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Food for El Salvador

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A "model" Point Four program is in full swing in El Salvador. Mr. Hallett, writing from there, says there are "more specialists per square mile than perhaps in any other country of the world." Most costs of the agricultural and economic development program are borne by the little country itself. The article lists its accomplishments.

In a country where some corn still is planted with a pointed stick during the full moon, Point Four is accomplishing much.

As Roberto Quiñónez, Minister of Agriculture, said in an informal conversation at a United States embassy function here not long ago: "Our people are just now awakening to the fact that there is a science to agriculture."

Through the enthusiastic cooperation of such Salvadoran leaders as Señor Quiñónez, the dedication of large sums of government money to the program, and the response of the people themselves, an effective program is being formed in El Salvador, land of volcanoes and broad lush valleys. No matter what happens to technical assistance in the future, the program in Salvador may well be remembered as a "model."

Eager to Learn New Way

An essential factor in success of assistance programs is a readiness for such technical training on the part of the people themselves. In Salvador this prerequisite is present to an outstanding degree. The people are eager to learn new methods, according to technicians.

This explains the presence of more foreign specialists per square mile than perhaps in any other country of the world. In addition to the United States Point Four mission (The Institute of Inter-American Affairs), experts from the World Health Organization, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, International Labor Organization, and United Nation Children's Emergency Fund, and private groups such as IBEC

Housing, a Nelson Rockefeller group, are busy applying modern techniques to Salvador's age-old problems of poverty, lack of adequate housing, illiteracy, poor water supply, etc.

Many gears have to mesh properly for an efficient Point Four program. And in Salvador they do. For example, the Minister of Agriculture and other local officials are 100 per cent behind the aid program; the United States Ambassador, Angier Biddle Duke, actively fosters Point Four; the program's Director of Technical Cooperation is an effective administrator, and the men in the field are qualified and do their work with enthusiasm.

Aids Many Fields

The United States aid program itself embraces education, health and sanitation, fisheries, economic and financial guidance in addition to agriculture.

A snapshot economic view of this tiny Central American republic shows the following:

Although only the size of Maryland, El Salvador is the third largest coffee producer in the world. Its economic existence depends on that crop.

Fortunately high prices have prevailed since World War II. Therefore, the government, which derives most of its income from export and import duties, has money jingling in its pockets. But a sharp price drop in coffee would be a devastating shock to the economy.

There is little or no middle class in the country—only the fabulously wealthy coffee "finqueros" and the great mass of impoverished campesinos.

The situation is complicated further by the fact that this is the most densely populated continental nation in the Americas, and competition for jobs, housing, and food keeps the living standard of the impoverished masses at a bare subsistence level. The average farm worker's labor is almost entirely devoted to raising his family's food. He does have about three months' work at 40 cents a day at coffee picking time. After that he has practically no other opportunity to earn cash income.

Seek Foreign Funds

This situation would provide ripe conditions for the spread of communism, particularly if the present economic bubble should break.

A few enlightened persons in government and private activities have taken the lead in attempting to smash this poverty-breeding cycle. They have attempted to lure foreign capital into the country to set up diversified light industries. Some already have been started. Others will be attracted when great power facilities become available with completion of the Rio Lempa hydroelectric project in several months.

The most urgent problem, however, is that of food. Salvador's 2,000,000 population must be fed from limited land resources. And population is growing at the rate of more than 2 per cent a year, which means that in 25 years the land will have to support more than 3,000,000 inhabitants.

The first all-out attempt to meet this problem came in 1942 when Salvador and the United States jointly set up an experiment station.

This was many years before the term Point Four had been coined. The program here and in other Latin-American nations was originated during the war in an effort to solve problems of food supply, health, and sanitation as they affected United States armed personnel serving in the area. This concept expanded as Latin-American nations saw the constructive benefits accomplished by these temporary agencies.

Big Help in Farming

Under Point Four the agricultural program has been expanded to include irrigation and erosion control, research and demonstration farms in various areas and "county agents" to work directly with the farmers.

The major cost is borne now by the El Salvador Government. In 1951 it put up $520,000 for the agricultural program compared with $94,846 from the United States (a figure which includes primarily salaries of United States technicians).

What has this phase of Point Four accomplished? In his informal discussion at the United States Embassy, Señor Quiñónez cited certain specific benefits:

"About four years ago a leaf rot blight hit henequen, one of our major export crops. We had no technicians to study it. Point Four went in and in a matter of four months knew what it was, and now it is not a menace. It can be controlled.

"Take another instance. We had found for a long time that most native sugar cane was affected by a blight. It didn't develop properly. Point Four people brought in 47 varieties from all over the world and found five not only resistant to blight but better producers. During the past three or four years we have had to import about 20 per cent of our sugar consumption. In 1952 we brought in very little and from now on will probably import none at all."

New Grains Introduced

Also three corn varieties have been evolved which have helped increase production fourfold. Ninety-five per cent of the corn in the country is now of those varieties. New sorghum plants also are being introduced, and a new variety of rice has been found which is particularly adaptable to Salvadoran conditions. Better breeds of cattle and hogs have been introduced; a tractor school is familiarizing young Salvadorans with modern farm machinery; insect control information disseminated throughout the country has eliminated a serious threat to the coffee crop.

Point Four "made it possible to organize a Ministry of Agriculture"—something that did not exist in the country before 1946, the minister said.

Some youngsters from wealthy Salvadoran families go to the United States or Europe to learn latest agricultural techniques, but Point Four "brings down this training directly to people who would not otherwise be able to get it," he said.

Señor Quiñónez believes it would work "tremendous harm" if Point Four were cut off or sharply curtailed. What has been done already would be very much wasted because insufficient Salvadorans have been trained to carry on the work.

The most important thing it has done for Salvador, the minister said, was to bring home the fact that agriculture is in tremendous need of improvement. One-third of the land is nonproductive; one-third inefficiently worked and eroded; one-third has to be conserved with its high fertility or "we will have to import everything we need to eat."

Demonstrations Pay Off

Agricultural technicians have found that farm demonstrations are an effective way of teaching farmers modern scientific methods of agriculture. Experiments have been set up on government land where farmers are shown the results of modern methods. In other areas private farms are used for such "showcasing."

Lands fit only for lizards have been reclaimed by irrigation; farmers, especially the younger men, are learning

about new crops and how to do things in better ways. In addition to their use for research and teaching, the demonstration farms are also valuable as a source of high-quality seed.

And as an example that Point Four is not all a one-way street, Salvador spent more on agricultural equipment in the United States during the past two years than it did in the previous 50 years.

Point Four activities in the field of education center around agencies for vocational training and transmission of practical know-how.

Currently assistance is being given in designing, equipping, and developing the curriculum of a pioneer vocational industrial school to be constructed with Salvadoran funds this year. Through a training grant, prospective instructors are studying in Puerto Rico.

In other areas of education, advisers will be provided in home economics and teaching of agriculture in rural schools in addition to a visual aids specialist to increase the effectiveness of the learning process.

Fisheries Survey Unique

The fisheries mission is unique among Point Four field projects. The gentle sloping coastal shelf of the Salvadoran seacoast appears to shelter substantial resources of food fish of many kinds which thus far have been exploited in only the most primitive fashion.

To survey these resources with a view to setting up a fishing industry, the Ministry of Economy has had for 1½ years the services of an expert in fish resources, Leroy S. Christey, veteran of many years' service with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

To provide Mr. Christey with a vessel to investigate local ocean fish resources, a 79-foot trawler was purchased in California by the ministry. Her captain, chief engineer, and cook are all Americans in the employ of the local government, as are the eight Salvadorans who comprise the crew.

Since March, 1952, Point Four has supplied the Ministry of Economy with an economic research and policy adviser, Dr. William E. Schenk, who has worked with the ministry supervising research training of young economists. He also has contributed to the development of the foreign commerce policy of the country which emphasizes diversification of production for export and of export markets and has assisted in the preparation of almost a dozen trade treaties to implement this policy.

In his discussion of over-all Point Four, Señor Quiñónez said "a price tag cannot be placed on the value of this program."

"Look at it this way," he summed up. "During the last war the United States had to spend millions of dollars to feed people on the side of the free world. In another war if we weren't prepared to feed ourselves the Unitd States would have to do it again. If we can do it, you will not have to use your ships to transport such things and we could even produce things you need.

"I believe Point Four is nothing but a normal outgrowth of the good neighbor policy. In five to 10 years we can dispense with American technicians and continue on our own."

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