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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO RURAL FARMING COMMUNITIES – THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

R.E. RIVIERE AND J. BERNARD YANKEY

INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps true to say that not enough attention has been given to the social as contrasted with the economic aspects of development in the Commonwealth Caribbean societies. Repeatedly, planned efforts at economic development have reached the implementation phase, but progress at that stage has been checked. This does not suggest that social factors have not been recognised. What is obvious in many cases, however, is that the social characteristics of the community involved have not been taken into account in the process of planning.

It is the aim of this study to bring the social factors associated with the economics of traditional agriculture to the surface and to evaluate their significance for the development of small-scale agriculture. We hypothesize that, given similar agro-economic conditions in agriculture, social characteristics can alter the levels of productivity of farmers. To test this hypothesis, two agricultural communities in the south-western south-central parts of Dominica were chosen. These are Giraudel and Laudat, both with similarly sized populations.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The first task was to establish the agro-economic similarities between the two selected rural communities. The major factors examined included accessibility by road, average farm size, agricultural extension services, cropping patterns, size of population, land quality and land use. This involved field observations.

The second stage was a pilot survey designed to identify these social factors as well as any other factors which are associated with the functioning of the organisation of agriculture in these areas.

The third and final stage of the fieldwork was the personal interview of a random sample of farmers in both communities using a field schedule. This was designed to indicate the relationships between:

a) agro-economic factors and social factors;

b) those social factors and the levels of productivity.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

(i) Characteristics of Communities:

The two villages are linked to the capital, Roseau, by a surfaced trunk road. Feeder roads are being established in both areas.

A greater proportion of Giraudel farms are less than four acres in size whilst Laudat farms tend to be more than six acres. However, a greater proportion of Giraudel farms are under full cultivation than those of Laudat. In the case of the latter, the majority of farms have about a quarter of their acreage under cultivation, particularly the larger farms. In both areas, the main crops grown are banana, citrus (mainly oranges in the case of Laudat) coffee, cocoa, vegetables and root crops.

According to the 1960 Population Census, the only available source of population statistics, both communities had roughly the same population - Giraudel with 325 residents in 68 homes and Laudat with 308 residents in 66 homes.

In both cases, land is undulating with gradual to steeply rising slopes. Agricultural land in the Giraudel area adjoins the base of Morne Anglais and Mount Micotrin in the case of Laudat. The soils consist of a more or less mature, freely drained material with humic surface horizons. Land is suitable for agriculture in most parts. The area that is suitable for agriculture in the Giraudel district is about one and a half times that of the suitable area of the Laudat district.

(ii) The Farmer and His Family (See Table 1.)

Most of the Laudat farmers are under 50 years while those of Giraudel tend to be over 50 years. Laudat farmers, therefore, are on the average younger than those of Giraudel.

Laudat families are generally smaller than Giraudel families. Most Laudat families have 3-5 children whereas Giraudel families contain 5-10 children. There are no large families in Laudat with more than 10 children, unlike in Giraudel.

(iii) General Characteristics

Fifty per cent of Giraudel farmers do not have more than a Standard III elementary education and about 40 per cent have completed elementary education. Farmers of Laudat generally are of a middle elementary education status (See Table 9).

Giraudel farmers make no distinction between labouring duties and managerial duties on the farm. On the other hand, Laudat farmers make such a distinction and consider some of their duties as managerial. (See Table 2). Giraudel farmers, however, use relatively more labour for farm work than Laudat farmers though their farms are relatively smaller (See Table 17). This may be explained by the larger sized families at Giraudel.

In both areas, farming is mainly a full-time occupation. However, at Giraudel more part-time farming is practised (See Table 4).

A higher proportion of farmers at Laudat own their farms than at Giraudel (See Table 8).

Most farmers in both areas are satisfied with their levels of farm production (See Table 7).

Not many farms in both areas seek relevant agricultural information on how to grow their crops or how to improve existing crop yields (See Table 9).

When problems arise, however, farmers in both areas do seek technical advice especially those at Giraudel (See Table 10).

Most Laudat farmers find farm income adequate to maintain their families, while only half the families at Giraudel find income adequate (See Table 13).

Giraudel farmers have more experience in farming than Laudat farmers, though most farmers in both areas have over fifteen years of experience in farming (See Table 14).

Most farmers, in both areas are not worried about the future of their farms. This is particularly so of the more experienced in farming (See Table 15).

Farmers in Laudat get more encouragement from their children to pursue farming than at Giraudel. The children at Giraudel, to a larger extent, do not like farming as an occupation. Most children seem to prefer urban jobs (See Table 19 & 22).

Giraudel farmers chose their career mainly because they had no alternative, whilst Laudat farmers regarded farming as a means of achieving independence. Other reasons for the choice include

their love for farming as a way of life and their relatively low level of formal education. Those at Giraudel who felt that they had no other choice of career, and those at Laudat who sought independence said they would nonetheless have preferred another job (See Table 20).

There is hardly any conflict between farmers in their farming activities but co-operation at a group level is seldom purchased (See Table 23).

Farmers generally agree that capital is the most limiting factor for farm improvement. In order of importance, other limiting factors include an adequate supply of seasonal labour, technical advice, feeder roads and an adequate water supply system (See Table 24).

Most farmers have not tried new methods of farming and are satisfied with the performance they get from traditional methods. Physical weariness for Giraudel farmers and lack of capital for Laudat farmers are the main reasons why few innovations are being introduced. Some Giraudel farmers, however, have tried new methods as they observe these from their neighbours and the surrounding large farms (See Table 25 and 26).

Discussion

(i) Level of Productivity

Both areas grow similar crops and have the type of soil described as suitable for agriculture with certain limitations. Both areas have a relatively similar labour force, transportation and communication facilities and are served by a closely located base of agricultural extension officers.

Over the past years, however, using the main crop as the example, Giraudel has been consistently more productive than Laudat (See Table 27). All things being equal, one would expect that the levels of productivity to be roughly similar in both areas. What, therefore, accounts for the difference? The hypothesis was advanced that non-economic or social factors may be crucial in influencing productive performance. This is undoubtedly difficult to determine, though the significance of non-economic factors has been understood.

(ii) Relevance of Social Factors

No significant agro-economic factors have explained the difference in productivity between the two areas. The relationship between selected social factors and productivity may well be examined. Social factors, per se, cannot influence productivity directly, but may serve as activating agents. Any significant relationship, therefore, can only indicate the existence of such an agency.

It can be assumed that a satisfactory choice of occupation should create a desire to produce better results from farming than an unsatisfactory choice. Our findings indicate that Giraudel farmers, in the main, chose farming as a career because they had no alternative. Laudat farmers, on the other hand, chose farming as a means of achieving economic independence. However, choice in both instances appears to be unsatisfactory since they all agreed that they would have preferred some other form of employment. Under such conditions one could hardly expect choice of career to serve as a driving force for improvement of farm productivity.

The question of farm ownership as contrasted with farm tenancy was also investigated. Findings revealed that more farmers at Laudat own their farms than those at Giraudel. It would, therefore, appear that ownership is no inducement to improvement of productivity and this may perhaps be explained by the knowledge that ownership is only a form of investment for security. On the other hand, tenancy may be an inducement to improvement of productivity since farmers must present a good record to landlords to justify their tenancy or that they must make the best use of the land whilst occupying it. The question of outright ownership (freehold) vis-a-vis tenancy in relation to improvement of farm productivity requires further investigation.

Group cooperation among farmers as an incentive to improvement in productivity was examined. In both areas little cooperation is practised, but on the other hand conflict amongst farmers is also non-existent. The absence of group cooperation and conflict in both areas does not permit any examination of these factors nor of the extent to which they would affect productivity.

On the question of adequacy of farm income for good rural living, most Laudat farmers find their farming incomes satisfactory, whilst Giraudel farmers find it less so. No reliable inferences can be made from this contrast unless details of pattern expenditure are available. It may be that Giraudel farmers re-invest more of their farm income in agriculture than Laudat farmers, who as a consequence may have more to spend on personal con-

sumption. Or it may equally be that Laudat farmers have a lower standard of living than Giraudel farmers. However, such questions were not investigated.

Finally, most farmers in both areas have no worry about the future of their farms. This is particularly so of the more experienced farmers. Thus again, concern over the future appears to have little effect on present levels of productivity.

CONCLUSION

The social factors investigated in this study are few. No attention was given to religion, social stratification, politics, customs, marriage nor to social control mechanisms, all of which may in one way or another influence the course of agricultural development in these two areas. These omissions restrict the depth of relevance of the social structure influencing the improvement of farm productivity in the areas studied. For this reason this study should be regarded as a lead, an introduction into an area of investigation which should be useful for future agricultural development planning. What is needed is a more intensive and broader series of studies touching on all social aspects of small agricultural communities.

To indicate the possible advantages of such wider studies, this limited survey has brought out two points which may be stated, with caution, as follows.

- a) It is possible that farm tenancy is more conducive to higher productivity than outright ownership.
- b) It is possible that dissatisfaction with farming income activates the farmer to strive for higher production levels - the income incentive.

To what extent these observations are valid cannot be determined from this limited study. Our hypothesis that social factors can alter the level of productivity of farmers is neither proved nor disproved. The proposition, therefore, calls for deeper research and testing.

TABLE 1. AGE OF FARMER BY SIZE OF FAMILY

Age	Size of Family								Total	
	1 - 3		3 - 5		5 - 10		10 +		G	L
	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L		
%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
30 - 39	-	-	-	10	-	10	-	-	-	20
40 - 49	-	10	10	20	10	10	-	-	20	40
50 - 59	-	-	-	-	20	-	10	-	30	-
60 +	20	10	10	20	10	10	-	-	40	40
TOTALS	20	20	20	50	40	30	10	-	90	100
NOT KNOWN			10						10	

TABLE 2. AGE OF FARMERS BY TYPE OF JOBS DONE

Age	Labouring		Management		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
30 - 39	-	10	-	10	-	10
40 - 49	20	30	-	10	20	40
50 - 59	30	-	-	-	30	-
60 +	40	30	-	10	40	40
TOTALS	90	70	-	30	90	100
NOT KNOWN	10				10	

TABLE 3. AGE OF FARMER BY FUTURE WORRY OVER FARM

Age	Worried		Not Worried		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
30 - 39	-	-	-	20	-	20
40 - 49	-	10	20	30	20	40
50 - 59	10	-	20	-	30	-
60 +	-	10	40	30	40	40
TOTALS	10	20	80	80	90	100
NOT KNOWN			10		10	

TABLE 4. SIZE OF FARM BY HOURS WORKED

Acres	Part Time		Full Time		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Under 2	10	—	20	—	30	—
2 — 4	10	—	40	20	50	20
Over 4 — 6	—	10	10	—	10	10
” 6 — 8	—	—	—	10	—	10
8 +	—	—	10	60	10	60
TOTALS	20	10	80	90	100	100

TABLE 5. SIZE OF FARM BY CROPS GROWN IN 1969

Acres	Bananas		Citrus		Vegetables		Coffee Cocoa		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Under 2	10	—	10	—	—	—	10	—	30	—
2 — under 4	20	20	12	—	6	—	12	—	50	20
4 — under 6	5	—	—	5	5	—	—	5	10	10
6 — under 8	—	5	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	10
8 +	4	26	—	25	6	—	—	9	10	60
TOTALS	39	51	22	30	17	5	22	14	100	100

TABLE 6. SIZE OF FARM BY AREA UNDER CULTIVATION

Acres	Proportion Cultivated								Total	
	Quarter		Half		3-Quarter		All		G	L
	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Under 2	—	—	—	—	—	—	30	—	30	—
2 — under 4	—	—	10	—	—	20	40	—	50	20
4 — under 6	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	10	10	10
6 — under 8	—	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
8 +	—	50	—	10	—	—	10	—	10	60
TOTALS	—	60	10	10	—	20	90	10	100	100

TABLE 7. SIZE OF FARM BY SATISFACTION WITH PRODUCTION LEVEL

Acres	Satisfied		Dissatisfied		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Under 2	20	—	10	—	30	—
2 — under 4	30	10	20	10	50	20
4 — under 6	10	10	—	—	10	10
6 — under 8	—	10	—	—	—	10
8 +	10	40	—	20	10	60
TOTALS	70	70	30	30	100	100

TABLE 8. OWNERSHIP OF FARM BY SATISFACTION WITH PRODUCTION

Status of Occupancy	Satisfied		Dissatisfied		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Ownership	30	60	20	30	50	90
Non-owned	40	10	10	—	50	10
TOTALS	70	70	30	30	100	100

TABLE 9. EDUCATION BY SEEKING AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION

Education*	Seek Information		Do not Seek		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Up to Std. III	—	20	50	10	50	30
IV — V	10	10	—	40	10	50
VI — VII	30	10	10	10	40	20
TOTALS	40	40	60	60	100	100

*No Secondary Scholars.

TABLE 10. EDUCATION BY SEEKING OF TECHNICAL ADVICE FOR PROBLEMS

Education	Seek Advice		Do not Seek		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Up to Std. III	20	20	30	10	50	30
IV - V	10	20	—	30	10	50
VI - VII	30	10	10	10	40	20
TOTALS	60	50	40	50	100	100

TABLE 11. EDUCATION BY INNOVATIVENESS

Education	Innovate		Not Innovate		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Up to Std. III	—	—	50	30	50	30
IV - V	—	—	10	50	10	50
VI - VII	20	—	20	20	40	20
TOTALS	20	—	80	100	100	100

TABLE 12. SIZE OF FAMILY BY IF FAMILY LABOUR EMPLOYED

Size of Family	Family Labour		No Family Labour		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Up to 2	20	10	—	10	20	20
3 - 5	30	20	—	30	30	50
6 - 8	—	20	30	—	30	20
9 +	10	—	10	10	20	10
TOTALS	60	50	40	50	100	100

TABLE 13. SIZE OF FAMILY BY ADEQUATE MAINTENANCE OF FAMILY

	Adequate		Inadequate		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Up to 2	20	10	—	10	20	20
3 — 5	—	10	30	40	30	50
6 — 8	20	—	10	20	30	20
9 +	10	—	10	10	20	10
TOTALS	50	20	50	80	100	100

TABLE 14. FARMING EXPERIENCE BY PREFERENCE FOR OTHER JOB

Years of Farming	Other Job		Agriculture		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Up to 5	10	—	—	10	10	10
6 — 10	—	10	—	—	—	10
11 — 15	—	—	10	—	10	—
16 — 20	—	10	10	20	10	30
21 +	30	20	40	30	70	50
TOTALS	40	40	60	60	100	100

TABLE 15. FARMING EXPERIENCE BY WORRY OVER FUTURE OF FARM

Years Farming	Worried		Not Worried		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Up to 5	—	—	10	10	10	10
6 — 10	—	10	—	—	—	10
11 — 15	—	—	10	—	10	—
16 — 20	—	—	10	30	10	30
21 +	10	10	60	40	70	50
TOTALS	10	20	90	80	100	100

TABLE 16. CROPS GROWN BY QUANTITY SOLD IN 1969

Crops	Quarter		Half		3-Quarter		All		Dont Know		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Bananas	-	-	-	-	12	-	46	52	6	-	64	52
Citrus	-	12	-	-	-	-	12	18	-	-	12	30
Vegetables	-	-	-	6	6	-	-	-	-	-	6	6
Coffee/Cocoa	-	6	6	6	-	-	6	-	6	-	18	12
TOTALS	-	18	6	12	18	-	64	70	12	-	100	100

TABLE 17. AREA CULTIVATED BY WEEKLY LABOUR EMPLOYED

Cultivated	Nil		1 Person		2 Persons		3+ Persons		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Quarter	-	40	-	-	-	-	-	20	-	60
Half	-	-	-	-	10	10	-	-	10	10
3-Quarter	-	20	-	-	-	-	10	-	10	20
All	50	10	20	-	10	-	-	-	80	10
TOTALS	50	70	20	-	20	10	10	20	100	100

TABLE 18. FAMILY LABOUR EMPLOYED

Farm Area	Nil	1 P	2 P	3 + P	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
Giraudel	40	40	20	-	100
Laudat	50	40	-	10	100

TABLE 19. CHILDREN ENCOURAGEMENT TO FARMER

Response	Giraudel	Laudat
	%	%
Not applicable	30	30
Negative	20	10
Positive	50	60
TOTALS	100	100

TABLE 20. WHY FARMING CAREER BY PREFERENCE FOR OTHER JOB

Why Farming Career	Preference for Other Jobs		Preference for Farming		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Like farming	—	—	10	30	10	30
No other choice	40	10	—	10	40	20
For independence	—	30	10	10	10	40
For livelihood	—	—	10	10	10	10
Education barrier	—	—	20	—	20	—
No reason given	—	—	10	—	10	—
TOTALS	40	40	60	60	100	100

TABLE 21. WHY FARMING CAREER BY SATISFACTION WITH PRODUCTION

Why Farming Career	Satisfied		Dissatisfied		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Like farming	10	20	—	10	10	30
No other choice	20	—	20	20	40	20
For independence	10	40	—	—	10	40
For livelihood	10	10	—	—	10	10
Education barrier	20	—	—	—	20	—
No reason given	—	—	10	—	10	—
TOTALS	70	70	30	30	100	100

TABLE 22. FARMING CAREER FOR CHILDREN X IF NOT, WHY

Response	G	L
	%	%
No, not remunerative	10	20
No, prefer urban jobs	20	20
No, too much effort	10	—
No, do not like it	10	10
Yes	10	20
Not Applicable	40	30
TOTALS	100	100

TABLE 23. CONFLICT X COOPERATION AMONG FARMERS

Response	Not much Cooperation		No Cooperation		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Conflict	—	—	20	—	20	—
No Conflict	50	60	30	40	80	100
TOTALS	50	60	50	40	100	100

TABLE 24. ASSISTANCE NEEDED TO IMPROVE FARMING

Type of Assistance	Giraudel	Laudat
	%	%
Capital	40	33
Water	12	—
Labour	30	17
Modern Equipment	6	4
Roads/Transport	12	21
Technical Advice	—	25
TOTALS	100	100

TABLE 25. INNOVATIVENESS X SATISFACTION WITH PRODUCTION

Response	Satisfied		Dissatisfied		Total	
	G	L	G	L	G	L
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Innovativeness	10	—	10	—	20	—
No Innovativeness	60	70	20	30	80	100
TOTALS	70	70	30	30	100	100

TABLE 26. REASONS FOR LACK OF INNOVATIVENESS

Response	Giraudel	Laudat	Total
	%	%	%
Satisfied with old method	50	45	47
Age does not permit	25	15	20
Insufficient advice	12.5	15	13
Lack of capital	12.5	25	20
TOTALS	100	100	100

TABLE 27. COMPARATIVE BANANA PRODUCTION OVER SIX QUARTERS
ENDING DECEMBER, 1969

	1968				1969	
	Sep. Qtr.	Dec. Qtr.	Mar. Qtr.	Jan. Qtr.	Sep. Qtr.	Dec. Qtr.
	lb.	lb.	lb.	lb.	lb.	lb.
Giraudel	78,569	47,579	63,871	97,805	70,608	77,339
Laudat	22,228	31,010	23,535	33,584	19,050	26,651

Source: Dominica Banana Growers Association.