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A STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL-SCALE FARMING IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GRENADA¹

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HISTORICAL OUTLINE

In a world of changing technology where the trend is towards large-scale farm operations, there is still a need to solve the problems of the small-scale farms. Farming in Grenada is typical of the Commonwealth Caribbean. The plantation economy, which was the pattern of agriculture set by the colonists over the centuries, had two main characteristics. Both land and labour were obtainable at very low prices and the colonists, who had the where-withal, obtained large areas of land.

On the emancipation of the slaves many of the workers were given parcels of land, generally in the poorest areas. These were the inaccessible, hilly lands, suffering from soil erosion and where consequently labour productivity was low. Farm workers had experience of the Plantation crops which were then sugarcane and cocoa. Now on their own land, not being concerned with cash crops, they concentrated on subsistence farming. Gradually, the more industrious farm workers acquired more land on the plantations. These additional acquisitions were mostly non-contiguous parcels requiring better management skills than the farmer had. Moreover, costs rise under conditions of farming non-contiguous plots. The social consequence of this decreasing productivity was that the large-size family of the farm worker made him a slave to subsistence farming from which little surplus arose to allow for reinvestment.

The plantations, which had suffered from a shortage of labour, began to be reduced to a more manageable size. An increased acreage became available for subsistence farming. Plantations were able to survive by contracting the emancipated labour to plant tree crops. Payment was made according to the number of fields established. As a result this was one of the most important periods of the history of Grenada in that it saw the emergence of a class of small farmers with a certain degree of independence.

During the inter-war years agriculture in Grenada witnessed a period of stagnation. There

was considerable migration to Trinidad, Aruba, Curacao and Central America. The recovery of the plantations by the system of contractual labour then suffered a relapse. The disturbance of world market conditions affecting prices, rising labour costs, the drifting away of labour and, to some extent, the lack of efficient farm management were basic ingredients for a violent social change in a predominantly peasant economy. The period after World War II saw a struggle for the recognition of more public rights and privileges and, because of the plantation system where everyone depended on Massa, the eruption centred on the plantations.

A turning point in the agricultural economy of Grenada came in 1956. Hurricane Janet struck the island in September of that year. About 15% of the cocoa and 80% of the nutmeg plantations suffered destruction. A period of rehabilitation followed when the owners of land began to plant bananas as a companion crop to cocoa and nutmegs. This recovery has continued to 1970.

During this period there have been marked increases in labour rates and fluctuations in the prices of export crops on which the economy of Grenada depends. Even more important, however, has been the changing ownership of land and its further fragmentation. Persons who had no previous interest in agriculture bought lands as a form of security. These purchases were rarely made for the purpose of agricultural development.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

The present agricultural situation which evolved from unplanned development is such that the plantations continue to grow their cocoa and nutmeg with an increasing banana acreage. The small farmer, however, has moved somewhat away from the subsistence farming of purely garden crops and has emerged with cocoa, nutmegs and bananas, as well as vegetable crops.

The organisation of small-scale farming and the cultural practices adopted are inefficient. Frequently, different crops or groups of crops are grown for no sound agronomic or economic reasons. Infra-structural services may not be available to a farmer owing to the non-cooperation of neighbouring farmers and the latter's failure to cultivate properly may lead to disease and pests spreading

¹Special tribute must go to Mr. G.A. Southwell, Chief Agricultural Officer (Extension) and Mr. David Fletcher, Senior Economist, for their assistance in the preparation of this paper.

to the well-cared farms. Output from this farming sector is uncertain, and through the price effect this leads to a continuing dependence on food imports and a consequent lowering of returns to land.

Strategy

It is with this background that new approach to small scale farming is proposed. This system would consist of a number of farms of between 2 - 10 acres distributed around a nucleus farm. The crops to be grown will determine the size of the unit. The nucleus farm will be managed by a highly skilled agriculturist who will be given general policy directions by a statutory board. The nucleus farm will be managed as a commercial unit in its own right. It will, however, serve to demonstrate high standards of agricultural practices and so be an effective influence on the surrounding farms. Moreover, it will provide all infra-structural services which otherwise will either not be provided, or only be provided at a higher cost. A road network could be set out at lower cost per farm if planned for the area as a whole rather than by each farmer specifically for his own purpose. It is proposed that the nucleus farm administration could undertake this service.

The administrative organization which is proposed for this system of farming is that a statutory authority will be established. Assets of the nucleus farm will be vested in the statutory authority. The authority will be governed by a board comprising participating farmers, Government agricultural officers, representatives of marketing associations and legal and financial representatives. The board will be responsible for forming the general policy of the authority and will be its administrative body. The day-to-day operation of the authority will be conducted by an experienced chief executive.

It will naturally follow that the staff would depend on what functions the authority has to perform. This has been described above in a general manner and it would be appropriate to set it down here specifically:

- (1) to give technical and managerial guidance in the administration of small adjacent farms;
- (2) to provide services common to the adjacent farms;
- (3) to serve as a demonstration farm;
- (4) to provide technical and other information to the farms;
- (5) to prevent the uneconomic fragmentation of land;
- (6) to provide marketing information and services;

- (7) to develop the natural resources of the areas to the fullest and to provide for the harnessing of community spirit and local leadership.

Initially, financing such an agricultural system will be the responsibility of the State. The physical assets of the authority will be a grant to develop the basic infra-structure of the area. Crop funds will probably be loaned with payments scheduled over a period long enough to ensure that the farmers' working standard will not be adversely affected.

Tenureship

One of the failings of our agricultural system is that it permits the freedom of transfer titles and land fragmentation. The obvious disadvantage of this freedom is that agricultural progress is disrupted by it. Patterns of agricultural practice do change with the change of ownership, particularly when land is fragmented.

It is submitted that when a system of farm management is establishment around the Nucleus Farm any attempt to fragment a unit will possibly distort the relationship which would have been established. For example, a separate road and water system will have to be laid down for the new lot. This will need a new agricultural programme. Output and marketing patterns of the various crops will change. This will affect the ordering of inputs such as plants, fertilizers and insecticides. It is not being suggested that an agricultural pattern for a particular area, once established, must not be changed. Change, however, must come as a result of changing demand patterns of the consumers as distinct from any distortion of established structural practices. It is submitted that where the ownership of an established unit has to change hands, the unit must be transmitted in its entirety rather than in part, except where the sub-division is recommended after due regard to the economic, social and agricultural requirements.

SUMMARY

The agricultural history of Grenada witnessed the development of small inefficient farmers with scattered units of relatively poor quality land. There has been a tradition of subsistence farming which has partly given way to cocoa, nutmegs and banana production. Labour productivity has been extremely low under this system. Investment in small farms has been restricted. There has been a tendency for incomes of small farmers to decline. Social attitudes have demonstrated themselves in the migration of youth from the land and its abandonment by even many of the older folk. Of a total farm acreage in Grenada of 60,000 acres, some 20,000 are owned by some 13,000 persons having under 10 acres. These 20,000 acres are, in the main, undergoing unprofitable husbandry. The contribution which

small farming can make towards reducing the food import bill of the Commonwealth Caribbean territories and the possibility of adding to their export trade must surely be significant. The strategy suggested above, whereby a farming complex of units owned by farmers and surrounding a nucleus farm from which all the advantages of large-scale techniques may be derived, seems to be the answer.

The battle against poverty must be fought simultaneously on several points including: industrialization, agricultural development and the transformation of institutional structures. The third world, with its population explosion and social demands that

have outstripped industrial growth, cannot expect to use effectively the same tools as the developed countries. Any agricultural development strategy for the Caribbean, if it is to be a lasting development, must ensure the participation of the small farmer in planning. The well-documented failures of even well laid plans of developers can be traced to the neglect of anticipating the small farmer's reactions which are now recognised as an indispensable factor in implementing agricultural policy. It is for the above reason, too, that the present proposal provides for an administrative machinery on which the small farmer is well represented and has a full voice.

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF HOLDINGS AND FARM LAND ACCORDING TO SIZE GROUPS:
GRENADA, 1961

Size Groups	No. of Holdings	% of Total Holdings	Acreage	% of Total Acreage
0 – 0.9	6,458	45.8	2,476	4.1
1 – 4.9	6,052	42.9	11,907	19.8
5 – 9.9	934	6.6	5,998	10.0
10 – 24.9	418	2.9	5,867	9.8
25 – 49.9	100	0.8	3,367	5.6
50 – 99.9	24	0.3	2,814	4.7
100 – 199.9	28	0.2	3,618	6.0
200 – 499.9	52	0.4	15,098	25.0
500 and over	12	0.1	9,052	15.0
Total	12,096	100.0	60,197	100.0

Source: West Indies Census of Agriculture, 1961.