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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.

6 July 1957

Dr. Wilson Popenoe
Director
Escuela Agricola Panamericana
Apartado 93
Tegucigalpa,
Honduras, C. A.

Dear Dr. Popenoe:

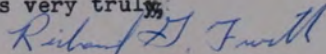
I am sending you a copy of our report by air mail. The accompanying letter to Mr. Bradford of IBEC pretty well explains the purpose of the paper and our interest in the project. We would be very grateful for any comments you may care to make on any part of the paper, or on the project, as a whole. Aside from that, I felt that, since we attributed certain qualitative information to yourself, it is only fair that you should have an opportunity to review it. On page 5 of the report I have tried to summarize some of the things brought out in our conversation of last July.

I should apologize, both for failing to include a return address with my last letter and for a vagueness in the letter, itself. It was not our intention to quote your production estimate, but rather to use it as a guide in selecting a figure which we would use in our calculations. You may recall that I was very appreciative of your being willing to hazard a guess at potential commercial yield. I understood that the figure provided was a guess, and was not intended for attributed publication.

The copy being mailed is my personal copy, as we underestimated our needs. Therefore, I am enclosing a check which I hope will cover return wrapping and mailing. Please feel free to keep this copy as long as you wish. I would merely like to have it back when you are completely through with it. We hope you can take time to read and comment upon the entire paper. On the subject of tropical agriculture, there is no man whose opinions we would value more highly.

If you find that I have been inaccurate in relating the information we discussed, please let me know, and I will inform Mr. Bradford and Sr. de Sola and Mr. Armour immediately.

Yours very truly,



Richard G. Furth
Harvard Business School, Baker 424
Soldiers Field, Boston 63, Mass.

6 July 1957

Mr. Wallace D. Bradford
Vice President
International Basic Economy Corp.
30 Rockefeller Plaza
Room 5101
New York 20, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Bradford:

The attached report is the one which I discussed with you about a year ago. The original was completed by April 15, on schedule, but the process of duplicating the report and, especially, the exhibits, which were done by hand, absorbed our spare time for several weeks.

As I recall, when I described to you the project on which I was working you mentioned that you would like to see a report, if one were written. This report was done for a course in the Harvard Business School, and for that reason there is a detailed organizational section included. Actually, there must be many other possible ways to organize this sort of enterprise. We do not view inflexibly either the organizational structure or our functions in the organization.

We would be grateful if you would inform us of your reaction to the project as a possible economic venture. If your reaction is favorable, we would be most interested in learning how you view the problem of raising capital for such a venture. I should mention that, although it is not sufficiently emphasized in the report, we feel that one of the chief values of this sort of operation is that it may serve as a vehicle for the introduction of a variety of other products, which themselves might not support such a project in the initial stages of their introduction. These might range from high value, but low volume, temperate crops, such as various types of berries, to a number of tropical products which have great potential, but which will require a good deal of market development.

While Bill Sharpe and Oliver Gayley have gone into industry, I have elected to work for the Business School for a year as a research assistant, and then to devote another year to writing a doctoral thesis on airline re-equipment. Thus, I am interested not only in how you view the project from an economic standpoint, but in your

opinion of the structure, content and logic of the report, itself. I imagine that in your position, you must see a good many similar pieces of work, and you have probably formed certain standards, regarding what you would like to see in a business report.

I should note that the paper has been checked only in part by experts. Mr. William Applebaum was formerly a vice president of the Stop & Shop chain, and is currently a consultant in supermarket merchandising and a member of the Harvard Business School faculty. He is enthusiastic about the project from his point of view. Mr. Paul Donham, Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School and instructor of a course entitled Management of New Enterprises, is also enthusiastic. The paper has not been checked from the point of view of a specialist in tropical horticulture, or even by a general agricultural expert, though several such experts provided material used in the report. Neither has it been checked from the point of view of a produce wholesaler or commission broker. In soliciting the views of the latter while writing the paper, we encountered a good deal of disparity in terms of both total market and potential prices. Rather than draw an average of their estimates, which we thought would be an unjustifiable compromise, we drew on records of past experience, where they were available. In view of the extremely small total volume traded (though individual shipments were about as large as those we envision), this method has its shortcomings, also.

I will send a copy of this letter, as well as a copy of the report, to Sr. de Sola and Mr. Armour. I also expect to send a copy to Dr. Popenoe in Honduras, both to solicit his comments and to be sure that we are accurate in relating the information which we attribute to him.

I know that this is a rather lengthy paper, but we found that we simply couldn't handle the subject with a briefer treatment. We will be very grateful for whatever time you may be able to devote to it. We will be looking forward to learning of your views about the aspects of the project which I have mentioned, or about any other phase of the report on which you may care to comment.

Yours very truly,

Richard G. Furth
Baker 424
Harvard Business School
Soldiers Field
Boston 63, Mass.

Avenida Roosevelt num. 21, San Salvador,
Rep. de El Salvador, 12 August 1957

Mr Richard G. Furth
Harvard Business School, Baker 424
Soldiers Field, Boston 63, Mass.

Dear Mr Furth:

Your letter of 6 July and the very thorough report on the possibilities of asparagus production for export reached me here a couple of weeks ago. As of June first, I retired as Director of Escuela Agricola Panamericana (automatic, just like my retirement from the US Naval Reserve) and from now on my address will be Antigua, Guatemala, though I shall be moving around quite a bit, as at Present: I am here in Salvador on a two months contract with the government to organize and put on foot (that's the important part) a program of fruit production.

Your report is allright, on paper. In fact it is allright, anyway you want to look at it, because you frankly state that a period of experimentation is required. I have made a few pencil notes on your text which I will return as soon as I can find a big enough piece of paper to wrap it. And I will send it by air mail, within the next week. But when I say, on paper, I mean this: we know almost nothing regarding the commercial possibilities of asparagus production for export. My advice is this: dont undertake to organize a company as yet. Scare up about ten thousand bucks, send down one man to handle things, get a piece of land - an acre - in the highlands at 5000 to 6000 feet, another lower down, at 2500 to 3000 feet; bring down a few thousand crowns (to save time), plant them, grow them on an experimental basis for about two years, keep good records, and then, if the facts warrant, go ahead.

I am rather hopeful about the possibilities. At the same time, you could not at this moment sell me a share of steak. But I would be willing to give a little of my own time and interest to seeing what can be done - this is not a request for a retaining fee. I am not interested in that angle. But I am interested, and always rather optimistic, about new horticultural projects in tropical America.

Sincerely,

2 September 1957

Dr. Wilson Popenoe
Avenida Roosevelt numero 21
San Salvador, El Salvador

Dear Dr. Popenoe:

Thank you for your encouraging and thought-provoking letter. I have delayed acknowledging its receipt, hoping that the annotated report might arrive, but I have learned through past experience that the postal authorities do not view air mail packages with the same concern as they do letters.

I was delighted to learn that you might be personally interested in helping with the project. As yet of course, we have no idea whether even experimental work will be attempted. If it is, your interest and advice will be a very significant asset.

I referred to your letter as "thought-provoking," because your suggestion for experimentation poses an interesting alternative. We had envisioned a rather elaborate experimental program, utilizing all of the facilities required for full production, but limiting investment by merely minimizing the scale of operations. If I understand your suggestion, you would advocate a much less costly (in terms of investment) program, with emphasis only on production. In view of the fact that there is a 10-month lead time between planting and the first harvest, it may be that this could not be done for \$10,000, but I would certainly agree that the cost of this type of program would be significantly less than for the one we suggested.

Of course, there would also be differences in the type of information gained. Our system, in addition to affording production data, would provide a means of testing transportation service, port-of-entry problems and market receptivity. It would also provide an opportunity for promotion among institutional consumers. Moreover, since we are looking for the maximum spread between revenue per acre and cost per acre, 10 acres might afford a more thorough experiment, with variations in quantity and types of fertilizer, density of planting, quantity and timing of irrigation, insect control measures, application of manure, sanitary control measures, etc., using the same equipment as would be used in full-scale operations.

Unfortunately, as you know, all this must come at a price. In this case, the price may be expressed in terms

of risk. With your system, we would know ahead of time the cost of experimentation. It might be modified by the revenue realized in local sales (which, incidentally, would help establish our case for customs valuation based on local price), but this would probably be a relatively minor factor. With our system, the investment (about \$50,000) would be comparatively great, and the loss incurred would depend upon how closely we have guessed costs, yield and prices. It would also depend upon our success in getting the product past all the transportation and port of entry barriers with minimum losses. In short, while the expected loss is the same under your system as under ours, the reliability with which this loss can be estimated is nearly 100% with your system and far less than that with ours.

To select one system or the other as being preferable, I suppose we would have to guess how far our estimated loss might be in error, and what the odds are of its being off to one extent or another. Then we would simply have to make a best guess as to whether the extra information would be worth the extra risk of loss.

Since we wrote the report, a couple of items have appeared in the news which might have a bearing on the project. The first is the isolation of an acid (whose name escapes me) which is reputed to have a profound effect on the rate of growth of certain plants. The other appeared in an article in Scientific American a few months ago. It reported on the existence and activities of a climatic laboratory at CalTech, where plants can be grown in conditions of controlled temperature, exposure to synthesized daylight, etc., and where other factors can be held relatively constant. This lab has succeeded in producing a number of plants of various types which are particularly adapted to a specific set of growing conditions. I would be very pleased to know what bearing you believe these developments might have on the project. I am sorry that my references are so vague, but I presume that both have received a fair amount of publicity in technical journals with which you are familiar.

I sincerely appreciate your devotion of time and consideration to our report, and am especially grateful for your continued interest in the project. I would think that your interest and encouragement would materially enhance the possibility of the project's being actually carried out. I hope you will not mind my forwarding copies of your letter and this reply to Mr. Bradford of IBEC and to Sr. de Sola and Mr. Armour of H. de Sola e Hijos.

Sincerely,

Richard G. Furth
Richard G. Furth

Antigua, Guatemala, 21 Oct 1957

Mr R G Furth
Baker 122, Graduate School of Business Adm.,
Soldiers Field, Boston 63.

Dear Mr Furth:

Your letter of 2 September failed to catch me before I had left Salvador to return home, and stayed over there a month before it finally arrived in Antigua. I trust the report reached you; I had to send it by ordinary mail as it would have cost something more than five dollars to send it by air. Feeling that you probably did not need it urgently I sent it by ordinary.

Supposing you start an experiment based on your over-all program, that is, with transportation, port of entry problems, and the like, all playing apart. Supposing you dont get sufficient production to warrant further development. You have thrown away a good deal more money than you need to. The first thing you must know, and it can be known at relatively low cost, is this: will asparagus produce sufficiently high yields of marketing spears to justify an export undertaking? Dont place any faith in results obtained in experimental laboratories in California, as to light and temperature relationships. I know the laboratory to which you refer; and it is a remarkable place where important basis work has been done. But it wont help you any in trying to find out whether or not it is worth while to undertake the sort of development you have in mind.

So again I say, if you want to get started, send one man down here to run the show, let him tie up with two other chaps who have land in suitable areas, and let him spend about three years finding out at first hand what to expect.

Sincerely,

Wilson Popenoe

22 November 1957

Dr. Wilson Popenoe
Antigua, Guatemala

Dear Dr. Popenoe:

Many thanks for your letter of 21 October. It arrived just before the end of the month, and was followed within a few days by the annotated report. Your assumption was quite valid; aside from my looking forward to reading your notes, I had no urgent need for that copy of the report.

I very much regret the misquote on page 10 of the report, and will send copies of this letter to Sr. de Sola and Mr. Bradford to put them on notice that it was a misquote. You made no estimate of production which could be expected, and in fact advised me that you would not wish to make such an estimate. It was my intention that the three of us who wrote the report take responsibility for the statement, and am sorry that we did not catch the mistake in our editing.

Your letter was very helpful to us in understanding the reasoning behind your initial suggestion. I would have acknowledged it more promptly, but was quite absorbed in preparing for my general examination, which I took a few days ago. Since I passed it, my plans for the immediate future remain unchanged.

Sincerely,

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