



**AgEcon** SEARCH  
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

[aesearch@umn.edu](mailto:aesearch@umn.edu)

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

## DISCUSSION REPORT

(Discussion of paper presented by Dr. T.H. Henderson)

Discussant: E.R.S. Cumberbatch

I congratulate Dr. Henderson on his comprehensive paper. I join him in praising the organisers of this Tenth West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference, for including a paper on agricultural extension, thus demonstrating, even at this late hour a recognition of the vital role extension workers play in the development of agriculture.

Caribbean Governments, in planning for agricultural development, have neglected for too long, the human element, the sociological implications associated with *change*. Plans have provided for changing the *farm*. Plans have not emphasised the necessity to change the *farm family*, and eventually the entire community, since by and large the Caribbean is an agrarian society. The author is right therefore when he contends that we "*can no longer afford the romanticism of incomplete planning*".

Our plans have in fact been incomplete because the area of extension has never been recognised as a *specialist field*, requiring a variety of highly trained personnel, who can make this discipline a career. Consequently, inadequately trained and mediocre staff, who cannot *make it* in other fields, are often thrown into extension, while successful extensionists are promoted to other fields.

I myself am unaware of any sociologists being included in the ranks of extension workers likewise, therefore few Home Economists working with the housewife; and the highly specialised field of public relations and communications is left to amateurs, who are expected to leave as things progress. As if these woes were no legion enough, all Caribbean extension services are understaffed.

It is not surprising therefore, that maladies in the economy, arising from lack of market information, poor farming techniques, gaps in technology transfer, all tending to perpetuate the syndrome of poverty (poor people make poor land, poor land make poor people poorer). It is not surprising that agricultural development has lagged in the face of advances in Caribbean world technology.

Henderson advances the controversial argument that extension workers must give their clients the best advice they can, even at the risk of such advice running counter to Government policy. I can visualise specific exceptional instances where broad Government policies could conflict with an individual farmer's interest; but I think that in the context of the Caribbean scene, civil servants are a loyalty to their employers; and this statement must be balanced by a close examination of the long term objectives of the policies, which after all is said and done, the extensionists themselves may have helped to formulate.

With respect to the ratio of extension workers to farmers, the author quotes figures for St. Lucia. I suggest that the adverse ratio

is even worse, depending on one's definition of a "farmer". It is not uncommon throughout the Islands for householders with backyard plots and subsistence farmers on half acre holdings, to lay simultaneous claims on the extension worker's time. If all these *clients* are defined as farmers - and let us say that politically they are - then a bad situation is considerably aggravated.

To overcome the superficial spread of these scarce resources, Henderson advocates the *saturation* or campaign approach. I can see such an approach having relevance to new projects (e.g., agrarian reform to land settlement projects), where *special* additional staff are recruited. To attempt to dilute or remove staff concentrations from existing districts, where they are already serving farmers, would to my mind court disaster with the rest of the territory, while giving a skewed incentive (including all the inputs that go with the "*production and development package*") to a special area. Political and psychological considerations apart, this strategy for quick successful development in one area at the refuse of other areas in the country, seems hard to defend in the arena of fair play.

With regard to the Banana Rehabilitation Project in Dominica, quoted as an example of the saturation approach, the staff I understand were specially recruited, whilst at Waller Field, the effects of withdrawal of the special additional staff employed, is yet to be assessed.

I fully support Henderson's plea for one extension officer speaking to a particular farmer. There is, developing in the Caribbean, a proliferation of advisers, all claiming the farmer's ear and all claiming to do him good. The result is often *Babel* instead of *Jerusalem*. The various voices, speaking of marketing intelligence, credit, development, plant protection, regulatory work plus business salesmen, advisers, often give conflicting counsel. Thus, the ideal of *one* voice, in this context, represents for the confused farmer, a state of bliss.

The notion that the more highly trained staff should concentrate on the fluctuations could be dangerous, in that the junior staff, no matter how well trained, could suffer from a complex. If staff are not competent to advise the large business, they should equally lack competence to build up the smaller enterprises that may well require expertise to make them succeed.

In conclusion, I make bold to add a few suggestions to another even comprehensive paper:

- (a) to motivate tomorrow's farmers and citizens, extensionists must work with schools;
- (b) close liaison is absolutely necessary with the agro-industrialist;
- (c) encouragement should be given to those extensionists who desire to engage in farming. Farmers are merely likely to heed the counsel of those, who are themselves involved in commercial agriculture, even though on a limited scale.