

## **Farming Colonies For Agricultural Students.**

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It is a longstanding complaint, ever since Agricultural Colleges were started and Agricultural Departments began to work in India, that very few of the passed students of these Colleges have taken to private farming, and along with the complaint the usual explanation has also been adduced that the main reason for the disinclination on the part of students to take to farming was due to the fact that the students did not really belong to what is popularly known as the Agricultural classes. The Term "Agricultural classes" covers a wide range. It may mean those who own large estates and extensive lands or those who own small holdings or it may mean tenants or agricultural labourers. The last class is generally the illiterate class and the first class consists of Zamindars and rich men, some of them not educated enough, and some of them inclining to an easy life, or with other avocations to engage their attention. The men with small holdings and the tenant farmers are generally able to make some thing out of their lands, as they live on the spot and attend to all the worries and troubles of a cultivator as they arise from day to day.

2. If one looks into the applications for admission to the Agricultural colleges, it will be found that the column "Area of land held in the family" is generally well-filled. It is only rarely that Principals of Agricultural Colleges, and recently the Selection Committees select students who have not agricultural interests or who come only from urban areas. Such being the case, it is a matter for serious consideration why these agricultural students who, in their first interviews before admission, said they sought admission with the object of taking to private farming, did not take to it when they passed out of the College. The reasons may be summarised as follows:—

(i) They have found berths ready for them so far in the Agricultural Departments; but it has to be pointed out that a limit to such recruitment will soon be reached.

(ii) Most students have not sufficient landed property when the property held in the family is divided and subdivided by the joint family system to bring them such profit as a result of the agricultural improvements they may effect on their lands, as will be equal to the present income from those lands *plus* the salaries of their appointments.

(iii) Some of them at any rate are not sufficiently confident of their own capacity to make farming profitable in the face of the uncertain nature of the Indian monsoons. In my opinion, the practical training in Agriculture, which students at present receive in the different Agricultural colleges, has achieved two important results; (a) The students have been taught the dignity of manual labour, some of them becoming quite expert at it, and they are not likely to fight shy of such manual labour in after-life and (b) they have been well trained in powers of observation. In these two respects, agricultural students are quite ahead of students of Arts Colleges. But something more than these is required to make a business farmer. The commercial aspect of farming is quite different. No agricultural department can be said to have started and worked a farm on commercial lines. It is no wonder I am not complaining or finding fault with Government Agricultural Departments, but I am only making a statement of fact therefore that students do not feel confident of success, if they wish to take to farming, nor are the parents willing to entrust their lands to these lads whom they consider to be mere theorists.

(iv) To such of the students as have confidence in themselves and as may be prepared to brave the vicissitudes of South Indian Agriculture, there is an absence of facilities and resources.

Those of you who were present at the opening Jubilee Session of the Conference 2 years ago will remember, that no less a person than His Excellency Lord Goschen said that in his case, he did not get much profit from landed property. Income from land is verily uncertain. But intensive farming conducted on business lines will certainly pay, provided the land holder is not an absentee landlord but remains on the spot and attends to the innumerable details of a business as they arise.

3. Before proceeding further, I would like to point out, that this problem of making agricultural students turn to private farming, has been felt as keenly in other Provinces and in Native States, as we feel it here in Madras. A number of proposals has been formulated but the latest is a system of agricultural colonies for agricultural students. The Durbars of Travancore and Mysore have, I understand, sanctioned schemes for colonising students, who pass out from the Vernacular Agricultural Schools in the former and from the Hebbal School of Agriculture in the latter, by the assignment of definite areas of land and the advancement of a certain sum of money for initial outlay. I have not got the details of working of these colonies and I will leave it to the visitors from these States to explain their working. You might have heard of Captain Petavel's scheme of Rural Reconstruction in Bengal, but that has reference to the relief of middle class unemployed youths, not necessarily lads trained in an Agricultural college. It was the late Sir Ganga Ram who brought to my notice the evolution of a definite scheme for the establishment of colonies for the agricultural students of the Lyallpur Agricultural College in Punjab. During my visits to the Punjab in 1927 and 1928, I had occasion to discuss this scheme with the Director of Agriculture and the Principal and staff of that College. The scheme has been sanctioned, and the land meant for colonisation has been handed over to the Principal more than two years ago, but it has not been given effect to pending the decision of a number of details which, I understood, were engaging the attention of Government and of the agricultural officers. It appeared to me that this scheme might be worthy of application in the Madras Presidency, with such modifications as may be deemed necessary, to fit in with our local conditions and with the systems of land tenure prevalent here. The Punjab scheme is as follows :—

4. The scheme first emanated from Mr. Johnstone, Dy. Director of Agriculture and was blessed by the Provincial Board of Agriculture, Punjab, of which the Director of Agriculture was a member and was subjected to careful scrutiny by different officers of Government, including the Minister, the Financial Commissioner, the



Chief Engineer for Irrigation, the Director and the Deputy Directors of Agriculture, the Principal and staff of the Agricultural College and the Old Boys' Association of the Lyallpur College; and the Principle was finally accepted by the Government of Punjab, of the idea of the grant of land being made to agricultural students. After considerable discussion, an assignment of 75 acres of land in the Canal Colony was considered an Economic Unit which would give a student a net income of Rs. 2,000, per annum which was slightly in excess of the starting income of an Agricultural graduate entering Government service. The principle was also accepted that the students to whom lands are assigned should form themselves into a Co-operative Society for their mutual advantage. 3,500 acres of land near Shergarh were ear-marked for the purpose and handed over to the Agricultural Department. The lands are not to be assigned permanently, but usually on a five years' lease, the object in the Punjab being to train the students in practical farming, in order to induce a feeling of confidence and self-reliance in agricultural students, and at the same time, to produce men who will be, eagerly and without hesitation, employed by rich Zamindars as Estate Agents on suitable remuneration. The lands should be cultivated according to the advice of the officers of the Agricultural Department, as far as possible and regular records and account books maintained, which would be subject to inspection by the Agricultural officers. The students are to reside on the lands in quarters provided by Government for which a nominal rent will be charged. The lands are not to be sublet, but students can get the work done with the help of labourers, and there is provision in the scheme for special work being executed on the contract system. An advance up to Rs 2,000 may be given to each student in the first year, for initial outlay, the amount being repaid by him during the next five years. All the land should be brought under cultivation within a definite period, and the tenant will be liable to pay the usual land-tax and, in case of failure of monsoons, will be entitled to the usual remission, as well. The produce will be sold, according to the market rate, to the Agricultural Department by preference for seed purposes, if they should require it. The student should provide kucha buildings for cattle sheds and for his servants

When the land has to be assigned to a new batch of students at the end of five years, payment will be made to the outgoing tenant, according to a proper valuation, in which the officers of the Agricultural Department will have the deciding voice, for permanent improvements on the land and for cattle, implements stores etc., with the proviso that the outgoing tenant may, for some reasons, be allowed to remove his moveable property.

According to the scheme, at the rate of ten students per year, 50 colonies will be established within the course of 5 years. The idea in the Punjab is this:--It is not that the students settle down once for all as farmers on the other hand it is considered to be a continuation of their practical training, especially farming on commercial lines. It is presumed that they would have acquired *sufficient mastery of the business of farming* during these five years that they would be able to lease out or purchase lands on their own account without the help of departmental officers, apart from the opportunities afforded to them of being employed as estate agents in large Zamindaris.

5. Such in brief is the scheme of Agricultural colonies for agricultural students of the Lyallpur College. The scheme has been made possible, first on account of the enthusiasm displayed by the Director and Deputy Directors of Agriculture, by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies and by enthusiastic successful farmers like the late Sir Ganga Ram. Secondly, such an extensive area as 3,500 acres in one block was easily available in the Punjab Canal Colony. If a scheme similar to this has to be evolved for the Madras Presidency, it will not be so easy to find such a large area but I believe none will gainsay the enthusiasm and the genuine interest in the welfare of agricultural students, which our popular Director, Mr. Anstead and his able and sympathetic Deputy Directors will evince in such a scheme.

6. His Excellency Lord Goschen has been the greatest friend of the agricultural classes in Madras. The Registrar of Cooperative Societies in our Presidency is not likely to show less interest in the matter, and we have also our present Minister of Agriculture who is a practical business farmer himself. Under such auspices, it should not be very difficult to evolve a scheme suitable to our condition

in Madras, whereby at least a small percentage of our agricultural graduates may be trained as practical farmers. As stated above, we may not have available in Madras such a large block of land as is available for the Punjab students. It is no good assigning to agricultural graduates who are starting life as probationary farmers, waste lands which have been already declared unfit for cultivation: nor is it expected that existing ryots should be turned out from rich lands for the benefit of the agricultural students. I have heard it said by experienced Collectors including a member of the Board of Revenue that there are suitable lands still available for cultivation in different parts of the Presidency which could be converted into colonies for agricultural students. What I would like to press on this Conference is this:—We have met today under the best of auspices. His Excellency the Governor himself was pleased to open the Conference yesterday, and the Honorable the Minister for Development, himself an agriculturist, will be here in a day or two. The Head of the Department of Agriculture presides over this session of the Conference. All the senior officers of the Department and a considerable number of the junior officers are here to-day. The Registrar of Co-operative Societies whose good offices we solicit in this venture has a reputation for working in intimate touch with the officers of the Agricultural Department. The old boys of the Saidapet College and the old and the present boys of the Coimbatore College are also assembled under the welcoming Aegis of the Alma mater. Now under these good auspices I beg to suggest that this Conference organised by the Madras Agricultural Students' Union should accept in principle the idea of the grant of land to Agricultural students with a view to encourage them to take to farming as a profession, a principle which, as I said above, has been accepted and acted upon, as far as I know, by the Punjab Government, and the Durbars of Mysore and Travancore. I may be permitted at this stage to say that this will be a characteristic feature of the Agricultural college to be opened under the Benares Hindu University, and His Highness the Maharaja of Benares has already consented to place an area of 1,200 acres at the disposal of the University, to be parcelled out into Economic Units

for starting students' colonies. Once the principle is accepted and I find from the Annual Report read by the Secretary that the Madras Agricultural Students' Union has accepted it the next step will be the appointment of a Committee by Government to obtain detailed information regarding the availability of suitable blocks of land in different districts and formulate detailed proposals for the starting, development and successful working of students' agricultural colonies.

7. With the limited time of ten minutes allotted to me, it has not been possible for me, nor would it serve any useful purpose, to go into details in the absence of detailed information about available land which is the basis on which one could work out an Economic Unit per student. At the same time, of the many obvious advantages of this colonisation scheme, one that is worth examining is that it may, to a certain extent, provide chances and facilities for the regular students of the Agricultural College to learn practical field work; somewhat on the line in which students of Agricultural Colleges in Great Britain take their training under a British farmer, whose certificate is officially accepted; and, supervised, as these colonies are suggested to be, by the officers of the Department, the practical training given herein to the students will be a real asset to them.

8. I have one word more. My object in bringing this subject before the conference is this. I have been speaking on this subject at so many of our Conferences in previous years, as most of you know. They were probably speculative proposals then, but when I have actually seen something like this scheme having been evolved, and I believe successfully being worked in other provinces, I am quite certain that such a scheme has become an immediate necessity in Madras, and I am also optimistic that it will lead to successful results.

After all there is so much talk in the country of rural re-construction. Most of us, agricultural students of the past, have led a rural life in the service of his Majesty's Government, and I believe, we have on the whole given a fair account of ourselves so far. What is asked for is that those of us who have not the necessary facilities and resources may be given a chance to turn to practical farming as a profession.