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THE PLACE OF MARKETING CO-OPERATIVES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN GUYANA

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Introduction

Agricultural production in Guyana is at present dominated by the production of sugar and rice. The percentage of total cropland under sugar in 1970 was 21.8 per cent, and the percentage under rice was 59.5 per cent, so that all other crops shared less than 20 per cent of total cropland.

Sugar in Guyana is produced by two companies, and marketing is done through the Sugar Producers' Association whose membership is largely representatives of these two companies. Only 8.5 per cent of the sugar cane harvested in 1970 was produced by small cane farmers, that is, farmers outside of the plantation system. These small farmers' canes were milled by the factories operated by the two companies and the sugar produced was marketed by the Sugar Producers' Association.

The Guyana Rice Marketing Board was established during World War II to provide a single marketing outlet for all rice sold either on the local market or overseas. Millers are required by statute to transfer to the Rice Marketing Board all milled rice produced, apart from reasonable quantities retained by farmers for their own consumption. At the Rice Marketing Board the rice is remilled if necessary, graded and packed before distribution to the final consumer through normal whole-sale and retail agencies.

The marketing of sugar and rice, therefore, can be said to be reasonably well organised at present and accordingly these two commodities will not be dealt with in this paper. There are indeed several cooperatives societies which call themselves Sugar-cane Marketing Cooperatives, but by and large, these are in fact land societies or even producer co-operatives which cooperate to transport sugar cane to the factories to be milled and which take joint action to ensure that the canes are properly weighed, that the sucrose content is correctly measured and that the price formula for the sugar produced from their canes is properly applied. The organisations referred to are not really marketing organisations in the true sense of the term.

The paper therefore is confined to the marketing of grains (other than rice), fruits, vegetables, root crops, livestock and livestock products such as meat, milk, and poultry and eggs. The marketing of fish and shrimps as well as of honey is also discussed.

Production Estimates

The estimated production of the major agricultural commodities other than rice and sugar for the year 1970 is shown in Table 1.

In addition, large unestimated quantities of vegetables and fruits, other than those mentioned above, crabs and fresh water fish are sold locally.

Consumption Estimates

According to the preliminary estimates of the 1970 census, Guyana has a

population of just under 750,000. Over 250,000, or more than one-third of these inhabitants, live within the five official towns and in villages and districts which may be considered semi-urban. Thousands more live on extra-nuclear sugar estate settlements which can hardly be described as rural because of the density of population. On these settlements there is also little agriculture apart from small vegetable plots and one or two head of livestock for which there is scarcely any pasture.

Estimates of Supply

Unpublished estimates from the 1968 Agricultural Census indicate that average size of holding has not improved significantly since the previous (1953) agricultural census was taken. Figures for 1953 showing the land distribution among farmers are seen in Table 2.

We have a picture, typical of Caribbean agriculture, where the agricultural commodities are produced by a number of farmers working on very small areas of land. The problems usually associated with small-scale farming would be aggravated if each farmer attempted to retail his commodity himself. But in Guyana that is exactly what sometimes occurs, where farmers live relatively close to the urban centre, Georgetown. Where transportation is easily available, as for example in West or East Demerara, or up the Demerara River, many farmers or their wives retail their produce themselves at one of the municipal markets. In the circumstances the sellers are uncertain about the prices their goods will fetch.

The Markets and the Commodities

It would perhaps be best at this point to treat some of the commodities separately and to group them according to recognisable features related to market conditions. The groups thus identified are:

- (a) root crops, fruits and green vegetables
- (b) coconuts, including copra, coffee and corn
- (c) beef, pork, mutton and goat meat
- (d) milk
- (e) poultry meat and eggs
- (f) fish and shrimps
- (g) honey.

The major existing marketing agencies through which the above commodities are sold are (a) the Municipal and Village markets; (b) the Guyana Marketing Corporation; (c) super-markets; (d) the Meat Marketing Limited. These sales outlets are discussed in turn.

(a) Municipal and Village Markets: These markets are the main sales outlets in villages and towns for the commodities listed above. The markets are sometimes sheltered structures, often open-air, with stalls for which the vendors pay a fee. Perhaps the best examples of this type of market are the four markets in the Greater Georgetown area. These markets are not confined to the sale of farm products alone, though the disposal of farm produce of all types comprise a fair share of the business transacted. Partial zoning is practised; there are special sections for beef and for fish but fruits, vegetables and root crops are usually sold by the same vendor. Some wholesaling is done but most of the hucksters and farmers engage in retail trade and operate on a small scale. The main commodities passing through the Georgetown Municipal markets are plantains, sales of which were more than 4 million pounds in 1970 and root crops, nearly 8 million pounds.¹

¹Figures from the Planning and Programming Division of the Ministry of Agriculture.

(b) The Guyana Marketing Corporation:¹ The G.M.C. is a marketing agency set up by Government to provide a marketing outlet for farm produce other than rice and sugar. Guaranteed minimum prices are paid by the G.M.C. for crops bought. In practice, however, the Corporation buys above the statutory floor prices. The Corporation has instituted a system of buying on contract from farmers and has exercised considerable influence upon the promotion of co-operative groups especially through its programme of granting credit to swine producing co-operatives in the form of feeds.

The Corporation undertakes some processing as part of its operations and attached to it are a milk pasteurization plant; a ham, bacon and sausage factory; and a processing plant which provides corn meal, plantain flour, and feeds for swine.

We get a picture of the scale of operations of the Corporation from the volume of purchases in 1970. Five and one-half million pounds of plantains were sold - 1½ million pounds more than the Municipal markets; about 4 million pounds of root crops were sold -- approximately two-thirds of the volume sold by the Municipal markets. Small volumes of a variety of other crops such as pineapples, carrots, and corn were also handled.²

(c) Super-markets: A significant contribution of the super-markets is the influence they have exerted on consumer appreciation of display of goods and standard packaging. Unlike other markets they make extensive use of refrigeration to reduce spoilage.

(d) Meat Marketing Limited: This concern is a private company which markets beef. Its membership is confined to cattle producers and its sphere of operations is centred almost entirely in the Rupununi; only about 10 per cent of beef sold by the Company comes from the Coast. In effect it is a wholesale marketing arm of a producer co-operative. Animals are purchased from members who are given an advance payment based on the slaughter weights of the animals. After the beef has been disposed of, the accounts are finally settled.

Characteristics of the Crops Marketed

Next we discuss characteristics of the commodities marketed.

(a) Root crops, fruits and green vegetables can be treated as one group because of their common characteristics which are that they are perishable; they are produced for the most part by a large number of relatively small farmers; and they are sold in the same markets and in many cases by the same people.

Root crops and fruits are produced mainly on riverain soils especially up the Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice Rivers and in the Pomeroon and North-West Districts. As mentioned earlier, where the farm lands are within easy reach of the main markets, the farmers or their wives may market their own produce. In the more remote areas the G.M.C. provides buying agents who purchase the commodities and ship them to Georgetown or New Amsterdam. The same wholesale

1

Another paper deals more fully with the impact of the Guyana Marketing Corporation (G.M.C.) upon the diversification of agriculture in Guyana.

2

Data provided by the Guyana Marketing Corporation.

purchasing service is provided by private middlemen but they offer no stable contract prices to farmers. They tend to exploit the market situation, using their better knowledge of market conditions against the best interests of the farmers. One result of this is that when market conditions are good and prices are high the producers sell to private middlemen; when conditions are depressed they look to the Government agency to help them get rid of their produce.

Table 3 compares the wholesale prices for some selected crops in the Georgetown Municipal markets with prices paid to farmers by G.M.C.

It should be noted that the G.M.C. buys ex-farm while the wholesale prices in the Municipal markets are mainly prices charged the retailers by private middlemen.

Most of the green vegetables are produced close to the markets, that is, along the coast especially near the major population centres. Though the ecological conditions in the interior seem better than the coastlands for the production of vegetables, problems of transportation permit the production in these remote areas only of the high priced vegetables if they are for sale on the coast. Most of the vegetables flown to the Coast are purchased by the G.M.C. These include cabbages and tomatoes as well as carrots and beans.

The handling of fruits, root crops and vegetables, both before and after reaping, leaves much to be desired. Many commodities are reaped in a state too mature to withstand shipping over appreciable distances. To aggravate the situation, very little crating is practised and the steamers, sloops and bateaus which are used for shipping have no special facilities that are required for the transport of vegetable crops. Fruits and vegetables are displayed in the open air. There is no grading either by size or quality and very little cleaning of root crops is practised.

(b) Coconuts, copra, coffee and corn are treated together because they are not perishable and because for the most part they need further processing before use. They tend accordingly to be purchased by a handful of traders and manufacturers. Most of the coconuts produced are converted into copra either by the farmer himself or by private copra producers who buy nuts from the farmers.

Major outlets for coffee are the G.M.C. which exports the beans to the U.S.A. for the processing of Guyana instant coffee, the local ground coffee manufacturers, and a few private local exporters. Coffee not sold to the G.M.C. is usually sold by farmers to private middlemen.

Most of the corn produced is purchased either by the G.M.C. for processing into stockfeed or corn meal or by other private stockfeed companies.

(c) Meat, other than poultry meat, is retailed either through the G.M.C. or by private butcheries located mainly in the Municipal markets. Some supermarkets and one or two specialised retail meat markets also sell meats. There is room for improvement in the standard of the Municipal butcheries.

The G.M.C. buys pigs by carcass weight and uses published grading standards which specify the minimum and maximum back-fat requirements, the length of the side and the weight margins which are acceptable to the Corporation. It also

enters into contractual arrangements with the farmers who are supplied with credit in the form of feeds for their hogs and who sell all of their marketable hogs to the G.M.C.

(d) Milk - milk bought by the Milk Pasteurization Plant comes from dual purpose cattle which graze on the open flood plains of the Mahaica, Mahaicony and Abary Rivers and which are owned by a number of small producers. The cows are neglected during the periods of rice planting and harvesting so that the supply of milk available to the Plant from this source is not reliable. Another important factor is the wide range in the standard of sanitation practised by the farmers and, in the absence of cooling facilities, on many occasions the milk reaches the Plant with an unacceptable bacterial count.

(e) Poultry meat and Eggs - the marketing of poultry products is usually undertaken by the larger producers themselves integrating vertically and thus linking their market outlets to their producing units. Competition and experience over the years have led to noticeable improvements in packaging and handling of poultry meat and eggs but standards vary considerably from producer to producer. There is still no central processing and packaging plant for poultry meat. Eggs are graded only with respect to size and not with respect to freshness. The size grades distinguish mainly between two sizes only, large eggs and those that cannot be called large.

(f) Fish and Shrimp - most of the fish and shrimp sold on the local market are caught by small fishermen who sell to small retailers operating open stalls in the Municipal markets or who hawk their wares along town and village streets. As in the case of beef and other meats, no protection against flies is usually provided and except for the larger retail outlets like the G.M.C. and the better super-markets no provision is made for refrigeration.

It must be added that most of the shrimps caught off our coast are properly cleaned, packed and frozen for export to the United States by the large companies which engage in shrimping.

(g) Honey is dealt with in this paper not because it is of considerable importance at present but because of the tremendous potential for the future development of the industry especially through producer and marketing co-operatives. It has been estimated that in 1970, 81,000 pounds of honey were produced by the beekeepers big enough to market their product efficiently.

The Case for Marketing Co-operatives

In his 'Marketing of Agricultural Products' Kohls¹ has defined marketing as "the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from the producer to the consumer so as to reach the consumer at the time, place, and in the form he desires at a price he is willing to pay". Such a definition of marketing is consumer-oriented but Kohls goes on to make the point that "in the long run, he who serves the consumer best profits most". What we seek therefore is a market organisation that will at once provide the marketing services the consumer demands and do the best for the farmer.

Mosher² in a chapter on 'Markets for Farm Products' notes that three things

¹ Kohls, R.L., Marketing of Agricultural Products, MacMillan & Co., New York, 1958, p.7.

² Mosher, A.T., Getting Agriculture Moving, The Agricultural Development Council, F.A. Praeger Publishers, New York, 1966, p. 63.

are necessary if the farmer is to obtain a price for his products high enough to repay him for his cash outlay and his efforts in producing these products:

1. There must be a demand for the products.
2. There must be a marketing system.
3. There must be farmers' confidence in the working of the marketing system.

There seems to be no question that there is a demand for farm products in Guyana and the Caribbean. There are several commodities listed in the Agricultural Marketing Protocol to the CARIFTA Agreement and the Region is still far from meeting the domestic demand for these items. Guyana still imports a relatively large percentage of its food requirements. In 1970 several millions of pounds of agricultural products valued at about 4 million dollars were imported into the country.

In the section on 'Development of the Marketing System' Mosher states that "an individual farmer, unless he is the operator of a very large plantation, has no way of contacting buyers in these markets. He does not have the means of transporting his products there. He does not have the know-how or the facilities for handling, packaging, storing, processing and other operations that are involved. His volume of produce is not large enough to justify his performing these operations anyway; it would be inefficient for him to do so".¹

The first part of this paper described in some detail the existing situation with respect to the marketing of agricultural commodities in this country. One recurring feature of small producer marketing was inadequate prices. Whether the sale took place at the farm gate or not, the result was the same -- the farmer received a financial return for his product which was not satisfactory from his point of view. The G.M.C. has in fact done a good deal to improve the situation by stabilising prices through its system of contract prices to farmers; but there are some areas where the G.M.C. has no buying agents; also, it has sometimes been forced to reject goods of poor quality and this has caused some dissatisfaction among farmers. In a word, there is, in spite of the functioning of the G.M.C., still a lack of confidence in the marketing system in Guyana as it now stands.

The importance of proper price incentives to farmers if they are to be encouraged to increase their production is recognised. In a chapter entitled 'Pre-takeoff Factors Necessary but not Sufficient' Lester Brown² points out that in addition to such factors as the levels of literacy and income, the market orientation of agriculture, the availability of physical inputs and the provision of credit, the price received by the farmer for his product plays an important part in promoting the takeoff in agriculture.

"When considering the use of a given input, farmers must estimate additional output expected as a result of its use. The value of additional output must be related to the cost of each input to determine profitability. Longer term investments in land improvements are influenced by the longer term price outlook."

¹
¹ Ibid., p. 66.

²
² Brown, L., Increasing World Food Output, pp. 62 - 67.

Brown goes on to cite examples of the effect of favourable prices upon the increase in production in different areas and suggests that some form of price support may be necessary. The point to be noted here is that in any circumstance, the farmer must be given reasonable incentives to greater effort, and one such incentive is a greater share of the proceeds of the sale of his produce. We can spend a lot of time arguing over the merits and demerits of a system of price support and its efficacy in promoting agricultural development but in developing countries Governments must always be sensitive both to subsidies directed to any one particular sector of the community rather than to the country as a whole and to any policy which will have an adverse effect on the cost of living. If the farmers are to get as much as possible out of what they produce without adversely affecting the cost of living, then one way of achieving this is to redirect profits to the farmers, which now go to the middlemen.

At the same time the needs of consumers must be borne in mind. We have indicated that the consumer is not provided with the goods and services "in the form he desires and at a price he is willing to pay". From the consumer's point of view the main defects of the marketing system described above may be summarised as follows:

1. The supply of some commodities tends to be unreliable.
2. Prices are high not only because of production factors on the farm but also because of a relatively high middleman margin built into the final price.
3. Little or no grading of produce is practised.
4. Produce is usually displayed in unattractive or insanitary conditions and refrigeration facilities are grossly inadequate.
5. Because of poor handling and lack of proper transportation facilities many fruits, vegetables and root crops as well as commodities such as milk reach the market in very bad condition. The resulting spoilage aggravates the supply situation in times of scarcity, influencing price upwards and forcing the consumer either to accept commodities of very poor quality or to do without them.
6. Because of the absence of better organised marketing of farm produce, distribution tends to be lopsided, some parts of the country being far better served than others.

Most if not all of the above factors can be attributed to the fact that marketing is in the hands of a great number of small producers, with some middlemen between the small producers and a large number of small retailers.

The path to follow seems clear enough. Better financial returns to the farmer will stimulate production. One reason why we need increased production is because not only we, but our Caribbean neighbours as well, are short of food. Consumers require steady supplies of farm produce of good quality, properly displayed or exposed for sale and at reasonable prices. By providing these services, the market system will stimulate the consumption of locally produced goods. Far too often our criticism of the apparent preference of local consumers for imported agricultural commodities overlooks the fact that the preference may stem more from

the consumer's reliance upon the known quality of a standard imported product than from any real prejudice against the local article. Here in Guyana, bacon and ham produced by the G.M.C. compare very favourably both in price and quality with the imported commodities. As long as the standards are maintained, there needs to be little fear of competition. Because G.M.C. has been able to standardise its products, the pig industry in Guyana has been stimulated and the production of pork has increased steadily in recent years. Significantly enough, G.M.C. now purchases most of its hogs through co-operatives which organise the collection and the transportation of the animals to be slaughtered.

One writer, in discussing co-operatives in Agriculture, states: "To increase their economic power and defend themselves against distributive practices they consider injurious, farmers have set the pace for the co-operative movement in the United States. At the farm end of the market process, the best solution to the problem seems to be in co-operative marketing for farmers. At small local shipping points effective competition among handlers and economic co-operation are almost incompatible. Co-operative marketing seems to be the only way to obtain a sufficient volume for low-cost operation and at the same time avoid exploitation of the farmer by the handler."¹

Cooperation among small scale farmers will lead to economies that reduce costs and at the same time prevent exploitation of the farmers. Co-operation therefore seems to be the answer to the small farmer's marketing problems.

Organisation of Marketing Co-operatives

There are fundamental differences between co-operatives and companies. Most co-operatives in western countries have adopted to a greater or lesser extent the concepts laid down by the Rochdale pioneers. These concepts may be briefly summarised as follows:

1. Membership is open to all irrespective of social class or racial group and the movement itself is politically neutral in the sense that all who subscribe to the concepts can become members irrespective of political affiliation.
2. Each member is allowed just one vote and size of share capital does not determine the influence which an individual member can wield in a society.
3. The percentage paid as dividend on share capital is limited and additional bonuses are declared according to the individual member's contribution, apart from his share capital, to the acquisition of profits. That is to say, a member who utilised the services of his co-operative tends to gain in proportion to his use of those services.
4. The education of members both in the principles of co-operation and in the management of the particular business in which the co-operative is engaged is a fundamental concept of the co-operative movement.

We should note the difference between co-operative and company organisation.

¹
Dimock, M.E., Business and Government. Henry Hold & Co., New York, Revised Edition, 1953, p. 321.

Kohls¹ puts it this way: "The control is exercised by the owners as investors in the business ... the primary objective of the co-operative enterprise is to do the job assigned to it at a minimum of cost and with maximum satisfaction for its owner-patrons ..."

"... The patronage refund of co-operatives is the device used to return to the owner-patrons the overcharges or underpayments which have resulted in earnings above cost ..."

"... In a co-operative the patron-owner invests his money primarily so that the organisation may provide desired services for him. His decision to enter or remain as a part-owner of the co-operative is made largely on the basis of his opportunity to benefit as a parton-user."

The relevance of the above concepts to the situation in Guyana apart from the economic considerations already discussed, lies in the following:

- (a) most of the farmers have little capital to invest and any form of company organisation can give to sleeping but wealthy members the advantage of earning or rather "unearning" more income than the farmers who have morally contributed more to any profits that may accrue;
- (b) co-operation allows for the educational growth of the member. Business and management principles inculcated through co-operative training programmes can encourage a business approach to agriculture, an approach sadly lacking among our farmers; and
- (c) the spirit of self-help and mutual-help which co-operation engenders will help to produce the type of citizen Guyana needs today to build it -- a self-reliant, self-confident, hardworking Guyanese knowing that he himself will reap the maximum benefits from any additional effort which he may put forward.

Guyana can begin its programme by establishing collecting centres for farm produce. The root crops, fruits and vegetables can be collected at a central purchasing centre. The commodities can then be cleaned, graded and properly crated for shipment to the G.M.C. After the marketing costs are met, dividends on share capital which by statute cannot exceed 6 per cent can be declared but the bulk of the profits will go to the producing farmers. The several benefits of such a system are that:

- (a) middleman profits will go to the farmer;
- (b) in time the principles of handling, grading and crating of produce will be learnt. Higher grades will mean greater financial returns to the farmer. Greater financial returns will act as an incentive to greater effort;
- (c) better crating and handling will result in less spoilage at the G.M.C. and a reduction in the amount of subsidy required by the Corporation. Funds thus released can be used to promote market education among co-operatives;
- (d) a better, cleaner and in time cheaper product will reach the consumer.

And so we can begin where we are now and with what we have got. Capital

¹

Kohls, op. cit., pp. 323 - 324.

costs will be low if we begin with the simplest marketing organisation, that is, collecting the produce at the central point, cleaning, grading or cooling as the case required. As we grow in experience, as we learn to trust ourselves and to trust each other more, as we begin to understand co-operation better and learn to work together, and as we gain more confidence in our ability to manage marketing, we can expand either upward or downward, laterally or diagonally. What, for example, is to prevent the Gold-Nab starch makers from moving into a well organised factory where they produce not only a flocculent for alumina, and laundry starch, also tapioca for human consumption and paste for stationery? What is to prevent them from producing their own cassava on a large efficiently managed farm to meet the requirements of their own factory?

Hog producers, beekeepers, small poultry men, pineapple growers, indeed all of the host of small farmers, would derive benefits from the setting up of collecting centres, benefits that will spread forwards to cooperative wholesale societies and cooperative processing plants, and backwards to large efficiently run cooperative farms with their ancillary cooperative farm supply depots, fertilizer plants and transportation services.

Table 1 Guyana: Estimated Production of Various Commodities, 1970

Commodity	Unit	Estimated Production
Root crops	000 pounds	107,936
Corn	"	4,100
Bananas	"	12,400
Citrus	"	18,500
Pineapples	"	2,800
Cabbages	"	650
Beef*	"	8,840
Pork*	"	2,645
Mutton, Goat Meat*	"	139
Poultry**	"	7,457
Milk	000 gallons	4,300
Eggs	000 eggs	31,263
Fish	000 pounds	26,758
Shrimps	"	11,877
Coconuts	000 nuts	50,000
Coffee	000 pounds	1,400
Honey	"	81

Notes: * Official slaughter figures only
 ** Large producers only

Source: Planning and Programming Division, Ministry of Agriculture,
 Guyana

Table 2

Guyana: Distribution of Farms by Sizes, 1953

Farm Sizes (Rh. Acres)*	Berbice	Demerara	Essequibo	Total
Under 2	1,800	3,300	900	6,000
2.0 - 4.9 ...	4,900	3,000	1,900	9,800
5.0 - 9.9 ...	2,800	2,100	2,000	6,900
10.0-24.9 ...	1,900	1,300	900	4,100
25.0-49.9 ...	200	300	400	900
50.0-99.9 ...	100	200	100	400
100+	200	200	100	500
Total Farms	11,900	10,400	6,300	28,600

Source: Planning and Programming Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Guyana.

Note: * "Rhineland acres" - A Rhineland acre is 1.051 of an English acre.

Table 3

Guyana: Wholesale and Retail Prices by the Three Main
Municipal Markets and the G.M.C., 1970

Commodities	Wholesale		Retail	
	Municipal Markets	G.M.C.	Municipal Markets	G.M.C.
	(. cents per pound)			
Plantains	7.1	6.1	10.9	10.0
Cassava	6.4	4.0	9.7	8.0
Eddoes	7.3	4.3	10.8	9.0
Yams	9.8	6.0	15.1	8.0
Sweet potatoes ..	11.4	7.6	16.6	10.0
Tannias	13.9	6.7	18.1	14.0
Cabbages	32.1	25.0	38.6	36.0*
Coffee beans	67.0	60.3	74.2	75.0
Cocoa beans	46.3	25.3	52.9	40.0
Corn	7.2	5.7	11.1	8.5*
Pineapples	-	4.0	16.4	6.0*
Avocads (per 100)	\$13.63	\$5.10	\$15.00	\$8.00

Source: Planning and Programming Division, Ministry of Agriculture.

Note: * Only small quantities retailed by GMC.

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