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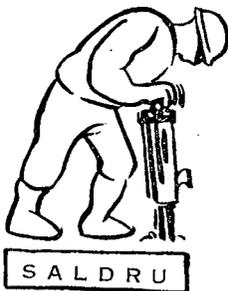
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Farming in the Hexriver Valley

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FARMING IN THE HEXRIVER VALLEY

Introduction

The main type of farming in this area is that of export table grapes. Table grapes form 95% + of all farming income, and farming in the Hexriver Valley can be safely called a monoculture. It is the most intensively farmed area in South Africa, if not in the Southern Hemisphere, and gross incomes of R10 000 per *hectare are not uncommon* although the average is R4 384,55*.

Population

Labour is still at present intensively used, and it is generally *assumed* that one male and one female labourer per hectare is required throughout the year. With ± 3 000 ha under cultivation this means an approximate permanent work force of 6 000 adults. These are made up of 80% Coloureds and 20% Bantu. The total Black population is estimated at 20 000, which means that 70% are still under working age (16 years).

People too old to work normally are allowed to reside on the farms where they need to work. Old-age pensions are paid by the State, and very often by the former employer as well. The aged are often granted "protected" employment, where they are paid a full wage for example watering the garden once a week.

No old age homes or other facilities for the aged exist in the area.

(Dept. of Agric. Economics and Marketing - Farm Analysis Report 1974/75.)

A further phenomenon of age distribution is that the age group 18-25 tend to drift away from the farms towards the urban areas.

starts This is especially so in the case of singles. However, once a family *slave*, the drift tends in the opposite direction.

A number of reasons can be given for this tendency. Firstly, when the 16-18 year old first starts to work, nearly all his pay is taken by his parents, and a paltry 50c or R1 per week is allowed him as pocket money. Secondly, the bright lights of city life are an attraction in contrast with the lack of entertainment in rural areas. Further, adequate accommodation has little meaning to the young single, and he/she, like many UCT students, has no objection to "slumming" it in inferior digs.

However, once a family starts, accommodation becomes meaningful. The present chronic shortage of housing here plays a role, as housing is more readily available in the rural areas, and the drift tends to flow back to the farms.

Young farm girls tend to find employment mainly as domestics in the cities, often working for other Coloured families. Normally being totally ignorant of birth control, pregnancies among them are not uncommon. These babies are then returned to the farm to be looked after by the grandparents, which further affects age distribution.

It would appear that sex distribution is in the region of 4 men: 5 women. This is probably because the men are more prone to alcoholism and its attendant illnesses - T.B., pneumonia and ^{cirrhosis} sclerosis of the liver.

Types of employment - Earnings

Nearly all employment is on a weekly cash basis. Those paid on a monthly basis are usually the higher-echelon workers, viz. foremen, lorry drivers, etc.

Payments in kind in the form of rations, dop and other fringe benefits invariably form part of total earnings.

While the dop in the past has been a tradition in the wine and grape growing area of the Western Cape, it is now happily becoming something of the past, although some farmers are still being too tardy in this regard. Originally the dop was a pernicious system whereby the labourer received 9-10 dops a day:

- 6.00 a.m. *Invaldop*
- 7.30 a.m. Voorbrèk^{vis} dop
- 8.00 a.m. Nabrèk^{vis} dop
- 11.00 a.m. Elfuur dop
- 12.30 p.m. Voormiddag dop
- 1.30 p.m. Namiddag dop
- 4.00 p.m. Vie^{fuur} dop
- 6.30 p.m. *litval dop* + 2 bottles to take home to drink.

A few isolated cases of this practice still exist unfortunately. To my knowledge at least 50% of the farmers give no dop at all, and the majority of those that do give only a dop in the evening. (The

philosophy behind this being that the farmer enjoys his sundowner and why shouldn't his labourers do likewise.) As long as this dop is not given in lieu of cash, a case for this practice can be made. However, the effect of the dop system on the abnormally high rate of alcoholism among Coloured farm labourers is not to be under^rated.

It is extremely difficult to qualify the value of payments in kind to farm workers. The full nature of fringe benefits varies from farm to farm, and the following benefits occur in various degrees

- (1) Housing : Here quality differs enormously, even on the same farm. Pre-war cottages normally built of raw bricks and mud floors are often worse than the squatters shacks in urban areas. Locally, the Divisional Council has laid down minimum standards for new housing and has also implemented a minimum standard for previously built houses. Farmers are becoming acutely aware that proper housing is essential if they are to keep staff, and most new houses on the farms are infinitely better than many council houses in the towns.
- (2) Water : Most houses have internal running water, although cases do exist where one outside tap is available for 4 or 5 houses.
- (3) Electricity : More and more farm houses are being fitted with electricity, especially since a subsidy for this purpose became available. Electricity is usually provided free by the employer. Quality of installation varies from a single light per room to the provision of all mod cons such as hot water cylinders, stove connections, etc.
- (4) Medical Expenses : Most farmers pay all medical expenses, or at least a major proportion thereof.
- (5) "Insurance" : A status symbol among farm workers is the possession of an "insurance" book. This entitles the owner and all members of his family to a decent coffin for his funeral. Unfortunately this is exploited to a large extent by the undertaking concerned. (Rather like furniture HP firms.) To prevent this many farmers pay the instalments on behalf of their workers.
- (6) Rations : Rations vary tremendously. Meat, fish, flour and/or groceries to a certain value are made available. The original reason

for this practice was to prevent the worker from blowing his total income on alcohol, and to ensure that his family received sufficient nourishment for sustenance.

Many farms have farm shops where their workers can buy food at a subsidised price on tick during the week.

Their grocery bill is then subtracted from their cash wage at the end of the week, thus reducing the amount available to be spent on liquor.

This practice has been widely criticised because it has been abused in some areas, notably the Swartland. In ~~the~~ Hexriver this does not occur at all, and is of a definite social benefit at present.

(7) Holidays : Far too few farmers give their staff any holidays at all. Most farms are not organisationally geared to do so, but then at least a cash payment could be made in lieu thereof.

Fringe benefits and rations, payments in kind, tied-housing and their relationship to cash wages paid have their pros and cons.

At present farm labour is treated in far too patriarchal a way. While there are many good and enlightened reasons for this being so, the development of the individual's responsibility as a social entity is not being enhanced. If progress is to be made in the upliftment out of the socio-economic morass in which so many farm workers still find themselves, then it is essential that social responsibility be developed. Thus, the decision as to what % of his income should be spent on food, clothing, etc. must be that of the individual. Ideally, the farm worker should be paid as much as possible in cash, but this is not a situation that can be easily attained overnight, and is something which will have to be gradually phased in.

At present, cash earnings in the Hexriver range between R5 and R25 per week, while the average is somewhere between R8-R10 (I have not attempted to quantify the value of fringe and other benefits).

A system that is quickly expanding is that of "piece" work, which is of mutual benefit to both farmer and worker. Most seasonal labour is paid on this system and earnings of R40 per week can be attained on this basis.

Some farmers have also instituted bonus systems, whereby workers receive an annual bonus on a profit-sharing or productivity basis.

There is obviously a differential in the cash wages paid by different farmers as well as in the standard of housing and other facilities provided. Yet it is found that some farmers always have sufficient labour while others never have enough, even though they might pay better wages and offer better housing and facilities.

A recent study conducted by the K.W.V. in this regard and published in their house magazine, "Die Wynboere", has attempted to evaluate what factors determine whether a worker will work for one farmer and not for another. The result of this survey indicated that the following factors in descending order of magnitude are applicable;

1. Quality of housing.
2. Availability of credit. $r(?)$
3. Personal attitude of employee.
4. Cash wage.
5. Dop.

Patterns of skills

Farmworkers can be divided into four basic categories. Unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and managerial. There is of course a certain amount of overlap in these sub-divisions and the same worker at different times might well perform work in different categories.

1. Unskilled - These workers literally do mostly spade work, e.g. bankiespit. They also move irrigation pipes and do general fetching and carrying, digging holes, etc. Most Bantu ~~and~~ migrant workers fall into this category, as against fewer and fewer Coloureds.

As agricultural science and technology develops, less and less of this type of work will be necessary.

2. Semi-skilled : This work includes pruning, de-bunching, packing and sorting grapes.

3. Skilled : This work includes welding, tractor and lorry driving, carpentry, brick-laying, fencing and the like.

4. Managerial : Managerial positions vary from temporary gang-boss to fully-fledged full-time foreman. Problems often occur when a worker is temporarily promoted over his peers, as he has trouble maintaining discipline.

The appointment of Blacks as farm managers will become more and more inevitable in the future. It is doubtful whether all will be found within the ranks of present farm workers, but salaries paid to farm foreman^e compete favourably with those paid to, for example, teachers and policemen. It is expected, therefore, that Blacks will participate more and more at managerial level in agriculture, and that these will mainly be recruited in urban areas.

Mechanisation

In the last decade many activities on table grape farms have become mechanised. Shifting irrigation pipes and flood irrigation have been replaced by permanent sets and micro-irrigation. "Bankiesspit" and "skoffel" have been replaced by chemical weed control.

Thinning of certain varieties, like Waltham Cross, has been replaced by hormone sprays, and within the next decade research scientists should discover similar sprays for all varieties.

Mechanisation and technological progress will lessen the demand for labour in the table grape industry in the future. Although certain jobs such as packing and thinning of grapes will probably always remain dependent on hand labour, the tendency in the future will be to rely more and more on seasonal and casual labour for this purpose.

However, the rates at which this tendency will develop will depend on cost structures. New techniques are invariably expensive techniques and much will depend on the degree of unemployment and underemployment in S.A. and the resultant cost - structure and mobility of labour.

Land, tenure and agribusiness

There are 163 landowners in the Hexriver Valley. Size of farm varies from 7 - 200 ha. 10 ha is regarded as the minimum size of an economic unit. Over 90% of the farms are owner-occupied, and less than 10% are rented by share-croppers (deelboere). Absentee land-owners do not occur. Farms above the size of 50 ha tend to become inefficient as the managerial capacities of the farmers tend to reach their ceiling at this level. This is because of the highly intensive nature of table grape farming.

The entry of large mining and individual enterprises in the Western Cape's deciduous fruit industry has on the whole been a disaster for the mining and industrial enterprises. I think the reason for this is that managerial capacity in this type of farming is highly specialized and is not at present vested in owner-occupiers and therefore not easily bought on the open market.

Quality of life

The quality of life among farm workers is undergoing a dramatic change. Housing is improving tremendously, real wages are rising and it is surprising to see how many farm workers own motor cars. Hours of work per week are lessening and few if any farmers still work on Saturdays.

Amusement facilities are still sadly lacking, which is a further cause of alcoholism. However, churches, community centres, T.V., film evenings and sport facilities are on the increase.

With modern communications and the increase in literacy, consumption horizons and expectations are increasing.

It is, nevertheless, difficult to assess personal feelings and aspirations of farm workers because they are generally inarticulate.

Birth control has further changed the quality of life and one and two children families are becoming less and less uncommon. A barrier in the past has been the ignorance of the women in the basics of domestic science. It is to be recommended that this subject be taught in the schools from an earlier age.

Farm schools for Coloureds in the Hexriver Valley are barely adequate and some schools have to hold double shifts to accommodate all their pupils. Although education is compulsory, little is done to implement this. It is left to the individual farmer to chide the parents of the truants, and this is not always done adequately.

While Coloured farm schools are run by the Dept. of Coloured Affairs, Bantu schools fall under the Dept. of Bantu Education. Little is

done to provide for Bantu farm children in the Western Cape, because in terms of official policy they are not really there in de jure terms. It is therefore left to the individual farmer/s to provide facilities for Bantu education, with little support from the State.

(On my own farm, it has taken 6 months to obtain recognition from the Government. Schoolbooks will only be available next year, and to be paid for by the pupils. Teachers' salaries will be subsidised as from next year, and a grant for the ^{construction} coercion of an adequate school will be made as and when the Department has funds available.)

Agriculture and the State

The table grape industry is export orientated, and prices are determined on the open market overseas, more often than not by auction. A control board, the D.F.B., has the monopoly of export marketing, which it does on a non-profit making basis.

The industry thus receives only the usual subsidies and tax rebates available to all exporters, e.g. export rail tariffs, market development expenditure tax rebate.

The only direct subsidy is on fertilizer. Labour legislation is hardly applicable, except for the Workmen's Compensation Act. Job reservation does not apply. The mobility of Black labour is seriously impaired by the control system and official quotes^a on the number of Bantu that can be employed.

While the Cape Coloured does benefit as a result of protection west of the Eiselen line, it remains a form of job reservation which only enhances inefficiency.

Prison labour was originally available to shareholders in a prison in the Hexriver Valley. About 5 years ago it was realised that this contravened an article of GATT, and the resultant request of the farmers to close down the prison was complied with.

The future

We all know that world population is increasing geometrically and that the area of arable land remains constant. In South Africa arable land forms only 13% of total area. As the demand for food increases, the efficiency of use of arable land will become critical.

It will therefore not be unlikely that farmers in the future will have to have a licence to farm. A similar system was introduced into the U.K. during World War 2.

Very often a farmer's treatment of his workers in terms of wages and facilities is directly proportional to his own financial circumstances. If only efficient and economically successful farmers are permitted in the industry, then the quality of life of farm workers will extend to new horizons.