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Discussion Report

The discussion opened with the question of a possible conflict between the commercial objectives of the nucleus farm and the latter's responsibility for servicing the surrounding smallholdings. Mr. Marecheau suggested that this could be overcome by accounting for the two functions separately and charging the surrounding farms for the services provided.

The viability of small farms was questioned and it was suggested that the whole policy of trying to develop them might be a waste of resources which could be better used in the creation of larger farms. In particular it was suggested that a size of between 2 and 10 acres for the satellite farm might be too small. In defence of the small farm it was maintained that the plantation had in general not served the area well and that plantations often found difficulty in obtaining labour. In Grenada, the people preferred to own their smallholdings and 2 - 10 acres could provide a family with an income of \$300 p. a. per head. This is comparable to the country's average income. It was hoped that the nucleus-farm system would incorporate some of the advantages of large-scale farming. Fragmentation of the farms under the system would be prevented by law. It had been estimated that there were 11,000 acres of cultivatable land in Grenada at present uncultivated. The nucleus farm-system was designed for new settlers rather than the re-settlement of existing smallholders. It was agreed that the demonstration-effect of the nucleus farm extended beyond the boundaries of its satellites to other smallholdings not formally part of the system, as Surinam's experience had shown.

J. Sital of Surinam pointed out the value of studying the operation of the nucleus farm system in other parts of the world (e. g. SODEPALM in the Ivory Coast) and made the following statement describing Surinam's experience:-

"The nucleus farm strategy has been used in several low income countries. In my own country - Surinam - this strategy was put into practice in the early sixties after the disappointing results we had with the settlement of farm-development projects of a more or less 'laissez-faire' type.

"In developing peasant agriculture, one can choose the path of gradual improvements in the existing setting, or a leap forward in creating a modern production structure on the basis of expected transformation in the overall economic structure. In Surinam, we are doing both. It goes without saying that the second approach is much more demanding and that guidance of the settled farmers should be very close and intensive. I am not exaggerating if I say that you have to sit almost on the necks of the farmers. The strategy outlined by the authors today proved to be successful in Surinam in both banana and rice production and there are plans for other crops. They were especially successful from a technical point of view but from the socio-economic angle there are still some problems to be solved since income has turned out to be far higher than the planners had anticipated. The aim of creating an independent peasantry, having incomes equal to those in comparable economic activities outside agriculture, was exceeded. This produced social problems and upset the pattern of allocation of resources. But corrective measures can always be taken to mitigate this type of unexpected result in the socio-economic field.

"Two more points I want to make are that the peasants were not settled until the nucleus farm was ready to do its job with a reasonable chance of success, and that the strategy will not produce results overnight. It goes without saying that success was not simply the result of establishing this form of organisation, but of the careful planning and execution of every aspect of the approach from the selection and training of farmers to the marketing of their produce. Political interference with this guided process of change was minimised by the establishment of nucleus farms as semi-independent foundations led by agricultural experts.

"My aim has been to draw attention to Surinam's nucleus farms so that if you succeed in establishing this strategy you may benefit from our experiences and avoid mistakes made by others. I am sure you would be very welcome in Surinam."