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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

Avril Jan Beattie

1978

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 cost 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to many people who contributed in various ways to the completion of this report. In particular I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Richard Le Heron, who has willingly given me advice and encouragement throughout my post-graduate years at Massey University.

Recognition must also be extended to Professor K.W. Thomson, and other members of the Geography Department staff, for their continued interest and support. Especially, I would like to thank the two geography secretaries, Mrs. "B" and Trish, whom I have always found most obliging.

I appreciated the financial assistance provided me by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research as it encouraged my study in a relevant research area and in addition was welcome assistance to the expenses over the year.

In January, I was able to help Dr. Paul Kaplan of the Sociology Department carry out a survey in the Mangamahu valley. The experience gained proved valuable with my own research and I am grateful to Paul for that opportunity and also for his continued support and advice throughout the year.

I owe a special thanks to the farmers and their families for their friendly hospitality wherever I went, and for their co-operation throughout; for without their help this thesis could never have been written.

The co-operation of various organisations is also gratefully acknowledged. To this end, I would like to thank the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, in particular Mr. Godfrey Gloyn and Mr. Rod Forbes who gave up valuable time to direct and assist me. In addition, the Manawatu Catchment Board, and the Palmerston North branches of Federated Farmers and the Department of Labour responded readily to many enquiries throughout the year, and this is appreciated.

Special thanks also to my typist, Mrs. Maxine McAusland for her care and competence.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to my parents and Dave, who have encouraged and supported me throughout my years at university.

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