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Agriculture
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Recommendations of the Commission to Survey Agriculture in Mexico

From a Report Accepted by the Board of Trustees
of The Rockefeller Foundation, December 3, 1941

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The following are the recommendations of the Commission taken verbatim from its report:

It is the unanimous opinion of the Rockefeller Agricultural Survey Commission to Mexico that there is urgent need for improving agricultural conditions and practices, that the most important problems are obvious, that the time is propitious, and that there now is enough potential and partially functioning talent to justify the opinion that substantial improvement could be accomplished with even a moderate amount of help from an outside and independent agency, such as The Rockefeller Foundation. The need is for encouragement, stimulation, and guidance of existing institutions and individuals. The following plan is therefore recommended.

I. That The Rockefeller Foundation could best begin contributing to the improvement of agricultural conditions in Mexico by maintaining, at least as a first step, with headquarters in or near Mexico City, a four-man Commission comprising an agronomist and soils expert, a plant breeder, a plant disease and insect pest expert, and an animal husbandman, to cooperate with and advise the Mexican Department of Agriculture in its various activities, including experimentation and research, regulatory work, resident teaching at its various levels, and adult education.

If it is not feasible to include four men in the proposed Commission, it is recommended that the order of preference in selection be as given above. The reason for this recommendation is that the most acute and immediate problems, in approximate order of importance, seem to be the improvement of soil management and tillage practices; the introduction, selection, or breeding of better adapted, higher yielding and higher quality crop varieties; more rational and effective control of plant diseases and insect pests; and the introduction or development of better breeds of domestic animals and poultry, as well as better feeding methods and disease control.

The work of the proposed Commission would necessarily be in formal cooperation with the Mexican Department of Agriculture including the various investigational, regulatory, extension, and teaching services, including especially the National School of Agriculture at Chapingo. And, it is important from the outset that the Mexican Government contribute, at least to some slight extent, toward the support of the proposed Commission's work.

The members of the proposed Commission would necessarily study the situation for the requisite time before making a final plan of action. It is recommended, however, that their efforts be directed along the following general lines:

1. Each member should have one or more specific experimental and demonstrational projects, chosen and located with due regard to importance, definiteness of objective, and suitability for demonstrational purposes.

2. The Commission should give advice and help to investigators and teachers in the Department of Agriculture and other institutions and should serve as a clearing house for information with respect to facts, procedures, and technics. For example, they should visit experimental institutions and the various experimental farms, remaining long enough to assist in planning experiments and giving advice with respect to methods and interpretations, thus immediately helping to orientate Mexican agronomists of purpose and enthusiasm.

As the improvement of agriculture and rural life involves not only progress in technics of crop and animal production but also amelioration of living and health conditions, it seems obvious that the proposed Commission should be intimately associated with the local office of the International Health Division, thus promoting economy and efficiency. The maintenance of a single administrative office, for example, would avoid unnecessary duplication of expense and should result in desirable integration of effort.

II. It is recommended also that provision be made for a special type of fellowship for outstanding investigators and teachers. There are now in Mexico young investigators and teachers of ability and character who are doing their best under the handicap of inadequate scientific education and experience. In some cases great benefit would accrue to the men and their projects as a result of special and limited study in the United States or elsewhere. At first, selection should be made of only such men as have important projects in progress, who have definitely demonstrated their ability, seriousness of purpose, and consistency of effort, and who would give assurance of continuing their project on returning to Mexico.

The objectives of study should be quite specific: The proposed plan does not contemplate fellowships in the usual sense but rather provision for study and experience for special and definite purposes in connection with the work in which the man is engaged in Mexico and to which he is expected to return. Nor would he necessarily go to an educational institution. In some cases it might be better to go to the United States Department of Agriculture, to commercial seed companies, or to other organizations that could contribute best to making the man more effective in his work in Mexico. In fact, it would be best, at least in the initial phases of developing the plan, to make it clear that the fellow is not expected to study at educational institutions in the traditional way. Rather he should go as a visiting scientist, not working for academic credit or degrees. The plan of work should be arranged with an adviser who will assume responsibility for guidance and for exemption from orthodox requirements and procedures. For example, a potentially able corn breeder might best go where the best corn breeding is being done in the United States. He should actually participate in the work in order to familiarize himself with modern procedures and principles.

111. Special grants in aid for the purchase of apparatus or equipment to assist in important investigations now under way would in many cases conduce greatly to progress. In general, they should be given only to men who have proved themselves and whose work is sound and important. For example, a soils man at Chapingo has so much enthusiasm for his work that he purchased out of his meager salary much of the apparatus in his laboratory. He had studied in the United States; he is a competent investigator; he knew what he wanted to do but lacked the tools. Even a little financial assistance and encouragement would stimulate him and give important impetus to his work and that of others like him.

The plan presented assumes that most rapid progress can be made by starting at the top and expanding downward. The alternative would be to start at the bottom and work toward the top. A program of improving the vocational schools of agriculture and of extension work directed toward the farmers themselves might be undertaken. But the schools can hardly be improved until the teachers are improved; extension work cannot be improved until extension men are improved; and investigational work cannot be made more productive until investigators acquire greater competence. It is the conviction of the Survey Commission that the primary need is to acquire a body of facts and principles relating to Mexican agriculture and to educate men and women who are willing and able to disseminate it effectively through teaching and demonstration. It is true that practice already lags behind knowledge with respect to some elementary procedures, but this situation is not unique in Mexico and can be remedied by the Mexicans themselves.

The proposed plan is not exclusive, nor does it contemplate final methods of procedure. It can be, and probably should be, amplified and expanded in several directions. It is presented merely as the most practical and effective to begin with. Although it may seem to be weighted rather heavily on the scientific side, it seems the most feasible and practical under Mexican conditions. Extension downward to reach the Mexican farmer and potential farmer directly could well follow, but it should await a more thorough study by the proposed Commission than the Survey Commission has been able to make.