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LABOUR AS A CONSTRAINT TO INCREASES IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

A Comparative Study Of Three Distinctive Farming Environments Within One Agricultural System

A Thesis Presented In Partial Fulfilment Of The Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Geography at Massey University

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ABSTRACT

A critical question facing economic policymakers today is whether agriculture will be able to play its traditional role in lifting export earnings through increases in the volume of production. One factor which is thought to have constrained agricultural development is the availability and price of farm labour. The following study examines the dimensions of the "labour problem" and attempts to assess the impact of this problem on an expansion of agricultural output.

The research draws extensively on geographical principles for the spatial design. One farming system is selected, and within this, the farm labour problem is examined in three distinctive environments, differentiated by topographical criteria and a gradient of isolation from a major urban area.

The labour problem, conceptualised in the four dimensions of cost, availability, retention and efficiency, is assessed within these environments. From the empirical research, the labour problem appears to be of greater magnitude in the hill country farm environment, which is considered by recent agricultural appraisals as having the potential for immediate, sustainable and sizable production increases. This raises implications for future policy formulation.

The study arrives at two principal conclusions. Firstly, the <u>cost</u> of the labour unit is the major inhibiting factor to increased employment on farms. Secondly, the on-farm shortage of skilled labour does not appear to have a limiting impact on production levels between farms, but it does elicit a certain management response towards less labour-intensive systems of production. The short and long term production consequences of this are as yet uncertain, and should provide a major focus for research in the 1980's.

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