

Agricultural Intelligence

TO CARRY on their global trade in farm products, a business that bears directly on the lives of nearly 3 billion persons, the United States and many other countries have a system of agricultural intelligence whereby they get and assess facts to enable producers to market their crops abroad advantageously and to help consumers obtain the products they need. This global agricultural information can mean the difference between profit or bankruptcy to the world's farmers and traders, between soundness and unsoundness of a country's economy, and even between plenty and starvation. In the United States, this information is supplied largely by the Foreign Agricultural Service, an agency of the Department of Agriculture. Its program of reports, analyses, and publications yields information that helps the American exporter to sell wheat, the importer to buy coffee, and the public foreign-help organizations to learn where hunger exists and how to cope with it.

Agricultural attachés form the core of this system, which started in 1881, when Edmund J. Moffat was sent to London to provide "accurate reports of crop prospects, valuable statistical exchanges, and miscellaneous information of value to the United States Department of Agriculture and the agriculture of the country." The attachés do the same work now, but on a larger, more complex scale. They are stationed at more than 50 key posts around the world. They and their trained foreign assistants cover more than twice that many countries. They forward to Washington each year more than 2 thousand scheduled reports, 5 thousand spot news reports, and 3 thousand foreign publications. Their reports deal with the production, trade, and consumption of more than 230 commodities. They supply much collateral information on government policies, the formation of common-market coalitions, availability of foreign currency and credit, trade balances, labor situations, bilateral trade obligations, weather, demand, prices, and changes in farming techniques. The attachés interpret the information they gather and evaluate its usefulness to American producers, consumers, and Government officials.

Getting the data is not difficult in countries that have efficient statistical services and farming and marketing systems, but in many countries gaps exist in official figures, the basis of presentation seldom is constant, and the accuracy of available figures sometimes



Guy A. W. Schilling, a marketing specialist of the Foreign Agricultural Service, inspects cotton from the United States at the Burmese Government Cotton Spinning and Weaving Mill in Thamaing.

is questionable. Agricultural statistics are lacking in some developing countries, and the task of gathering data there often is made more difficult by uncertainties of highways and communications and the remoteness of producers. There the attaché may have to rely on interviews with parish priests, migrant traders, and tribal headmen and to undertake much arduous travel. A trip by car around one country in Africa, for example, takes more than 3 months.



Graham Quate, former agricultural attaché in Thailand, and his assistant ford the Ping River during a field trip to collect information on the rice crop.



Robert E. Adcock, United States agricultural attaché (right), sizes up the prospective coffee crop in Kenya. With him is T. E. Ritchie, of the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Sometimes the job of estimating the size of a crop is an individual project. An attaché in one country travels by jeep through the major cocoa-producing sections, stops every 2 miles, hikes into the groves, and counts the pods on a sampling of trees. Later trips to the same trees help him gage season-to-season differences in yield and quality. Often commodity specialists are sent from Washington to help the attaché evaluate the situation regarding a major crop. Help also is given by foreign technicians, officials, and farm leaders who have returned home after taking part in foreign training programs sponsored by the Department of Agriculture.

The reports from the attachés are fitted together in Washington by economic analysts who have expert knowledge of a commodity or an area or both. An instance: The attaché in Bangkok may report that the Thai rice crop is 3.5 million piculs larger than usual and that growers have raised their price 20 bahts. Thailand is a major source of rice, and rice is a mainstay of half the people in the world. The United States also is a major exporter of rice, although we produce only about 1 percent of the world crop. Thus the information about Thai rice becomes part of a larger picture—so important to millions who subsist largely on rice and to growers in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and California, who rely on export markets. Against this background, the specialist of the Foreign Agricultural Service must decide: Does the Thai report coincide with other reports? How much rice may be exported—considering carryover stocks and domestic use? How does the price compare with comparable United States grades and qualities? How does it compare with world market prices? What is the situation in other

rice-exporting and in rice-importing countries? How much of Thailand's rice is already committed through bilateral trade agreements?

The specialists who process such facts work in a dynamic situation that changes constantly as dietary habits change, farming methods advance, demand-and-supply patterns shift, and science fosters new agricultural products and bypasses others. For example, the Carolina indigo that was traded around the world a century ago has been replaced by synthetic dyes. The New England whale oil, once important in trade with Europe, has been supplanted by other oils. The uses of many natural products, such as rubber, are being extended or preserved by research on new uses and byproducts.

The Department shares its global information with everyone who wants it and needs it. International organizations and many foreign governments rely on the Foreign Agricultural Service for dependable facts and figures. The International Coffee Agreement, for example, sets its trading quotas on the basis of the world coffee estimates made by the Foreign Agricultural Service. The International Wheat Agreement makes use of our intelligence to get the billions of bushels of wheat in world granaries to the people who need it and yet protect both buyers and sellers. The primary clients, however, are American producers, processors, and traders. Many months ago, for example, a seed company foresaw increasing demand for higher yielding varieties of seed in the newly developing countries south of the Sahara. Our information on the staple food crops of those peoples, the varieties of seed that would grow best, and the limitations imposed by soil and climate benefited both trader and consumer. Other users of the data are bankers and brokers, farm and trade organizations, libraries, trade journals, shipping and railroad companies, universities and colleges, hotel suppliers, quartermasters, newspapers, TV and radio networks, manufacturers of pharmaceuticals, fungicides, and farm equipment, and other Americans who want to know what's going on in world agriculture.

The Department releases more than 5 thousand reports a year on some aspect of foreign agriculture in answer to individual queries and through a series of free publications. Foreign Crops and Markets, issued weekly since 1919, contains articles and statistics about commodities and developments in foreign trade. Foreign Agriculture Circulars advise specific segments of agriculture on world developments that affect sales or supplies of special commodities. Foreign Agriculture, a monthly illustrated magazine, reports and interprets developments in world agriculture. Information is also made available in press releases, fact sheets, chart books, economic studies, outlook reports, radio tapes, and films about special situations. (*Audrey Ames Cook*)