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About the Institute

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.

JOHN L. STROHM

515 WEST JACKSON STREET, WOODSTOCK, ILLINOIS

June 21, 1962

Dr. Wilson Popenoe
c/o Dr. Hugh Popenoe
Soils Department
University of Fla.
Gainesville, Florida

Dear Dr. Popenoe:

Twenty years ago when I made my first trip to Latin America, I met and talked with you in Cuba -- and have never forgotten your lively interest in and knowledge of the nations to the south.

Currently, I am preparing to work on a story on Mexico's tremendous achievement of almost doubling food production, with the yeasty and invaluable help of the Rockefeller Foundation.

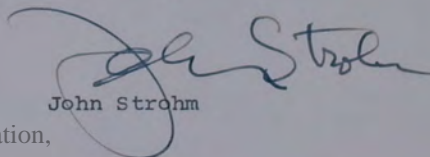
I would appreciate any thoughts or suggestions you have on this subject-- and particularly answers to these questions:

1. Can the Rockefeller formula work in other Latin American countries?
2. What made them successful when other and more grandiose schemes failed? What is the formula?
3. What lessons should we learn from Mexico and apply with our American foreign aid?
4. How many Latin American governments would do as well as Mexico has done--given something similar to the Rockefeller set-up?
5. What lessons have you learned in helping Latin American farmers help themselves?

I certainly would appreciate your comments.

I have some orange groves in the vicinity of Orlando and get down that way occasionally, and perhaps might be able to come to Gainesville to see you.

Sincerely,



John Strohm

Formula of the Rockefeller Foundation,
as I see it:

1. They select areas where there are lots of people, where production can be increased and the standard of living thereby raised in a materially ~~in a~~ ~~reasonable~~ ~~short~~ ~~time~~, through the application of relatively better techniques, e.g., better seed, intelligent fertilization. to farmy case

2. They choose the men to do the job carefully and intelligently. They hire them on a permanent basis, not a year-to-year basis with transfer to new and perhaps entirely different fields (language, crops, etc.). They pay ~~them~~ ^{them} well, they keep in mind good living conditions for their men and their families, and there are good prospects for advancement as time goes on. after two

3. They go into a country with no fanfare. They work in close cooperation with the local authorities and technical men. They are not interested in telling the public of their achievements; they want the local government to get most of the credit.

4. They go the limit in selecting and training local young men, sending them abroad for advanced study in a great many instances, and pushing them ahead to high positions in the program just as fast as the men are ready for it.

5. They keep close to the land. There is a maximum amount of work in the field, a minimum of time taken out for report writing and other office work, a minimum of "conferences", aimless discussions, and the like.

Now to answer your other questions. Yes, the Rockefeller formula can work, and presently is working, in other countries. It has its greatest potentialities under such conditions as mentioned in No. 1 above, i.e., large areas, great and urgent need of more production which can be achieved fairly promptly - no long waiting for the plant-breeders to develop new varieties, new strains. We want the plant breeders, but there is much information already available which has not been put into practice. Let's use that information,

with the plant breeders work pari-passu; neither extension - if we can call it that - nor plant breeding operating to the exclusion of the other. Extension, in the hands of dedicated men, can work wonders - it is working wonders - in Latin America.

Why has the Foundation been successful when other and "more grandiose" schemes have failed? If I had to answer in one word it would be continuity. By this I mean continuity of purpose and projects, but above all, continuity of personnel. No two, or even four, years tours of duty, then a transfer, a new language to be learned (perhaps), familiarity a new environment and new crops in many cases, and much time necessary to make new contacts with local people who can help.

Another factor - less bureaucracy, which means more time in the field, on the job, and less in office discussions, report writing, and the like. And still another factor - Big appropriations alone won't do the job. Not at all. The essentials are dedicated personnel, sticking to the objectives assured continuity, and freedom from useless "red tape" - Bureaucracy.

What lessons should we learn from the Mexican program and apply with our U. S. foreign aid? I think this question has been answered in the above paragraphs.

How many Latin American governments would do as well as Mexico has done, given something similar to the Rockefeller set-up? I think numerous ones would welcome such programs, but I do not believe the small countries can justify the establishment of a sufficiently large organization to do the job. It means a considerable number of imported technicians in every case, and more important still, a sufficient number of local men to be trained and eventually take over. Mexico had an ample supply of such men; some of the smaller countries may not have enough men with the necessary ability and dedication.

What lessons have I learned in helping Latin American farmers to help themselves? As you know, I have worked in this field for many years, I have come to feel that helping the small

farmer is a simple, satisfying and highly useful job if one goes about it in the right way. The main thing is the personal touch. One must come to know the small farmer as a friend, and as an unselfish friend. And he must work on simple lines and have endless patience. Don't give the small farmer too many bulletins to read - give him some seeds to plant and keep in touch with him to make sure he gives the seeds a chance. A chance, that's all. When he sees the results he will begin to believe in you, and will listen to you when you suggest some improvement or other, which means more work on his part. Be careful about lending him money unless you are sure he will increase his income to the extent that he can liquidate the debt.

I do not know when I may get back to Gainesville again. I would like to stay in Central America until after Christmas.