the most comprehensive book on the subject in Australia and is recommended for those who require a greater knowledge of the considerations that are necessary in syndicate formulation. It will be useful not only to farmers but to all those who service them.

New South Wales Department of Agriculture, Dubbo. LLOYD DAVIES.

Agriculture in Semi-Arid Environments. Hall, A. E., Cannell, G. H. and Lawton, H. W., Springer-Verlag, New York, 1979. Pp. xiv, 340 (no price quoted).

This book is a multi-disciplinary study designed to assist agricultural development in semi-arid environments of the world. It is these environments which are coming under increasing pressure from human populations and, as such, have to be managed so that productivity is improved and stabilised and environmental deterioration is decreased. The reader thus anticipates that this book will help him understand the principles that govern a fragile ecosystem in semi-arid environments and suggest how it may be manipulated.

The first introductory chapter discusses ancient agricultural systems based on archaeological evidence and how these develop from hunting and gathering to a dependence on agriculture. While this change increased food supply it had many deleterious effects which have resulted in an overall loss in man's ecological flexibility.

The next chapter deals with the development of the present dryland farming systems and reviews land use and agricultural settlement patterns in each of the important tropical semi-arid regions of the world. It concludes with the five stages of development and ecological modification existing in other regions. The final introductory chapter defines semi-arid climates on the basis of climatic data.

The next group of chapters deal with the fundamentals of climatology, soil microbiology, crop adaption and soil-plant-atmosphere relations. Following are a series of chapters which attempt to discuss how this fundamental knowledge applies to soil, crop, pest management and erosion control. The final chapter deals with the interaction between cultivation and livestock production. Unfortunately, the author's treatment of the fundamental aspects takes the form of a literature review which contains many irrelevant references and little useful discussion of the topics. A good example is the chapter on microbiology and biochemical aspects where the reader needs to be a microbiologist to understand and appreciate the presentation. No attempt is made to discuss the particular problems of microbiology relating to semi-arid environments.

The chapter dealing with disease and nematode pests does discuss crop technology and management practices which would be useful in semi-arid West Africa, which could be extrapolated to some other situations. Alternatively, the chapter on weed control gives a review of literature and the role of weeds in crops, but makes little attempt to discuss the principles. The author discusses

the control of specific weeds but only a limited number of weed species, herbicides and particular crop sensitivities on chemicals in some countries. An abridged list of weeds, crops and herbicides are presented, but limited technical information such as this is of little use to students and researchers because it is incomplete. Field workers and advisors would also find it does not contain enough applied information and is limited to a few situations.

The final chapter deals with the interaction between cultivation and livestock production. This chapter makes a real effort to discuss the implication of changing methods between cultivation and livestock systems. It sounds a warning to researchers and educators to understand political, socioeconomic and cultural aspects of existing situations if they expect relevant programmes to result. The chapter, while using examples of links in Africa, discusses in such a way that the information is relevant to many other parts of the world.

In conclusion, many parts of this book have not succeeded in assisting decision making concerning agricultural development in the semi-arid environments. Technical advisers in these regions will have difficulty extracting relevant information because of the amount of technical jargon and lack of meaningful discussion. The final chapter does make up for some of these deficiencies as it discusses the implications of agricultural expansion on traditional pastoralism and suggests some solutions.

New South Wales Department of Agriculture, Trangie. D. G. SAVILLE.

Co-operative Marketing in European Agriculture. Gordon Foxall. Gower Publishing Co., Hampshire, England, 1982. Pp. xi, 101. £14.50.

Foxall's contribution to the agricultural co-operative marketing movement is significant for its timeliness and comprehensive nature. At a time when there are many proposed changes in the marketing of Australian primary products it is interesting that co-operative marketing is being considered given the rather patchy record of co-operatives in this country.

Foxall systematically examines the experiences with agricultural co-operative marketing in eight European countries, where this form of marketing has been practised to much greater extent than in Britain. The author suggests that the major reason for this was the notable failures among British co-operatives early this century. The analysis concentrates on the part played by second and third tier co-operative organisations in the determination of marketing arrangements and in doing so, the author has been able to penetrate the avalanche of "official facts" released to portray the apparent success of these ventures. His probing of individual organisations through written enquiries and discussions with researchers gives this work an authoritative status.

The first chapter is devoted to the organisation of agricultural co-operatives in Europe including a general run down on co-operative finance, legislation and management. The following eight chapters concern co-operative development and scope, and the organisation, financing and management of co-operatives in France, Denmark, Holland, West Germany, Luxemburg, Ireland, Belgium and Italy.

Foxall adopts a pragmatic approach with a clear and concise text that is laden with real-world examples with an extensive bibliography which provides a useful reference source. The book is relatively short (just over 100 pages) but it is crammed with facts and figures, and I regard it as a worthwhile contribution to the study of alternative marketing structures in agriculture. It is the sort of text that is needed in Australia as co-operatives are often readily dismissed without a true understanding of what is required to make them work.

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