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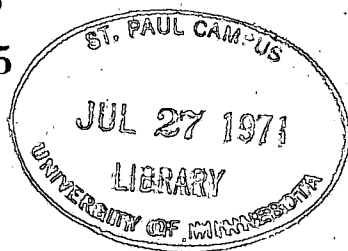
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GROUP 11 (a). DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

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The Group discussed in detail the advantages and disadvantages of a number of methods of collecting basic agricultural data, including mail surveys, interviews, censuses, probability-area surveys, objective-yield surveys, aerial photography, farm management records and the by-products of administrative functions. The Group also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of processing data by various methods, including hand tabulation, small calculators and electronic computers. The discussions revealed that the problems of collecting and processing agricultural data vary so widely between countries and types of data that it is not possible to generalize that some particular methods are usually preferable. Each problem of collecting and processing data must be analysed in detail to determine the most promising procedure. Often a combination of methods will produce the best and cheapest statistics.

The Group pointed out that plans and programmes for economic development sometimes fail to include adequate plans, programmes and finance for the development of the essential supporting statistical system. The discussions focused the view that agricultural statistical programmes should be reviewed frequently since a country's needs for agricultural data and its capacity to produce them often change rapidly.

The members of the Group, several of whom were primarily producers rather than users of statistics, took note of the many comments made in papers and discussions at this conference, concerning the pressing need for improvements in basic agricultural data. The Group



GROUP 11 (a). DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

First row, left to right:

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did not contest this general view but the discussions revealed experiences which suggested that the desires of consumers for statistics are universally far in excess of those which producers of statistics, with their limited resources, can supply. Thus the production of statistics requires an economizing process. The benefits of an additional quantity of statistics or improvements in quality (in terms of accuracy, timeliness or detail of coverage) must be weighed against each other and against the cost. Some members of the Group suggested that economists who seriously desire more or improved data should be prepared to uncover more resources to produce them, or to present their arguments so convincingly as to displace less important priorities.

Some professional data collectors in the Group suggested that economists or other users of data should beware of rushing out too quickly to collect data. Often the job can be done more effectively by existing statistical collecting services. The discussions also revealed that in fact there is often duplication of effort in the collecting and processing of agricultural data. Users of data often are not well informed on what data are available, or fail to make use of data which might prove to be a reasonable substitute for that desired as an ideal. Many of these problems could be avoided if there were better communication and co-operation between producers and users of data. The members of this Group expressed themselves as fervently in favour of such better communication and co-operation. The Group suggested that in future discussions on the subject of agricultural data, consideration be given to including a more representative group of producers and consumers of data. For example, the discussions at this conference might have been more fruitful if groups 'a' and 'b' had been combined.

The Group agreed that it would be desirable for collectors of basic or raw data, such as census data, to develop a greater capability for making available to research workers, the data either in raw form or in such compilations as will meet the individual needs of the research workers.

The Group discussed the problem of international comparability of data. It was agreed that this is highly desirable for such purposes as the development of trade and for the making of meaningful comparative analyses in order that countries may learn and benefit from each others' experience in economic development. However, it was pointed out that the production of strictly comparable data is often very costly or even impossible.

The Group applauded the efforts of international bodies to standardize agricultural statistics. It was noted that the 1970 World Census of Agriculture may be an important move toward improved international comparability of agricultural statistics. The Group noted that planning for the 1970 Census was already underway. The Group hoped that for the 1970 Census there would be an exploration of the possibilities of setting up, either at one place or in different parts of the world, processing centres for assisting countries who do not have elaborate facilities.

The Group recommended that this Association consider including a discussion of the content of the 1970 World Census of Agriculture in the programme of its next meeting.