

Group Production

The importance of co-operation among farmers to achieve better results is well realised in the socialist as well as in capitalist countries. The level to which farmers co-operate is influenced to a great extent by the socio-economic environment and the political ideologies of the country. Co-operation could range from simple mutual assistance in farming operations, the relics of which are seen in most traditional villages' emphasis to more complex forms involving complete pooling of resources and socialized production and consumption.

Till recently the emphasis on co-operation in Sri Lanka has been one on retail consumer co-operatives. Except for a few unsuccessful attempts to organize production co-operatives particularly in the settlement schemes in the Dry Zone, no serious attempt was made to organize production co-operatives. After the Land Reform of 1972 the government established a number of co-operative farms in this country. This was limited only to those lands which were vested with the state under the land reform laws. A great extent of lands still continue to be privately owned. These lands which are primarily small holdings, are very often of uneconomic sizes, operated by peasant farmers and characterised by low levels of productivity and primitive methods of production which result in low incomes to the farmer. The predominance of small holdings in Sri Lanka agriculture is clearly shown by the census of Agriculture 1973. Thus if these small holdings are to provide a reasonable marketable surplus and a better standard of living for those operating them some form of production re-organization is essential. This could be done to a great extent by group production. Group production is a system of farming in which the principle of private holding dominates. Here a farmer while continuing to own his land, will co-operate with a group of neighbouring farmers and carry out a common cropping programme or a common programme of rearing of animals in accordance with a plan laid down by the group. The

farmer will retain the right of collecting the produce from his land himself but may co-operate with the group in processing and marketing the produce. To illustrate the concept: Farmer A grows paddy, cloves, pepper and bananas; farmer B grows only pepper while farmer C grows pepper, and cloves and also rears cattle. According to the concept of group production, the farmers agree to grow the common item (Pepper) on the basis of a co-ordinated programme which means that they select the same variety of plant at the same time, fertilize at the same time, spray insecticides at the same time and so on. Once the crop is ready to be harvested each farmer harvests the produce from his own land and disposes it as he wishes or he may market the produce together with the other two farmers.

Group production is a purely voluntary exercise. It differs from co-operative farming in that in the latter case the land is jointly owned by all the members of the co-operative and other resources such as labour and capital are pooled. The produce is jointly harvested and marketed and the income is distributed equally or according to the amount of land contributed.

In group production however there is no pooling of resources whatsoever. Each farmer will continue to own the land he cultivates and finance the production himself. He will harvest the entire produce from his land and enjoy the full income from it without having to share it with the others. Besides the co-operation in the production process, group production also provides for the common ownership of certain machines which would be uneconomical for any one producer to purchase. In addition to bulk purchase of seeds, fertilizer, chemicals and so on cultivation could also be performed by the group. The common use of first rate breeding stock, the common hiring of machinery and extension services are all functions which could be effectively organized under group production.

The system of group production counteracts the negative effect of fragmented small holdings helping

its operators to realize the benefits of large scale farming. At the same time, it provides for the better utilization of machinery, efficient irrigation, and provides a better advisory service as it is easier for the extension worker to serve farmers as a group.

First Experimental Project

In Maha 1975-76 the Agrarian Research and Training Institute with the Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Productivity Committee, Bemniwatte (Mawanella) organized the first experimental project on group production in a paddy tract at Molligoda in the Bemniwatte APC area. The project covered an extent of 16.2 acres and involved 16 farmers operating holdings ranging from 0.5 acres to 1.5 acres. The necessary inputs were supplied by the APC on credit and were channelled through the local Co-operative Society. The farmers on their part agreed to strictly adhere to a common cultivation calendar laid down by the group in consultation with the extension officer. An agreement was signed by the APC and the farmers. This agreement stipulated the terms and conditions under which the farmers would operate and also stated the obligation of the APC and Cultivation Committee to the group. This experiment has now gone through one season and the results were satisfactory. The yields registered a two fold increase over the previous season. From an average reported yield of 32 bushels/Ac. in the previous Maha season (74-75) the farmers in this tract obtained an average yield of 70 bushels/Ac. from group production.

Based on the success of the first experiment 15 paddy production groups involving 300 farmers operating approximately 300 acres of paddy lands have been organised in Yala 76 in the same area. In addition a pilot project on group banana production has been organised at Didula also in the Bemniwatte APC area.

Although this system of farming is at present showing good progress, a number of other factors such as input supplies and supporting services have to be carefully worked out. Great potential exists for group production in Sri Lanka, in particular on tea and rubber lands which are given out for village expansion schemes and fragmented paddy holdings.