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**ISSUES IN UNITED STATES-MEXICAN
AGRICULTURAL RELATIONS:
A BINATIONAL CONSULTATION**

by

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PREFACE

United States-Mexican agricultural relations have profound implications for the futures of these two countries. In the 1970s, a complex relationship involving issues of trade, migration, investment, labor, and development became further complicated: Mexico emerged as a major oil producer, and the U.S. began to supply most of Mexico's increasingly large quantities of foodgrain imports. For Mexico, proximity to and dense economic relations with the United States have precipitated the development of a modern commercial agricultural sector that is highly responsive to export demand; meanwhile, the country has lost its ability to ensure self-sufficiency in basic foodcrops or to provide employment to a rural population that has become dependent on migration to the United States. In the United States, diverse interests conflict over the beneficial or harmful effects of agricultural imports and labor migration while the agricultural sector is beset by the same kinds of pressures that affect Mexico's commercial farmers. These problems and the issues in U.S.-Mexican relations that they raise have roots that stretch back at least to the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the scope and magnitude of agricultural, trade, and migration-related issues have grown significantly since the 1940s and continue to be the focus of numerous debates and policy initiatives in both countries.

In late February, 1981, the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies of the University of California at San Diego hosted a Binational Consultation on U.S.-Mexican Agricultural Relations. The consultation sought to define the nature, causes, and consequences of flows of labor, capital, technology, and agricultural commodities across the U.S.-Mexican border and to identify fruitful areas for additional research. This agenda required not only analysis of the trade relationships between the countries, but also discussion of socioeconomic changes occurring in both countries and related public policies that could be identified as causes or consequences of binational concerns. Thus, sessions of the consultation were devoted to U.S.-Mexican

agricultural trade in an era of oil wealth and "food power"; Mexico's crisis of production in the small-farm sector; public policy toward agriculture and rural development in Mexico; the Mexican Food System (SAM¹); Mexican labor in the United States; the organization of farmworkers in both countries; and the effects of migration on rural Mexican communities. In these sessions, researchers, public officials, private businessmen, labor leaders, and representatives of private foundations presented their views and addressed important issues facing the two countries. Much of this report is a summary of the discussions that occurred at the binational consultation.² In addition, it provides an indication of important areas of consensus and controversy among the participants and attempts to provide an agenda of issues requiring further research. Because of the publicity and controversy surrounding the initiation and performance of the Mexican Food System, this monograph devotes special attention to the session of the consultation in which the SAM was discussed and makes an effort to assess the experience of the SAM in the two years that followed the 1981 meeting.

1. Sistema Alimentario Mexicano.

2. Most of the presentations were based on working papers, research reports, and monographs published by the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies. Where applicable, these publications will be noted as the presentations are discussed in the following pages. A list of participants at the consultation is provided following Appendix A.

**NEW TERMS OF AGRICULTURAL TRADE
BETWEEN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES
AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR
U.S.-MEXICAN RELATIONS**

A major issue discussed throughout the consultation was the extent to which U.S.-Mexican agricultural relations were the result of the internationalization of capital, the increasing incorporation of the two national economies into global markets for labor and agricultural commodities. This concern is of more than academic interest for Mexico; it has implications for the extent to which the country is bound in a dependent relationship to the United States and the extent to which the Mexican government can alter the course of the country's current development trajectory. In particular, whether Mexico can use "oil power" and the U.S. can employ "food power" as bargaining tools in binational relations became an important question for research and discussion in the early 1980s; these issues figured prominently in the consultation.

Based on his research in the cattle and winter vegetable industries in northern Mexico, *Steven Sanderson* argued that the international conditions of production, consumption, exchange, and distribution of food have profound effects on a wide range of domestic policy issues for Mexico — migration, employment, urbanization, inflation, balance of payments, trade, and oil-based development.³ However, he stated, to consider these food-related issues only as simple matters of trade with the United States is to miss a central point: the current dynamics of U.S.-Mexican agricultural relations have deep historical roots and are linked to a process that extends

3. See Steven E. Sanderson, "The Receding Frontier: Aspects of the Internationalization of U.S.-Mexican Agriculture and Their Implications for Bilateral Relations in the 1980s," Research Report Series, 15 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

across national boundaries and results in specialization of function internationally and deep, class-based inequities domestically. Examples of the increasingly rationalized linkages between the two countries are the production contracts that shape the nature of winter vegetable production and the feedlot and feeder-calf operations and packing houses that characterize livestock development in Mexico. According to Sanderson, Mexico increasingly acts as a spillover producer for U.S. domestic shortfalls. Because the two countries are assuming the characteristics of a single system of agricultural production, the linkages are extremely difficult to break or alter.

Sanderson argued that the international context of Mexico's development has meant the capitalization of export agriculture, especially through the development of highly successful irrigation districts, at the expense of small farmers and *ejidatarios*. The irrigation districts have siphoned credit and other public investments and goods away from small farmers and *ejidatarios* and away from the production of traditional foodstuffs toward production of export crops and luxury food items. Moreover, Sanderson indicated, proletarianization of the *campesinado* and high levels of rural unemployment have characterized the growth of modern commercial export agriculture in Mexico.

Politically, the complex linkages between the countries create significant international and domestic problems for Mexico, he continued. Internationally, trade relations with the United States have become ever more contradictory and delicate as diverse interests on each side of the border pursue goals and form alliances that often conflict with national needs for development. Domestically, Mexico faces high levels of rural unemployment and income disparities; increased pressure on the land; tension between its goal of organizing the rural population for production and its attempts to maintain political quiescence; difficulties in reorienting its bureaucratic structures to serve rural interests; and a contradiction between demands for animal protein emanating from a growing middle class and a need for basic grains that are increasingly displaced by fodder crops. Fortunately, in the late 1970s oil wealth presented the government with the opportunity to mollify the rural poor through "oil patronage" and to avert or postpone a political crisis resulting from these conditions.

In conclusion, Sanderson argued that the often-mentioned capability of the U.S. to exert pressure on Mexico through "food power," especially to obtain oil, overlooks the increasing presence of cross-national sectoral alliances. These alliances currently belie the existence of national producers, national consumers, or national markets. Instead, the reality of U.S.-Mexican agricultural relations is characterized by an international economic system that limits the policy space available to both the Mexican and U.S. governments for manipulating oil or food in the international arena. Thus, for Sanderson, "food power" refers to an international economic structure that is evolving inexorably and that places constraints on the activities of all governments.

In his presentation, *David Mares* provided a different view of Mexican agricultural development and the country's dependence on the United States.⁴ Mares argued that Sanderson's presentation, like most current work on Mexican agriculture, overemphasized integration with the U.S. economy and understated or overlooked the role assumed by the Mexican state and Mexican producers. Importantly, the consequences of integration between the Mexican and U.S. economies can be beneficial for some domestic interests; moreover, the state itself often has the capacity to influence the course of agricultural development within a country. Thus, according to Mares, Mexico and its government are not mere pawns in a growing internationalization of capital. While Mexican production has been historically responsive to U.S. demand, changing consumption patterns in Mexico also helped stimulate a move away from basic staples to more remunerative crops, and the oil wealth of the late 1970s further promoted this change. Likewise, public policies in Mexico and the United States have had an important impact on the structure of production in both countries. Mares supported these arguments with a close analysis of cotton and winter vegetable production and the "tomato wars" of 1969-1975 and 1978-1980.

4. See David Mares, "The Evolution of U.S.-Mexican Agricultural Relations: The Changing Roles of the Mexican State and Mexican Agricultural Producers," Research Report Series, 16 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

Mares indicated that in recent years the role of U.S. distributors and U.S. markets in Mexican fresh vegetable production has diminished considerably, while domestic markets have become more important. To the extent that this change characterizes a broad spectrum of agricultural and livestock products, he suggested, international influences on Mexican production may be declining in importance when compared with domestic market stimulants. In addition, he argued that the Mexican State has the capacity to shape participation in international markets. In the case of cotton and winter vegetables, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture acted to modify international trade relations in the "national interest," even when Mexican producers opposed its actions.

Furthermore, Mexican producers of important export crops like tomatoes have become influential actors in relations between the two countries and therefore should not be regarded as instruments in the hands of transnational corporations based in the United States. In fact, the future may bring increasing evidence of the emergence of transnational agribusiness enterprises based in Mexico rather than the U.S. All of these changes suggest that U.S.-Mexican relations must be interpreted within a complex and dynamic theoretical framework that goes beyond the inevitable unfolding of a new international division of labor. This framework must include not only international factors, but also important influences emanating from the state, the domestic economy, and various social classes.

The differences in perspective between Sanderson and Mares were magnified in the discussion of their presentations. *Olga Pellicer de Brody* noted that neither of them had directly addressed the issue of the bargaining relationship between Mexico and the United States. She suggested more specific analysis of the impact of Mexico's oil production boom on its international position and called for a closer examination of the extent to which national interests were undercut by emerging transnational alliances between Mexican producers and U.S. distributors of agricultural commodities. Pellicer indicated that Mexico could lessen its dependence on the United States through its policy of self-sufficiency in "strategic basic foodstuffs" such as corn and beans and forestall the use of U.S. "food power" through its policy of conserving oil. She noted, however, that grain is a renewable resource while oil is not, and that these fundamental characteristics should be

considered seriously in discussions about exchanging oil for food.

In his comments, *Clark Reynolds* called for greater attention to the empirical bases for theoretical debate. He returned to the question of the international division of labor and advocated greater conceptual clarity in using the term. He suggested that U.S.-Mexican relations in the 1980s are characterized by a dynamic of "full exchange" of capital, labor, technology, values, and cultural patterns; in this exchange, social forces, demographics, and public and private policies all work to influence the impact of market forces. While current tendencies in the evolution of full exchange probably cannot be stopped, governments can influence them, especially in terms of protecting those individuals, such as smallholders in Mexican agriculture, who are adversely affected by them.

Agreeing with much of the analysis in the Sanderson presentation, *Carlos Rico* echoed Pellicer's call for further analysis of the bargaining power of both the U.S. and Mexico. If, as Sanderson argued, the U.S. government does not have much power to exert on Mexico, given transnational alliances in agriculture, then it does not have much power to deliver on its promises to Mexico, either. Nevertheless, he suggested, policy options at an intermediate level, such as those indicated in the Mares presentation, could affect the relations between the two countries. Above all, he argued, the Mexican government should intervene to influence the impact of market forces on its domestic economy.

Alex McCalla underscored the distinction between Sanderson's presentation and that of Mares: in the former, the model used indicated that U.S.-Mexican relations cannot produce mutual benefit; in the latter, the model described a more complex "two-way street" in which mutual benefit is possible. He pointed once again to the emergence of conflicting interests within both countries and called for further analysis of the cost of food independence for Mexico.

Similarly, *Gustavo del Castillo* called attention to the importance of the conceptual framework adopted for interpreting the results of empirical research and argued that both presentations would have benefited from a fuller introduction of social class analysis. He alluded to an issue that would receive much greater attention at a later

point in the conference when he suggested that Sanderson was incorrect to use the term "proletarianization" to describe what is happening to Mexican peasants. Instead of experiencing a full transformation to landless wage labor, peasants are seeking out wage labor as part of complex coping strategies in order not to become "proletarianized." He stated that both presentations overlooked complex forms of social relationships evolving in the countryside and equally complex relationships between sectors of the rural population and the state. Del Castillo commented that Mexican agricultural development faced deep contradictions at the national level at the same time that it was becoming more integrated at the international level. This paradox poses serious dilemmas for public policy.

In a final commentary, *Gustavo Vega* raised questions about the historical analysis presented by Sanderson and called for further research on the extent and kind of influence that states can actually exert in international economic relationships.

Participants in this session of the consultation represented the disciplines of political science, economics, agricultural economics, and anthropology. It is interesting to note, therefore, that in certain areas they reached a consensus about the evolving relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. All agreed that in each country there exist diverse and conflicting interests with a stake in the nature of agricultural relations between them. Economic interests on both sides of the border are often linked through transnational alliances. Similarly, these interests and alliances make the identification and pursuit of national goals in international agricultural relations increasingly difficult. This in turn means that agreements between the two countries are likely to be increasingly elusive.

Among the areas of greatest consensus was a recognition of the need for further research — more intensive data collection and empirical analysis to help clarify important theoretical and conceptual issues. This research should be directed at those areas in which disagreements emerged among participants, such as the nature or dynamics of the agricultural changes occurring within each country and internationally. The varying perspectives on the relative importance of domestic or international markets and the extent to which market forces can be influenced by the activities of the state

underscored the need for this type of clarification. This question is particularly important because it concerns the extent to which the Mexican government has the ability to address serious problems of poverty and underproductivity in its rural sector. The participants also indicated the need for further research on issues which specifically address the politics of international relations. Such research should examine policymaking, the exercise of power and influence in the domestic and international political arenas, the ability of transnational alliances to transform economic interests into political influence, and the impact of different and changing resource bases in the two countries in terms of oil and food. So central and interdependent were the economic and political issues that they arose repeatedly in subsequent sessions of the consultation.

II

*THE CRISIS OF PRODUCTION
IN MEXICO'S SMALL-FARMING SECTOR*

The course of Mexico's development and the emergence of its modern commercial export agricultural sector discriminated seriously against the country's *ejido* and small-farm sector. Increasingly, rural Mexico finds itself in the midst of a crisis, the manifestations of which include extremely high levels of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, outmigration, social tensions, and decreased production of basic staples. The causes of this crisis and the alternatives available to the Mexican state for resolving it are important for U.S.-Mexican relations, for they affect migratory flows across the border, trade in grains and other agricultural commodities, the destination of oil revenues, and the maintenance of social peace.

Agustín Porrás reported on the results of field research concerning the impact of the collectivization of *ejidos* on welfare and demographic change in Mexico.⁵ His topic thus had important implications for the policies available to the Mexican state to resolve the crisis of rural development. He pointed out that the collectivization of land in Mexico (the *ejido* structure) has not generally meant the collectivization of labor. However, the collectivization of labor through the reorganization of the *ejido* offers real potential for improving the welfare and productivity of the rural poor, he asserted. In two different regions, Porrás compared collectivized and non-collectivized *ejidos* in terms of their production potential, market linkages, and sociopolitical context. Using these cases, he presented data to argue that levels of welfare, labor retention, and population limitation were higher on collectivized than non-collectivized *ejidos*. Therefore, he insisted, the state must intervene to promote

5. See Agustín Porrás, "Desarrollo agrario y cambio demográfico en tres regiones de México," Research Report Series, 18 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

collectivization of labor in the *ejidos*; if not, the *ejidos* themselves will be gradually absorbed into the private sector and levels of rural welfare will decline even further.

Porrás recognized that collectivization is a medium- and long-term project which must overcome substantial resistance by the *campesinos* themselves, and that state policy is often contradictory in terms of support for or discrimination against the *ejido*. He noted further that state intervention can only promote, not create, collectivized *ejidos*; their creation is a task for strong local leadership. Moreover, the *ejido* exists within a politico-economic context that identifies collectivization with communism. Thus, collectivization is not an easy alternative to choose; nevertheless, Porrás defended it as the only viable alternative for rural Mexico.

David Barkin returned to themes introduced in the first session of the consultation by arguing that the transformation of Mexican agriculture is part of a transformation of the economy as a whole.⁶ That is, changes in land use in Mexico reflect the internationalization of capital and must be analyzed from this perspective. According to Barkin, Mexico's agricultural crisis resulted inevitably from the country's integration into a new global division of labor. This change is characterized by an expansion of the wage-labor force, the need to produce wage goods, the creation of new markets and new social relations of production, and new ways of reproducing society. Barkin found specific evidence of these changes in land-use patterns in Mexico. In particular, the increase in livestock production, the conversion of cropland from production of food for humans to production of animal feed, extensive under-cultivation, and export crop expansion clearly signal this new international context of Mexican development.

The crisis in Mexican agriculture, Barkin argued, results from the impact of the international market on the advanced private sector. This market indicates what to produce (export goods) and what not to produce (basic grains). In the end, the self-sufficiency goals of the government's expensive SAM strategy will probably never

6. See David Barkin, "El uso de la tierra agrícola en México," Research Report Series, 17 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

be achieved because they work against an inevitable process of global integration of agroindustry. Theories of comparative advantage, popular among some economists, argue for policy alternatives that will only perpetuate Mexico's agricultural and agrarian problems. Ultimately, according to Barkin, only an organized peasantry can acquire the political muscle and economic resources necessary to alter the impact of the international economy and reverse the trajectory of state policy.

The presentations of Porras and Barkin included strong prescriptive statements about the resolution of Mexico's agricultural problems. The commentators, whose remarks followed, noted these and called for greater conceptual and empirical clarity in the research. For example, *Van Whiting* criticized Porras's presentation for not defining clearly the meaning of collectivization and differentiating it from "cooperativization"; he argued that capitalist agriculture — and Mexican agriculture is deeply imbedded in capitalist development patterns — constrains the development of real collective agriculture but not cooperative production. He criticized Barkin's work for presenting Mexican agricultural problems within a theoretical straightjacket. He echoed Mares and others in arguing for research that includes not only international economic analysis but also national and binational perspectives, and which identifies important variables that operate at each level. He suggested that much more work needed to be done at the level of specific industries or sectors, at the level of the state to explore its role and autonomy, and at the level of national policy. He urged that the development of the agricultural sector be viewed in terms of its relationship to industrialization.

Guillermo de la Peña indicated that land has different meanings to different sectors of the population and that it therefore becomes a source of conflict among them. For capitalist producers, profit determines the appropriate use of land; for urban consumers, the production of abundant food for domestic consumption is most important; for *campesinos*, land use is structured by subsistence needs; and for the state, it relates to changing and contradictory policies over time. De la Peña criticized Barkin's exclusive concentration on the demands of capital in the process of internationalization for its failure to recognize these diverse pressures on land. He argued that state policies, investments in other sectors by the rural bourgeoisie,

urban consumers, and the strength and continuity of peasant agriculture can all limit the expansion of capitalist agriculture. Porras, on the other hand, argued that alternative forms of peasant agriculture can exist and thrive within a context of capitalist development. De la Peña asked for further verification of the cause and effect relationship between collectivization and rural welfare; he indicated that the many examples of failure in collective enterprises warrant reexamination of the conclusions presented by Porras. Finally, de la Peña urged that researchers direct attention to the power of peasant organizations, not just to the quality of their leadership.

In his comments that reviewed the history of the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIM-MYT⁷), *Bruce Jennings* pointed to technological choice and development as an important aspect of agricultural change. This point, overlooked in both presentations, implicates the state as an important actor in promoting rural change. Jennings indicated that agricultural technologies are not neutral instruments and therefore generally bring unequal benefits in the wake of their introduction. A realization of this dynamic should characterize state policymaking and provide an underpinning for agricultural research, he concluded.

These presentations and commentaries suggest that considerably more research needs to be addressed to the dynamics of agricultural change in Mexico. In order to address the series of broad questions raised at this session, researchers must engage in specific micro-level analysis such as that undertaken by Porras, as well as study of intermediate levels of economic interactions, as Whiting suggested: To what extent are these interactions determined by the international market economy? To what degree does the state shape the structures of production? How much can it alter the patterns of the past? What alternatives to proletarianization, if any, are available to Mexico's peasants? What is the nature of the relationship between capitalist agriculture and the conditions of the rural poor? Some of these questions were addressed in greater detail in the next session of the consultation.

7. Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento del Maíz y del Trigo.

III

*THE EVOLUTION OF
MEXICAN GOVERNMENT POLICY
ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT*

The Mexican state has long been noted for its active intervention in economic and social conditions in the country. A large number of scholars have affirmed that the state has significantly shaped the development of the agricultural sector and the structure of the rural economy. The policies it has implemented and their impact are therefore important topics to consider when addressing issues of U.S.-Mexican agricultural relations. Indeed, many of the problems affecting binational relations, such as food deficits and illegal migration, are clearly linked to public policies that encouraged the modernization of the agricultural sector without considering their negative impact on the rural poor. At the same time, however, many feel that only the state can redress the sector's inequitable development process and resolve some of Mexico's international problems through a major commitment to rural development programs. These were among the issues raised and discussed during the third session.

Reviewing his research on micro-agrarian regions in Mexico, *Manuel Carlos* focused on the large disparities among them in terms of development and economic activity. He argued that those disparities have resulted from the discriminatory nature of national policies for agricultural development and the degree and kind of state activity that penetrates them.⁸ Moreover, he argued, many inequities are related to ecological and economic factors deeply entrenched in the historical evolution of the regions themselves. They are likely to be resistant to short-term

8. See Manuel L. Carlos, "State Policies, State Penetration, and Ecology: A Comparative Analysis of Uneven Development and Underdevelopment in Mexico's Micro Agrarian Regions," Research Report Series, 19 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

changes of the type promoted by state-sponsored rural development efforts.

To buttress his argument, Carlos highlighted the skewed impact of national development policies such as the formation of irrigation districts, the distribution of agricultural credit, and the provision of technical assistance. These helped to produce differences among "hyperactive," "moderately active," and "inactive or minimally active" regions, according to Carlos's typology. In general, the state has channeled resources toward regions of high agricultural potential and has denied them to regions considered marginal. State policies therefore exacerbated already great ecological distinctions among the regions. In the 1970s, when the state began to attempt to redress some of these imbalances through programs such as PIDER, the rain-fed districts program, and COPLAMAR, regions that had stronger center-periphery ties were probably able to benefit more from these efforts than were the least-advantaged regions into which the state had penetrated very little with its development programs.⁹ Carlos argued that once established, ecological zones that are highly favorable to agriculture are likely to continue to attract large proportions of public and private investment and that other regions will continue to lag behind them. Thus, the great disparities that he identified among regions are quite likely to remain constant or even increase in spite of the government's efforts to reduce them.

Merilee Grindle reviewed a decade of official programs for rural development in Mexico.¹⁰ Beginning with the administration of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) and continuing with that of López Portillo (1976-1982), agriculture and rural development policies underwent significant change. The two administrations made serious attempts to increase the production of basic foodstuffs and to improve the welfare of the large and diverse peasant population

9. PIDER (Programa de Inversiones para el Desarrollo Rural Integrado) was initiated in 1973; the rain-fed districts program and COPLAMAR (Coordinación General del Plan Nacional de Zonas Deprimidas y Grupos Marginados) were begun in 1977.

10. See Merilee S. Grindle, "Official Interpretations of Rural Underdevelopment: Mexico in the 1970s," Research Report Series, 20 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

that had been discriminated against under previous development policies. This change was stimulated by concern over growing import bills for basic staples and resultant balance-of-payments deficits, expanding evidence of the scope and magnitude of rural poverty and potential social unrest, and increasing criticism of the inequitable results of Mexico's path toward development. Under Echeverría, the problem of underproductivity and poverty in rural areas was understood to result from the exploited condition of the peasantry. To redress that situation, the administration undertook a series of programs and projects to provide goods and services for peasant producers, a strategy designed to free them from the need to deal with exploitive middlemen and rural *caciques*. The succeeding administration defined the problem as one of technological backwardness and risk-aversion strategies adopted by peasant producers. The López Portillo administration thus undertook to redress regional imbalances in infrastructure and technology and to improve the potential for innovation among peasants.

During the 1970s, massive federal expenditures were directed toward these rural development initiatives. Nevertheless, Grindle indicated, they resulted in little measurable improvement in production of basic crops or in peasant welfare. The area dedicated to the production of basic crops declined during this period, imports of food continued to mount, unemployment and underemployment grew, and rural wages and conditions of security continued to decline relative to urban areas. Among possible reasons for the failure of the public programs Grindle cited weather, population increases, the severity of rural underdevelopment, and the lack of sufficient time for results to appear. Equally important, however, were constraints imposed on the programs during their implementation. Institutional constraints included the difficulties of cooperation and coordination among official agencies, problems arising from the reorganization of priorities within established organizations, and lack of continuity caused by the change of administration in 1976. Among political constraints Grindle pointed out the government's inability to consider certain policy options — massive land redistribution, for example — because of the political opposition they would generate and the failure of both administrations to weaken the hold of intermediaries on the peasant economy.

According to Grindle, both administrations also overlooked the conflict between the advanced commercial sector and the peasant sector over the distribution of productive resources and state assistance. Government programs consequently ignored the likelihood that commercial agriculture was developing at the expense of the majority of the rural population. In conclusion, she argued that the Mexican state, if it wished to provide support for rural development, would have to pursue policies to reverse land concentration, discourage capital-intensive technology, make better land and water resources available to peasants, inhibit agribusinesses from controlling conditions of production, inhibit the role of intermediaries, make a wide range of goods and services available to the rural poor, and encourage the mobilization of independent peasant organizations.

Wayne Cornelius followed by summarizing an important issue raised in a publication by *August Schumacher*.¹¹ After reviewing PIDER and other programs of the 1970s, Schumacher argued that a trade-off inevitably takes place between increased production for self-sufficiency in corn and beans and increased opportunities for rural employment. Programs to increase corn and bean production have siphoned off much of the funding for rural development initiatives, especially since the initiation of the SAM; but these labor-extensive programs do little to resolve perhaps the deepest problem of rural areas, the problem of unemployment and underemployment. Schumacher urged that the Mexican government give much more attention to efforts to create permanent job opportunities in rural areas.

Blanca Suárez presented a brief commentary, noting with approval the focus on state penetration in Carlos's presentation and indicating the importance of differential flows of state resources to various regions. She argued, however, that his typology of regions should reflect an understanding of the internationalization of capital and the extent to which various regions were incorporated into the global economy. She criticized Schumacher's work for its

11. See August Schumacher, "Agricultural Development and Rural Employment: A Mexican Dilemma," Research Report Series, 21 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

inattention to the assumptions underlying national programs in Mexico and to how they were pursued in practice. She indicated an interest in learning more about the role of the World Bank in Mexico's rural development initiatives and suggested that its influence was not always beneficial. Finally, Suárez noted that she shared with Grindle a sense of skepticism about the potential of rural development programs to resolve deep causes of underdevelopment and poverty.

In summary, all participants in this session questioned the impact, if not the goals, of rural development efforts undertaken by the state in the 1970s. Moreover, all agreed about the distorting impact of pre-1970 development policies on rural regions and sectors of the rural population. This thesis, most fully explored in the consultation by Manuel Carlos, has received extensive analysis in the literature on Mexican development problems. Rural development initiatives, however, require much more research, as various approaches to the problems of underproductivity and poverty continue to have strong advocates and equally formidable skeptics. Researchers should devote their attention to analyzing the underlying causes of the problems as well as to identifying the potential means for resolving them. The implementation and impact of programs like PIDER, the rain-fed districts program and COPLAMAR, as well as more global strategies such as the SAM, require much closer examination than they have received. Such research should focus on the regional and community levels in order to examine in depth both the implementation problems and the effects of various rural development initiatives on different strata of the rural population. Equally important, however, researchers must analyze the potential of such initiatives within a broader political economy at national and international levels; they can thus try to determine whether programs that actually improve production and welfare at the local level have the economic and political potential to resolve rural and agricultural problems throughout the country. Ultimately, we must question whether public programs can respond to issues with deep structural roots.

IV

**NEW DIRECTIONS IN MEXICAN GOVERNMENT
POLICY TOWARD THE RURAL SECTOR:
THE SISTEMA ALIMENTARIO MEXICANO (SAM)**

The Mexican Food System (SAM) has been called one of the most innovative and significant initiatives for agricultural and rural development in the past four decades in Mexico. While most attention has focused on the program's efforts to bring about Mexico's self-sufficiency in basic staples, the SAM was actually a broad series of programs — a strategy — aimed at the production, commercialization, processing, distribution, and consumption of food in Mexico. In essence, it provided a series of subsidies and other state programs to induce changes in each of these activities. Its objectives were ambitious and its organizational requirements extensive. Its planners set as a goal no less than the achievement of self-sufficiency in basic staples by the mid-1980s and the fundamental restructuring of the sources of supply and patterns of consumption of the Mexican population. In its implementation, it involved the activities of an extensive variety of federal agencies in addition to state and local governments. In the fourth session of the consultation, participants attempted to define and analyze the nature of the SAM and to evaluate its potential for resolving Mexico's food and rural development problems. The participants in this session again raised the issue of Mexico's food dependence, especially on the U.S., and consequently addressed the question of "food power."

An important participant in the session was *Cassio Luiselli*, architect of the SAM, who provided an analysis of its initiation and organization.¹² According to Luiselli, the SAM emerged from an effort to identify developmental

12. See Cassio Luiselli, "The Mexican Food System: Elements of a Program of Accelerated Production of Basic Foodstuffs in Mexico," Research Report Series, 22 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1982).

priorities for the country. Within the López Portillo administration, the officials responsible for analyzing the country's development identified food supply as a central problem. However, they came to the conclusion that this problem could not be resolved simply by addressing conditions of agriculture and livestock raising. Issues of distribution and consumption also had to be integrated into plans to raise the production of food in the country. Even more importantly, at the basis of the food supply problem lay the issue of poverty; only through a full attack on this deep-seated problem could the nation's food supply be ensured.

Luiselli addressed the reasons for Mexico's inability to feed its own population as the planners of the SAM had interpreted them. Primary among them was an enormous growth in urban demand for food. This expansion paralleled the rapid urbanization of the country and the growth of a middle class demanding higher levels of animal protein in its diet. Domestic production of staple goods stagnated in part as a result of low official prices, which benefited the emerging urban proletariat, and the country began to import foodstuffs in ever-increasing quantities. The strategy of the SAM called for reestablishing "the alliance between the state and the rural population" in an effort to improve the production of basic foodstuffs and to reverse the impact on the peasant population of four decades of urbanization, agricultural modernization, and state intervention. The SAM strategy was also important in terms of Mexico's external economic relations, especially with the United States. Luiselli pointed out that export agriculture had historically been promoted in order to improve the country's balance of payments and to earn foreign exchange to promote domestic industrialization; the strategy of the SAM, however, called for applying a policy of import substitution to the agricultural sector to avoid high import bills and the threat of U.S. "food power." In order to accomplish this, the structure of production on small holdings needed to be drastically improved. Luiselli stressed that Mexico's wish to achieve self-sufficiency in basic staples did not mean a search for autarky: SAM planners recognized that the country would continue to be actively involved in agricultural trade in the future.

SAM strategists were also concerned about evidence that nutritional levels had stagnated and even declined between 1959 and 1979 and that the diet of the average

Mexican included an increasing proportion of "empty calories" derived from junk food. The next step in the development of the SAM, therefore, was to identify a "basic food basket" that would provide the Mexican family with a balanced and adequate diet at a minimum cost. Nutritionists identified thirty products as essential to the food basket, and economists then undertook to study how these products could be supplied to the population. Increases in their production, when necessary, were planned for zones of rain-fed agriculture, where the country's problems of poverty were most evident. The SAM significantly raised guaranteed prices for production of important crops, greatly expanded the government's network of food distribution centers, restructured marketing arrangements to benefit peasant producers, stimulated peasant organization, brought new agricultural regions into productivity, and undertook to improve nutritional awareness. In particular, the SAM introduced a program of shared risk in zones of rain-fed agriculture to increase technological innovation among peasant producers. The package of innovation promoted through credit and subsidized prices centered on the extensive use of fertilizer adapted to the conditions of rain-fed agriculture; this strategy meshed well with Mexico's ability to produce sufficient additional fertilizer for domestic needs in the years ahead.

While the SAM focused on peasant agriculture, Luiselli acknowledged that it did not exclude commercial agriculture from its benefits; this type of production continues to play an important role in the national economy and cannot be ignored in national policy. However, the SAM strategy included efforts to discourage the use of land for extensive livestocking and the production of forage crops where corn and beans could be grown. In addition, the SAM's strategy encompassed efforts to stimulate agroindustry, and the plan sought to distinguish between beneficial forms of foreign investment and technology and those that hindered Mexico's development. In spite of the optimistic assessment that the SAM was based on a full and rigorous understanding of Mexico's development problems, Luiselli cautioned that its results would become apparent only over the long term.

Stating at the outset that he agreed with the goals of the SAM but questioned its potential to achieve them, *Michael Redcliff* presented a critical perspective of the

food system.¹³ He argued that a careful analysis must distinguish between the SAM as a statement of objectives and the SAM as a series of policy measures. With regard to the second definition, the strategy faced problems of implementation, internal contradictions, and the influences of public initiatives external to the SAM. In particular, Redclift argued, the analysis of the nature of the underlying problems was not reflected in the policy measures chosen to carry out the SAM.

He raised four specific questions about the SAM to substantiate his criticism. First, the SAM had not intervened effectively to control international interests in the Mexican economy, and it was therefore not a strategy based on a structural analysis of Mexico's problems. Second, the SAM had not addressed the devastating impact of livestock expansion on peasant agriculture, especially in the humid tropics. He pointed out that, in fact, cattle interests and the state had reached an agreement to exclude from the SAM between 20 and 25% of the land area in livestock holdings that could be given over to corn production. Third, the state agencies which were central to implementing the SAM have a long history of manipulating and exploiting the peasantry; therefore, the new alliance between the state and the peasantry called for by the SAM would not likely receive strong bureaucratic support. Finally, the SAM served important political ends in attracting support from the Mexican left at the same time that anti-peasant and anti-*ejido* measures were being pursued by the government.

Redclift then questioned whether the SAM was a redistributive program. He pointed to the fact that the SAM had not addressed important class conflicts occurring in the rain-fed agricultural zones, such as those between cattlemen and peasants and those among various strata of the peasant population. Moreover, the benefits of the strategy would likely accrue to those who had reached "an advanced state of petty commodity production" and would work to the disadvantage of the great majority of *ejidatarios*; areas with reliable rainfall would also receive

13. See Michael R. Redclift, "Development Policymaking in Mexico: The Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (SAM)," Research Report Series, 24 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

greater advantages than other areas. The impact of the SAM was therefore likely to be selective at the same time that the new law for agricultural development helped further disorganize the *ejidos* while assisting the state and private capital to continue to penetrate them. Thus, the SAM in the end could result in further social differentiation in the countryside; in Redcliff's view, it was definitely not a redistributive program. The SAM, in conjunction with the new law, would improve the conditions of the rural bourgeoisie and advanced peasant producers, but it would also probably discriminate against the remaining rural population, especially *ejidatarios*.

John Bailey presented a report which he had written in collaboration with *John Link*. In it they reviewed conditions of Mexican agricultural development and described the SAM within the context of the country's economic development strategies.¹⁴ Bailey began by reiterating that the most important of the SAM's objectives was self-sufficiency in several basic food items by the mid-1980s. In their analysis of Mexican agriculture, Bailey and Link reached the conclusion that the agricultural sector probably could not respond in time to meet that timetable. Bailey argued that the SAM could only initiate a process of agricultural change; to remain viable, that process must receive a strong commitment from the Mexican government for some time to come. Its ability to maintain this commitment, he remarked, would depend upon the SAM's capacity to weather the changes accompanying the administration change in late 1982. He also noted that administrative and planning problems would be a major impediment to the implementation of the SAM. Nevertheless, Bailey indicated, the SAM served a useful purpose in focusing the attention of elites on the problems of the agricultural sector and of rural poverty and in inducing important attitude changes among these elites. Another important impact of the SAM was to preserve, for the time being, the "statist option" in responding to problems created by

14. See John J. Bailey and John E. Link, "Statecraft and Agriculture in Mexico, 1980-1982: Domestic and Foreign Policy Considerations in the Making of Mexican Agricultural Policy," Research Report Series, 23 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

the impact of the market on national, regional, and household economies within Mexico.

Bailey then addressed the issue of "food power" and the potential of the SAM to respond to its use by the United States in binational relations. He dismissed the possibility of the actual use of "food power," because the employment of such coercion by the U.S. in its dealings with Mexico is simply not credible; the U.S. cannot manipulate food exports to the extent needed to make "food power" an effective bargaining tool. At the same time, however, Bailey argued that López Portillo had very successfully used the potential threat of coercion through food to engender support for the SAM and for the goal of self-sufficiency. In this regard, "food power" served important symbolic ends in the "statecraft" of López Portillo.¹⁵

In a series of commentaries, the nature and impact of the SAM continued to generate controversy. *Jack Corbett*, noting that the SAM was long overdue in terms of its general conception and in terms of directing attention to a "forgotten 40%" of the population, also expressed concern about its various ambitious goals.¹⁶ He referred to the optimistic assessment of the SAM provided by Luiselli and then underscored the reservations expressed by Redcliff and Bailey about several issues, including organizational and administrative bottlenecks that would likely plague the initiative; the issue of timing and the possibility that the SAM would not survive the *sexenio* change; the overestimates of the impact of the strategy, especially over the short term, on low-income groups and disadvantaged agricultural zones; and the political implications of a symbolically important initiative derived directly from the bureaucracy and the president's "household" rather than from the PRI or the CNC. Finally, Corbett wondered whether the

15. In a subsequent response, Cassio Luiselli argued that the real concern of the Mexican government was the balance-of-payments situation. In this regard, policymakers saw the issue of "food power" related to growing indebtedness and dependence on the U.S. rather than as a specific tool in binational bargaining relations.

16. Corbett later submitted his comments in expanded written form. Because they are a valuable analysis of the three papers cited above and have not been published elsewhere, they are included here as Appendix A.

goal of increased production and the strategy of increased investment in rain-fed agriculture were not contradictory. He reasoned that since returns on investment in rain-fed agriculture were typically low and the continuity of production always precarious from harvest to harvest, the Mexican government would find itself forced to decide which of its objectives it considered most important. He called for greater study of the impact of the SAM programs on rural employment, warning of the possibility that new crops and technologies might displace labor.

Mario Carrillo called the SAM monumental in its scope and goals and argued that the SAM was distinct from previous public initiatives in Mexico because of its basis in "micro-level planning." The SAM's planners had inquired into production and consumption patterns of the average Mexican household and based their strategy on this level of analysis. They therefore probably comprehended the nature of the problem better than had previous planners who focused on "macro-level" problems to alleviate poverty and underproductivity. Carrillo called for further analysis of the linkages between the objectives of the SAM and conflict with the U.S. in terms of its interests in Mexican agriculture.

Norris Clement noted that the SAM, for all its rhetoric, should not be considered a radical departure for Mexico in terms of public policy. It was, after all, an effort at reform within the system and therefore subject to the constraints characteristically imposed on such efforts. In terms of its claims to ensure the economic development of Mexico, it is noteworthy that the SAM sought technological transformation in the countryside, not the transformation of the social relations of production.

The SAM Updated

The SAM was rapidly implemented in the months following its announcement in March of 1980. But to evaluate this massive and well-publicized response to poverty and underproductivity in Mexico will require extensive data collection and analysis for some time to come. Because of the nature of the strategy and the controversy surrounding it, the next few pages will go beyond the issues raised during the consultation in order to provide a brief analysis of what is known of the SAM experience

from its inception to early 1983 and to speculate on its implications for the future.¹⁷ The available data are sketchy; therefore, the comments on succeeding pages can only suggest hypotheses for further research.

According to the official announcement of the SAM, the government expected to spend nearly seven billion dollars on the strategy between that time and the end of the López Portillo administration on December 1, 1982. Those anticipated expenditures included an extensive array of subsidies and a projected increase of 35% in public investments in rain-fed agriculture. The announced goal was to dedicate 25% of total federal investment to agriculture and rural development. The increase in support prices for selected basic foodcrops alone was expected to cost about four billion dollars during the 20-month period. The remainder of the funds would be spent primarily on an expansion of the government's marketing agency, CONASUPO; on subsidies for improved seeds (75%) and for fertilizers and pesticides (30%), primarily for corn and bean production; on cheaper and more available credit; and on improved and expanded crop insurance for basic crops (at 3% rates of interest). Figures on the actual cost of the SAM are not available, but its implementation, particularly in pursuit of increased production of basic staples, was unquestionably both massive and costly.

Judging from production figures for the 1980-1981 harvest, it also seems to have succeeded as a strategy. The favorable weather conditions of that year helped produce an extremely impressive harvest, at least in comparison to the poor harvest in the drought year of 1979-1980. Given the evidence that much of the increased production resulted from the expansion of area harvested, the SAM's subsidies no doubt figured importantly in stimulating this increased production. During 1981, production of basic grains increased 19% in area harvested and 22% in production over the previous crop year. In corn production, the harvest measured almost 14.8 million tons, compared to 12.4 million tons the previous year; production of beans rose from less than a million tons in the drought year to almost 1½ million in the first full year of the SAM. Overall, corn production was up 84% over 1976 and 19%

17. Wayne Cornelius generously provided suggestions and data for this analysis.

over 1979-1980, while bean production increased by 99% over 1976 and 51% over 1979-1980. Other grains showed equally impressive increases. In fact, the production figures surprised many who had argued that Mexico could not achieve self-sufficiency or could achieve it only in the long term. Mexico was expected to import only 2.5 million tons of basic grains in 1982, compared to 8.2 million tons the previous year.¹⁸

These figures suggest that Mexico can achieve self-sufficiency in basic grains, at least in the short term, barring major climatic disturbances. During the period from 1980 to 1982 the political regime indicated its willingness and capacity to pursue this goal fully. However, when the production achievements are viewed within the context of the very high levels of subsidies they involved, it is clear that self-sufficiency in 1980-1981 was bought at a very high cost indeed. The question this raises is clear: can these costs be continued over the longer term? In early 1983, the answer was a clear "no." By that time, it was evident that the SAM could be adopted and pursued only by a country with vast resources available to it through the production of oil. As a strategy, it involved an almost indiscriminate distribution of subsidies and avoided the need to reduce budgetary allocations to some sectors in order to expand the resources available to others. The SAM, then, was proposed and then initially pursued within the context of Mexico's "expanding-pie economy," and it offered something for everyone. This environment clearly eased any problems it might have encountered in terms of political opposition.

In 1982, however, Mexico's oil boom came to a precipitous halt through the combined effect of falling international prices for petroleum, massive foreign debt, and hyperinflation in the domestic economy. This combination of circumstances meant serious trouble for the SAM. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to continue to subsidize prices at a level commensurate with inflation rates of 50 to 100%, especially with public revenues declining. For SAM strategists and the political system as a whole, the alternative of raising farm income at the expense of urban consumers was politically infeasible. In the aftermath of

18. *Latin American Regional Reports*, RM-82-03, March 19, 1982, p. 7, based on predictions by BANAMEX.

peso devaluations in 1982 and austerity measures imposed through an agreement with the IMF, Mexico clearly could not sustain the cost of the SAM. Miguel de la Madrid, López Portillo's successor in late 1982, repeatedly and explicitly singled out high levels of subsidies in a variety of economic sectors as essential targets for budgetary cuts — and without those subsidies, imports of basic grains would undoubtedly increase. In this sense, then, the SAM did not survive the administration change, primarily because it was inappropriate to a drastically altered economic situation.

It should be remembered that the SAM, although ostensibly directed toward zones of rain-fed agriculture, offered subsidies to all producers who would grow appropriate crops. Further research may indicate that even strong critics of the SAM underestimated the non-redistributive impact of its subsidy programs. Preliminary evidence suggests that increases in production and harvested areas came disproportionately from relatively advanced agricultural zones and particularly from states with heavy investments in irrigation.¹⁹ For example, corn production in Sonora increased 188% from 1979-1980 to 1980-1981, while in the rain-fed zones of Morelos and Oaxaca, it declined by 1% over the same period. Less corn was produced in the 1980-1981 season than in the previous harvest in the states of Nayarit, Hidalgo, Morelos, and Oaxaca, where small-scale subsistence agriculture predominates. Moreover, the states reporting the highest levels of increase were Sonora, Chihuahua, Durango, Coahuila, Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí, which have large commercial farming sectors. Bean production fell in states such as Querétaro, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, and Yucatán, while it increased most noticeably in states such as Sonora, Sinaloa, and Baja California Sur.

These preliminary results raise the possibility that a significant portion of SAM subsidies were captured by the most advantaged farmers, including well-organized peasants and large, commercial, export-oriented growers who may have seen in the SAM the opportunity for making a "quick killing" through the production of staple crops. If

19. The following data come from production figures supplied by the Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, printed in *Unomásuno*, Dec. 17, 1981.

this was the case, especially with the large-scale farmers, production will likely revert to export, luxury, or forage crops with the suspension of subsidies from the SAM or as soon as prices for staples become competitive with those for other crops. Clearly, we need to know much more about how far the SAM programs reached into the countryside and the extent to which they had an impact on rain-fed zones and marginalized groups of peasants. Given the rapidity of the response to the subsidies, there is room for considerable suspicion that the SAM achieved its early results from "non-target" producers who would prove fickle in their longer-term commitment to the production of basic grains. A strong possibility exists that, in practice, the SAM did actually reinforce existing inequalities in the agricultural sector, both between commercial and subsistence farms and within the subsistence sector.

Nevertheless, the basic lesson suggested by the 1980-1981 harvest remains important for the future of Mexican agriculture: self-sufficiency can be achieved in a very short time if the government provides sufficient economic incentives. When and if Mexico becomes as concerned over "food power" in U.S.-Mexican relations as it was in 1980, it may choose to undertake a similar campaign, but without concerning itself with subsistence producers. During the 1970s, many public policymakers in Mexico became convinced that if a central goal of government policy was to increase production of staple crops, then they would have to pay much greater attention to subsistence agriculture, since peasants were the principal producers of these crops. This was the central reason why peasants were "rediscovered" during the 1970s as crucial actors in the national economy. If, however, the government wishes to achieve short-term production increases, policymakers may decide that they need not go to the subsistence sector to realize them; they can direct their efforts at the already advantaged commercial sector alone. Self-sufficiency may be achievable in the short term without the "rediscovered" peasantry. Policymakers will therefore have fewer incentives or rationales for directing public resources to this disadvantaged sector of the rural population — a possibility which has disturbing implications for the future of rural development initiatives.

In addition to these broad issues, the impact of the SAM on rain-fed agricultural zones requires careful assessment. With its extensive emphasis on increased

production, what impact, if any, did it have on rural employment? During the consultation, many participants expressed the view that job creation, not production, was the principal problem in rural Mexico. The SAM's heavy emphasis on the production of corn and beans may have eliminated some rural jobs if the production of these labor-extensive staple crops displaced other, labor-intensive crops. The new agricultural development law may also have a significant impact on rain-fed zones by incorporating the most ecologically promising zones into the commercial-crop sector at the expense of subsistence producers. If this happens, the land and water resources available for the production of staple crops in the absence of significant subsidies would be reduced. These are central issues for further research and analysis.

To raise yet another issue, the administrative feasibility of the SAM strategy is problematic. If the 1980-1981 production increases indeed came primarily from commercial farmers, then the extensive array of agencies involved in the SAM achieved no more than what they have always been able to achieve; they increased productivity by providing services and goods to a relatively limited number of well-organized, politically articulate agriculturalists. The reorganization and reorientation of the public bureaucracy necessary to respond to subsistence farmers would not have occurred. To the extent that state agencies did deliver goods and services to peasant-based production units, their interaction and organizational efforts among the rural poor must be carefully scrutinized. Given the long years of less-than-exemplary dealings with the rural poor by public agencies, the newly proclaimed "alliance between the state and the peasant" should be treated with skepticism until empirical research suggests a different attitude. And if the purported "alliance" falls victim to the change in administration and stringent new political and economic realities, the rural poor will have added reason for their cynicism about highly publicized state development programs "targeted" at them. The sense of *engaño* will no doubt be reinforced.

For a variety of reasons, then, the critics of the SAM may have foretold its experience. But this possibility can be confirmed only through the collection and analysis of more extensive and detailed data. In addition to the issues raised in the preceding paragraphs, there exist many other fruitful areas for research on the SAM: its

impact on the conflict between basic staple production and livestock and forage production; its impact on economic and social relationships within rural communities; its impact on elite opinion; and its longer-term impact on the content of future policies. A more definitive assessment of this innovative and controversial public initiative will require this kind of knowledge.

V

*THE ROLE OF MEXICAN LABOR
IN U.S. AGRICULTURE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY*

Conditions of poverty in rural Mexico have encouraged migration to the United States as a means of ensuring the livelihood of migrants' families. But that migration, both legal and undocumented, has also served important interests in the United States, in spite of periodic vociferous opposition to it. Historically, U.S. agriculture in the Southwest, along the Pacific coast, and throughout other areas of the nation has depended upon the availability of low-paid migrant workers from Mexico. Most of that labor currently enters the United States illegally. Thus, the binational consultation addressed the topic of labor migration in U.S. agriculture and the public policy dimensions of a large temporary undocumented population in the United States.

The topic of labor and mechanization in California agriculture was presented in historical perspective by *David Runsten*, based on research carried out with *Phillip LeVeen*.²⁰ He noted that California growers had utilized ethnic labor groups since the late nineteenth century and had structured cropping patterns and the use of technology around the availability of cheap sources of labor. In more recent times, the mechanization of some crops had disrupted the maintenance of reliable sources of migrant laborers who could move predictably from one crop to the next in accordance with the growing season. Between 1942 and 1964, the Bracero Program helped provide labor when and where it was needed through seasonal adjustments of the migratory flow from Mexico. However, since 1964, growers have adapted in different ways to the

20. See David Runsten and Phillip LeVeen, *Mechanization and Mexican Labor in California Agriculture*, Monograph Series, 6 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

greater insecurity of a primarily undocumented migrant labor force. Their adaptations are largely determined by the nature of the crops they produce, possibilities for mechanization, and the degree to which the growers are organized.

In order to analyze how growers have adapted to changing conditions of labor supply, Runsten examined post-Bracero labor use in five crops which had employed large numbers of Mexican migrant workers during the Bracero Program. Strawberry growers adapted by seeking to increase yields, recruiting legal migrants at the border and in immigrant *barrios* in Los Angeles, converting to piece-rate pay, and establishing sharecropping arrangements. In lettuce production, another industry severely limited in its potential for mechanization, growers attempted to increase labor productivity through the use of work teams and incentives, and they also recruited some legal migrants. Lemon producers also sought to create a more structured work environment in order to minimize the amount of labor needed. When white asparagus growers attempted to mechanize, strikes and foreign competition destroyed the industry in California; processors of white asparagus moved to Mexico and stimulated production there. In tomato production, mechanization significantly reduced labor requirements and transformed the industry into an "assembly line in the fields." In this case, mechanization improved employment opportunities for local residents, women, and the unskilled; on the side of capital, it favored large farmers and California producers. At the same time, the new technology discriminated against migrants, men, small farmers, skilled pickers, and producers in the rest of the country. In general, Runsten concluded, growers adapted by making their industries less dependent on the availability of regular "waves" of migrant laborers from Mexico.

Bruce Babbitt, governor of Arizona, presented a critique of the findings of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, the release of which coincided with the binational consultation.²¹ He argued that the

21. See Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, *U.S. Immigration Policy and the National Interest*. Final report and recommendations of the Select Commission to the Congress and the President of the United States (Washington, D.C., 1981).

Commission's efforts had ended in "abject and complete failure" because of inconsistencies in its recommendations. For example, its recommendations for sanctions against employers of undocumented workers could not be implemented without a uniform and universal system of worker identification, a system that the commission refused to recommend because of its implications for civil liberties. Babbitt also criticized the idea of "retroactive amnesty" because it did not address the problems of the future, and he rejected the recommendation for strict control of the border because it was a physical impossibility.

Babbitt then presented his thoughts on what the United States should do in terms of immigration policy. First the recommendations of the Select Commission should be rejected entirely, he stated. Then, serious and conscientious research and discussion should begin to establish a consensus on the nature of the problem of undocumented migration from Mexico. Well-documented answers to important questions should be sought: Do Mexicans take jobs that would otherwise be taken by U.S. workers? Do Mexican workers impose heavy costs on government? When answers are forthcoming, realistic solutions to the binational problem of undocumented migration can then be sought. Third, public opinion must be enlightened and made aware that there may necessarily have to be some ambiguity between law and fact, given the large number of interests involved. Moreover, people must be made aware that some "solutions" can actually make matters much worse. He proposed a public debate to address the question of which social welfare benefits should be available to all in the United States regardless of legal status and indicated that education and emergency medical attention should be among these; various forms of transfer payments, he noted, pose more difficult issues. In conclusion, Babbitt urged "modest, rational proposals for evolutionary changes."

Russell Williams presented the perspectives of U.S. employers on the need for Mexican agricultural workers. He acknowledged the great complexity of immigration issues and supported Babbitt's contention that sealing the border to undocumented immigration would be impossible. He favored the idea of imposing sanctions on those employers who exploit undocumented workers. Finally, he noted the importance of Mexico as a source of labor for

agriculture in California and Arizona and indicated that the industry would be hard-pressed to survive without it.

In the discussion following the presentations by Runsten, Babbitt, and Williams, *William Friedland* noted that although agricultural labor throughout the U.S. was overwhelmingly Mexican, the sector was absorbing a decreasing proportion of workers from Mexico. Nevertheless, he noted, agricultural interests were still the most coherent and organized sector influencing immigration policy. Historically, labor policy in the United States has always supported the transformation of petty agricultural production to capitalist farming by maintaining an oversupply of labor, encouraging mechanization, and supporting technological innovation. Immigration policy has reflected these broad objectives implicitly. Thus, in recent years, Mexico has borne the costs of reproducing the labor force for U.S. agriculture. Friedland noted critically that none of the participants in any of the sessions had addressed the issue of political institutions in Mexico, the PRI above all, that help maintain current conditions for migrant labor. In conclusion, he reminded participants that the subjects of their discussions were not abstract categories such as "labor" or "undocumented workers," but human beings who have real needs and endure real suffering.

Harland Padfield commented on the socialization process undergone by migrant workers in the U.S. and the resistance of employers to this acculturation in order to maintain the vulnerability of labor and thus minimize its costs. As migrants seek to adapt to their new situation and learn to manipulate it, employers seek to keep them from accomplishing this adaptation, and conflict between them inevitably ensues.

Jorge Bustamante argued that the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy overlooked the structural dimension of labor flows across the border, a relationship that has existed for a century or more. Thus, migration from Mexico should not be defined as a problem: it meets important needs in the U.S. and serves important needs for Mexico also. The real problem is exploitation, which results from the conversion of Mexican migrants into a cheap labor force by a century of U.S. policy which has kept Mexican workers insecure and illegal. The problem of exploitation then becomes one of Mexican dependence on the United States. Bustamante considered this

issue difficult to resolve because the phenomenon serves important interests in the U.S. and is related to structural relations between the two countries.

Manuel García y Griego reaffirmed Babbitt's comment that the nature of the problem itself remains elusive and unknown and echoed Bustamante in asserting that labor migration from Mexico to the U.S. had to be understood in its historical and structural dimensions. At the same time, he noted that the prevailing public mood demanded some change in immigration policy, while emphasizing that structural needs for labor tended to adapt to policy changes, often in ways that subverted the objectives of the policy itself. Stopping the flow of undocumented migration from Mexico, he noted, is a much more difficult undertaking than ending the Bracero Program: the demand for Mexican labor will not end even if immigration policy undergoes a drastic change.

From a variety of perspectives, an important consensus emerged in this session that migration from Mexico, whether legal or undocumented, serves important functions for some sectors of the U.S. economy. The extent to which Mexican migration can be described as a "problem" is questionable; it is clearly not a problem for U.S. employers in agriculture and elsewhere, except when it becomes disrupted, irregular, or expensive. In addition, the participants in the session generally agreed that migration from Mexico exhibited patterns and structural interdependencies with agriculture in the United States, patterns which endure in spite of periodic changes in public policies or which have adapted to policy changes in a fashion that could minimize their impact.

The central question, however, remained unanswered: how should U.S. government policy address undocumented migration from Mexico? There are good reasons for the failure to find answers to this question. Among them are the diversity of conflicting interests that any policy would affect; unfavorable economic conditions in both the U.S. and Mexico; and heightened public debate over the issue. The suggestion of some panel participants that public policies should await clearer definition of the issue should be taken seriously. In particular, further study of the costs and benefits of the labor flow in terms of jobs, contributions to production, and government services should begin this effort. However, even with answers to such questions in hand, diverse interests will still conflict

over the framing of policy choices. Moreover, the issue of exploitation of an undocumented and therefore vulnerable workforce must be addressed now, even in the absence of an explicit policy. In the sixth session of the consultation, labor organizers discussed the issue of how to protect undocumented migrants from exploitation.

VI

**ORGANIZING MEXICAN FARMWORKERS
ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER:
GOALS, METHODS, AND RESULTS**

Farmworkers have traditionally been considered a vulnerable and difficult-to-organize group. In Mexico the dispersed nature of rural work, low levels of educational attainment among rural workers, social relationships that emphasize individual ties over collective ones, and the role of the state and the PRI in repressing or coopting independent rural organizations have created difficulties for organizers. In the United States, farmworkers have traditionally been migrants and many of them are now in the country without legal status. Both of these conditions make labor organization among them extremely difficult because of the risk such activity implies for the individuals involved. In addition, American labor unions have been slow to initiate organizational activities among farmworkers. Nevertheless, in recent years Mexican farmworkers have begun to organize in Mexico and in the United States. The experience of those involved in these efforts was discussed in this session.

Miguel Ugalde reflected on the experience of the Fundación Mexicana para el Desarrollo Rural.²² He criticized the circular reasoning of many rural development activists who begin by assuming that peasants are incapable of making decisions and then proceed to ignore them in the decision-making process, with the ultimate result that peasants do not gain experience in making decisions. He also noted that many academics fear that peasants will be reactionary when organized, while politicians fear that they will be radical. Participation fundamentally affects the outcome of programs for rural development, he argued,

22. See Miguel A. Ugalde, "Desarrollo rural y participación campesina: la experiencia de la Fundación Mexicana para el Desarrollo Rural," Research Report Series, 25 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

and it therefore represents an essential element in the structure of such programs. Authentic participation by peasants in their own development will result from involvement in planning for their own futures, control over their own independent community organizations, and the linkage of these community organizations into broader regional alliances. Such alliances will provide them with enough influence to resolve the socio-political barriers they face as isolated organizations. This kind of participation requires that those interested in peasant welfare learn to trust the capabilities of peasants to resolve their own problems.

Heladio Ramírez López spoke of the experience of the Confederación Nacional Campesina in organizing both peasants and farmworkers in Mexico.²³ The National Agrarian Party, formed in 1920, was active in organizing farmworkers, but not until Lázaro Cárdenas became president in 1935 did systematic organization of peasants take place. Since the creation of the CNC in 1938, most rural organizing has been with peasants, but since 1969 the Mexican Confederation of Workers has been engaged in organizing farmworkers, both salaried and casual. According to Ramírez López, the process is difficult and complex, and to date only about 10% of day laborers on Mexican farms have been organized. Landowners have seriously impeded the process.

In his presentation, *Jesús Romo* discussed a paper written in conjunction with *Guadalupe L. Sánchez* concerning the efforts of the Arizona Farm Workers Union.²⁴ Mexican farmworkers in the U.S. began organizing only recently; the Arizona Farm Workers Union began such activities in 1977, and it has had to face a series of impediments to successful organization. For instance, rivalry between the Arizona union and the United Farm Workers and related strike activities resulted in bitterness,

23. Heladio Ramírez López, "La sindicalización de trabajadores agrícolas en México: la experiencia de la Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC)," Research Report Series, 26 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

24. See Guadalupe L. Sánchez and Jesús Romo, "Organizing Mexican Undocumented Farm Workers on Both Sides of the Border," Research Report Series, 27 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

distrust, and division among the Mexican workers. Workers themselves were deeply fearful of organizing because of their undocumented status and the strong possibility that their employers would identify them to the Immigration and Naturalization Service and deny them jobs in the future. The Arizona union discovered that these workers prefer employment in the citrus industry because orchards provide a place to live and work in relative safety from immigration authorities; that they are overwhelmingly young and male, with families in Mexico; that they work for much less than the minimum wage and without any benefits such as Workmen's Compensation or sanitary facilities; that they have access only to contaminated water for washing and drinking; that they are generally invisible to the general public; that their employers routinely cheat them of their pay; that they are subject to banditry and extortion; and that they pay high fees to *coyotes* to smuggle them into the United States.

The Arizona Farm Workers Union has begun to train organizers and to initiate efforts to organize strike activity, and it has conducted campaigns to inform the public about these workers' living and working conditions. While initial strike activity was suppressed, the union has recorded some successes in recent years, including the negotiation of labor contracts and collective bargaining agreements and the establishment of social and job service centers and clinics, among other accomplishments. Ultimately, however, if undocumented workers succeed in improving conditions of farm work and wages in the U.S., these jobs will become more attractive to U.S. workers; Mexican workers will then be forced to remain in Mexico, thus putting pressure on the government to resolve the country's serious economic problems.

In another presentation, *Miguel Tirado* considered the unionization of undocumented urban workers and their impact on the collective bargaining system in the U.S. Undocumented urban workers make up an increasing proportion of Mexican laborers in the U.S. and therefore deserve much greater attention. He argued that growing tensions between U.S. and Mexican laborers in this country could be ameliorated through unionization and by putting an end to the use of undocumented workers to break strikes or to skew union voting to the employers' benefit. He also asserted that the unionization of Mexican workers would protect them from unscrupulous employers. He

warned that if American labor unions did not aid Mexican undocumented workers, they would form their own unions to the detriment of the union movement in the U.S. He therefore called for a dialogue between American and Mexican unions.

In discussing these presentations, *Rodrigo Medellín* indicated that the problem in Mexico is not how to unionize workers, especially salaried workers, but how to deal with the issue of massive unemployment. Anticipating a discussion in the following session, he called the peasantry a "class in formation" that is already incorporated into the capitalist system, providing a ready workforce for its development; the session on organizing farmworkers corroborated this assertion because it included evidence that most Mexican farmworkers are also peasants with access to private or ejidal land. Thus, union organizers must recognize that they are dealing with individuals who are both workers and peasants, and that they work in order to "reproduce themselves" or to "reconstitute themselves" as peasants.

In the area of organizing Mexican farmworkers, the task for the future involves not only research into what is not yet known, but also the much more difficult undertaking of achieving actual results in union organization, political demand-making, and protest activities. In this regard, a fuller understanding of the identity and concrete needs for conditions of employment and welfare of undocumented workers in the U.S. would seem an obvious priority. In Mexico, much work remains to be done in identifying both economic and political impediments to effective and independent organization.

VII

*LABOR MIGRATION FROM RURAL MEXICO
TO THE UNITED STATES:
CAUSES AND EFFECTS
IN "SENDING" COMMUNITIES*

If little is known about the impact of labor migration from Mexico on communities in the U.S., even less has been discovered about the effects of migration from rural Mexico on the communities where migration originates. Investigation of this important area involves generating knowledge about why and how individuals and families become part of the migratory flow; what networks and other influences encourage migration to specific localities in the U.S.; the patterns and causes of return migration; the impact of migration on those who remain behind; and the ways in which migrant remittances are invested or not invested in the development of the local household economy, community, or region. The generation of insights into the causes, costs, and benefits of migration in rural Mexican communities requires in-depth and longitudinal research at the level of specific communities. The presentation of the final session of the binational consultation considered insights from such detailed and important research.

Ina Dinerman presented a series of findings from her study of two communities in the Pátzcuaro region of Michoacán.²⁵ She argued that residents of these two communities decide whether or not to undertake temporary migration on the basis of the needs of the household as a production unit. Over time, these rural dwellers have decided in favor of sending a family member to the U.S. more frequently as national and international economic changes have increased their impact on the rural

25. See Ina R. Dinerman, *Migrants and Stay-at-Homes: A Comparative Study of Rural Migration from Michoacán, Mexico*, Monograph Series, 5 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1982).

households and as families have become more dependent upon an urban economy to sustain the household. At the same time, variations in the response of different communities to the opportunity to migrate and the selectivity of individual responses have been shaped by several factors, such as the organization and composition of the household; land-tenure patterns and land use within the community; alternatives available to the household; the impact of government investments in infrastructure, services, and tourism; and community-level differences in wealth and development. In addition, structures of production within the community, educational attainment, and binational networks are also important. She found no evidence to support psychological or personality explanations for migration.

Dinerman explored the local consequences of migration by noting that these often differ significantly by community in relation to the rate of migration. In one community, migration has had an especially notable impact on agriculture: farming has assumed characteristics of a secondary activity for the typical household. In that community, foodcrops were replaced by more easily tended fodder crops; women became primarily responsible for farming family plots, and increased income for some households tended to stimulate land concentration. In general, Dinerman found little positive impact from the migratory experience and indicated that it has had negative results in terms of the breakdown of family relationships, increased levels of alcoholism and nonproductive spending, and increased dependence on further migration to maintain family consumption levels. Perhaps most important from the perspective of policymakers was the paucity of productive investment deriving from the resources that became available through migrant remittances.

In concluding, Dinerman argued that goals of production and increased income for rural communities are often contradictory. Public investments in infrastructure and social welfare services, while improving the quality of life for rural inhabitants, also stimulate the desire for increased income and promote urban consumption patterns. Specifically, the provision or improvement of housing provides a strong motivation for migration and becomes a major destination of remittance income. In turn, migration discourages households from serious

attention to foodcrop production of the kind promoted by the SAM. Dinerman urged that in finding solutions to this dilemma, the government assign central importance to job creation in local communities. Job creation itself must be based on an appreciation of the household economy as a flexible and strategic unit through which the rural poor seek to ensure their livelihood. Rural development plans must therefore take into consideration the changing roles of men and women and the importance of the age structure of the household.

In a parallel study of rural Zacatecas, *Richard Mines* also drew attention to the relationship between migration and rural development.²⁶ He indicated that an understanding of local and regional economies must serve as the basis for comprehending migration from rural Mexico. However, he argued, migratory networks are perhaps the most important influence on the destinations chosen for migration. His study traced network migration from a rural community in Mexico to settlement areas in California and, like Dinerman's, emphasized the importance of the strategic decision-making of the household unit. Mines developed a typology of Mexican community networks on the basis of the legal status and permanence of the migration. Thus, he found "permanent-settler core network communities," "legal shuttle communities," "undocumented shuttle communities," and "launching-pad communities." Community types tend to change over time as experience with migration increases. Migratory patterns in general change over time, becoming more urban than rural and alternating between periods of legal and undocumented labor.

Like Dinerman, Mines pointed to a number of negative implications of migration for the local community. Among these he noted the extensive absence of males during their most productive years and the labor shortage this implies for the household; the concentration of landholding deriving from remittance investment; the paucity of other productive investment; and a general lack of interest in the development of the community. While migration and

26. See Richard Mines, *Developing a Community Tradition of Migration: A Field Study in Rural Zacatecas, Mexico, and California Settlement Areas*, Monograph Series, 3 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

remittances do seem to keep rural women and children from abandoning the community, this occurs at the cost of disrupted family lives. In addition, involvement in migration tends to generate dependence on further migration. The goal of many repeat migrants is to acquire a secure, semiskilled job in the U.S., and Mines found evidence that a large number accomplish this objective, whereupon they begin the process of becoming permanent settlers. Those who do not succeed continue to migrate on a temporary basis. He found that the Mexican village he studied in Zacatecas "has become largely a rest, recreation, and retirement center" for successful migrants, as well as a place where future migrants are formed. He concluded that research on sending and receiving communities is important for evaluating policy options available to the U.S. government.

Michael Kearney reported on research in Oaxaca which he carried out in collaboration with *James Stuart*.²⁷ In the extremely poor village that they studied, they found that rural households had few alternatives within the local economy for even maintaining subsistence. Indeed, they found that the community was capable of producing only 16 to 17% of its own nutritional requirements, that population pressure meant that it was 70% deficient in land, and that no opportunities for wage labor existed. Characteristically, the rural poor in this village follow a variety of household-based strategies to adapt to the conditions of "infra-subsistence" in the community. They economize through a variety of belt-tightening activities (many of which add to already poor health and nutrition); they leave the village entirely; they become involved in a variety of marginal economic activities such as handicrafts and petty trade; and most importantly, they migrate on a seasonal basis to the United States. Stuart and Kearney estimate that approximately 80% of household income is generated through this migratory activity.

The researchers utilized these findings to suggest that proletarianization is not occurring among the peasantry in this community; rather, as suggested by others,

27. See James Stuart and Michael Kearney, "Causes and Effects of Agricultural Labor Migration from the Mixteca of Oaxaca to California," Research Report Series, 28 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1981).

workers use the remittances from wage labor in the U.S. to help maintain the peasant household. This adds support to the argument that peasants in rural Mexico contribute markedly to the growth of commercial agriculture elsewhere; in fact, through their struggles to maintain access to the land, peasant households make their wage labor available to commercial agriculture at a lower cost than would a fully proletarianized labor force.

Kearney indicated that in the village which they studied, migration does not imply great potential for an improved livelihood. Migrants remit an average of about a quarter of their U.S. earnings, and the household uses much of this money to purchase basic necessities. If any money remains after satisfying subsistence needs, the household generally invests it in housing and consumer goods. Stuart and Kearney found little evidence of investment in productive activities. Thus, while migration is clearly essential to the survival of this rural community, they found little evidence that it was contributing to the community's development. Moreover, migration clearly begets the necessity for more migration.

Juan Vicente Palerm presented evidence from his study of the Bajío region of central Mexico, placing his study within the theoretical context of the internationalization of both capital and labor. His argument supported Kearney's view of the deep interconnections between peasant agriculture and capitalist agriculture; he stressed that the peasant household economy in fact provides a subsidized work force for the capitalist sector. He also introduced the notion of strategies followed by peasant households as units of production, indicating that in the Bajío, characteristic strategies involve the recrudescence of the extended family and the diversification of economically productive activities.

In a commentary on these four presentations, *Gustavo Verduzco* argued that the selective use of migration as a household economic strategy should be linked to the concept of class, since structural constraints on various strata of peasant households determine the selection process itself. He called for more research into the conditions that stimulate initial migration out of the communities as a way of understanding the kind of change occurring in rural Mexico. In addition, he indicated that investigating the changes occurring in the recipient communities is essential to understanding the complex influences on the

migrant. He commended Dinerman for demonstrating the variability of responses to changing economic conditions among communities even within the same region, and he cautioned against generalizations based on a single case study. He also noted that the influence of migration on sending communities is complex but great and suggested that the presentations had oversimplified its impact. Finally, he urged that migratory patterns themselves be related to more general forms of economic development.

In seeking to understand the nature of migration, *David Gregory* urged consideration of migration in Europe and an examination of the kinds of programs that might increase the productive potential of migrant remittances. In most cases, he noted, migrant households invested remittances in physical and cosmetic improvements of the sending community and not in productive activities. Importantly, they did not use their savings to change the economic and social structures that initially stimulated migration. He called for serious attention to means of utilizing migrant remittances to create jobs.

Richard Sinkin noted in a final commentary that all of these presentations had helped explode a myth about migration: the idea that it benefits the community and country of origin. In particular, migration to the United States seems to be postponing the necessity for Mexico to face up to the major structural changes that it must make if the rural poor are to benefit from increased economic opportunities in the future.

The presentations and commentaries of the final session underscored the notion that the solution to the problems inherent in massive Mexican migration across the U.S. border is to be found, if at all, in rural Mexico; that solution will require increased attention to the economic structures that impose on rural households the necessity to choose migration in order to sustain themselves. This conclusion refocuses attention on the successes and failures of the public efforts of the 1970s to improve production and income among the rural poor; on the contradictions underlying the development of Mexico's commercial agricultural sector; and on the need to create employment opportunities and to base public policies on a fuller appreciation of the rural household as a unit of production and consumption. Implicitly, it suggests that the U.S. should give greater attention to helping find solutions to these problems and questions rather than focusing so

much attention on issues of law enforcement and legal status in the United States.

The research efforts reported during this session all stressed the importance of the household as an economic unit and indicated that this unit must be understood within a broader context of change occurring on community, regional, national, and international levels. The participants also presented evidence that migration generally has serious implications for sending communities and demonstrated that migration creates the necessity for more migration. Above all, the implications of allocating migrant remittances to non-productive activities deserve further research. Strategies to stimulate the translation of remittances into effective rural development undoubtedly exist; but before these can be undertaken, planners need to learn much more about their impact on the sending communities and the reasons behind the observed allocation of remittances. Among the variety of topics discussed at the consultation, these would seem to be among the most important and creative efforts that can be undertaken.

APPENDIX A

ASSESSING THE SISTEMA ALIMENTARIO MEXICANO

by

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After its announcement in March, 1980, the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (SAM) emerged as one of the principal policy initiatives of the López Portillo administration and as the most ambitious attempt to restructure Mexican agriculture since the agrarian reform of the 1930s. Analysts have generally agreed about the need to improve food production, distribution, and consumption, but regarding appropriate strategies and possible consequences, no such consensus emerged. Proponents of the SAM have anticipated rapid, far-reaching success, but less optimistic observers have pointed out that, as a result of the complex constellation of constraints on effective policy implementation, the SAM might adversely affect those segments of the marginal population which it is supposed to benefit. In complementary presentations addressing these issues, Cassio Luiselli Fernández reviewed the SAM's policy goals and strategies, Michael Redclift discussed policy development and impacts, and John Bailey and John Link placed the SAM in a more general context of Mexican policymaking and agricultural change. Although their written reports supported the idea of an integrated, systematic approach to food and development policy, they nonetheless differed sharply in their assessments of the SAM's feasibility and possible impacts.

Luiselli's work opened with a vigorous affirmation of the rationale underlying the SAM and identified five critical concerns as influential in its formulation:

- Persistent agricultural stagnation raises the spectre of national vulnerability to the manipulation of food imports by foreign suppliers, and ever-increasing purchases of food abroad may create long-term balance-of-payments problems. The SAM would restore food self-sufficiency.
- Twenty million Mexicans live a precarious, marginal existence in areas of rain-fed agriculture. The SAM would bring them into the mainstream of the economy.
- Research has disclosed that many Mexicans suffer malnutrition, often because they make poor dietary decisions. The SAM would assure access to an understanding of proper nutrition.
- Transnational corporations and markets have had a growing influence on the direction and priorities of Mexican agriculture. The SAM would stress national needs and interests.
- Four decades of neglect and exploitation have left *campesinos* mistrustful of the state and its concern for their welfare. The SAM would forge a new alliance between the state and the *campesinado* — an alliance which would improve access to resources for rural dwellers while giving the state a more central role in directing the development of the rural sector.

Luiselli asserted that an effective response to these five concerns would require a single, integrated program package linking production, processing, distribution, and consumption in a systematic way. As its name implies, the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano sought to create a “food system” meeting multidimensional needs through careful program design, massive re-allocation of resources, organizational and technological innovation, and creation or coordination of those institutions (private as well as public) necessary to attain national goals. Luiselli noted that the SAM would include twenty program packages ranging from improved crop insurance to increased subsidies for nutrition to the creation of technologies suited to rain-fed

agriculture. His comments singled out three program areas for special mention: improved distribution, focusing on issues of health and nutrition; production increases as a counter to possible pressures on food imports; and the potential of a rejuvenated state-peasant alliance. Luiselli recognized that the SAM's complexity made the simultaneous implementation of all programs impossible; therefore, he argued that vigorous governmental and private efforts should see the first goal, self-sufficiency in corn and beans, reached successfully in 1982.

While generally sharing Luiselli's appreciation of the crisis which gave rise to the SAM, the analyses written by Redclift and by Bailey and Link expressed reservations regarding operating assumptions, policy strategies, and the nature of the political agenda which shaped programmatic choices and timing. For purposes of brevity the reservations expressed in both papers have been collapsed into four categories: organization, timing, impacts, and political implications.

Organizational Difficulties

The critiques of the SAM authored by Redclift and Bailey and Link point out the substantial emphasis that the López Portillo administration placed on planning and administrative reform. However, these authors and many other observers have expressed skepticism about the extent to which administrative reforms effectively improved coordination or delivery of services. Bailey and Link specifically mention the need to coordinate the activities of many agencies and public sector companies in order to ensure effective implementation of the SAM, yet there is little evidence that efforts at coordination and integration had much impact on the SAM. On the contrary, available evidence suggests that the SAM was imposed from above with little awareness of or concern for linkage problems with other policies and programs. Redclift's study briefly analyzed inter-agency rivalry and pointed out that several agencies tended to adopt a passive attitude toward the SAM. On at least one occasion when attempts to improve coordination came into conflict with the objectives of the SAM, coordination took a back seat. At that time, the Secretaría de Programación y Presupuesto, charged with preparing the National Plan to Combat Desertification, found its efforts in this area suddenly given low priority, in

part because its emphasis on long-term use and conservation did not fit well with the production orientation of the SAM.

Reservations about Timing

Several timing problems have confronted the SAM. Perhaps the most serious is the oft-described propensity of incoming administrations to discard plans, programs, and policies developed in the previous administration. The pressure to demonstrate results by December, 1982 undoubtedly was a major factor in setting a goal of self-sufficiency in corn and beans for that year. A second timing problem aggravates the first: toward the end of a *sexenio*, political attention shifts to problems of the upcoming campaign and jockeying for positions within the new administration. As early as February, 1981, middle-level managers in some ministries were being told by their superiors to avoid new commitments or obligations which might cause unwelcome difficulties, political or managerial. These two factors then work against a third, namely, the time horizon in agriculture. Bailey and Link noted that there were only two growing seasons between the announcement of the SAM and the 1982 election — far too little time to develop the farming technology packages and to build the infrastructure necessary for successful implementation of the SAM in rain-fed agricultural zones.

Problems of Variable Impact

The SAM's most important and attractive aspects lay in its orientation toward the subsistence farmer and its attempt to reach this segment of the rural population with credit and technical-aid programs. Nevertheless, critics of the program feared that social and economic differentiation within this stratum would almost inevitably result in variable impacts. Some *campesinos* would find themselves unable to take advantage of technological or market opportunities, and this inability would tend to force them out of the ranks of small producers into a rural proletariat. Redcliff's analysis supported this argument with its reference to the "commoditization" of peasant agriculture: the value of land, water, and other resources tends to rise with their potential for commercial

production; the price of such resources ultimately reaches a point at which *campesinos* can no longer afford to hold them or which provides powerful individuals with an incentive to displace them. His study cited the conflict between *campesinos* and cattlemen in the tropical lowlands, a conflict which seems likely to spread to a variety of settings as improvements in infrastructure, technology, or market arrangements facilitate capitalist displacement of subsistence production. Thus, effective integration into the market economy would possibly, even probably, force many marginal *campesinos* to migrate to the cities or to become part of a rural labor reserve, underemployed but maintained by the SAM's basic food basket and other subsidies.

Political Implications

Taking into account the record of relations between the state and the *campesinado* during the past forty years, critics of the SAM have quite logically raised some pointed questions regarding its political implications. Redclift argued that the SAM on the one hand offered tangible economic benefits to a variety of middle- and large-scale producers, agribusiness interests, and the like; on the other hand, it provided a nominally radical package attractive to much of the political Left while doing no more for the *campesino* than distributing paternalistic benefits. Bailey and Link carried the argument somewhat further by noting the symbolic utility of the SAM's references to the "food weapon," with its far-from-subtle implication that the United States, principal supplier of Mexican food imports, might attempt to use that weapon to compromise Mexican sovereignty. Couched as it was in patriotic terms, the argument in favor of the SAM would prove almost impossible to reject.

The notion of rejuvenating the alliance between *campesinos* and the state also raises some interesting issues regarding relations among the bureaucracy, the PRI, and the *campesinado*. The PRI has historically maintained organizational control of *campesino* groups through the Confederación Nacional Campesina, and the party has functioned as the critical link between the *campesino* and government institutions. If the SAM were to become a salient feature of rural life and the *campesinado* were to see the benefits associated with the SAM as flowing

directly from the bureaucracy without party intervention or intermediaries, a major justification for supporting the PRI might begin to disappear.

Additional Considerations

In theory, at least, the SAM had the potential to make major contributions to rural welfare, national nutrition, balance-of-payments and sovereignty concerns, and a host of other developmental issues. If the proposal no longer appears quite as radical as it once did, and Redclift underscored this observation, it still reflects a notion of integrated development which merits study, not only for its potential importance to Mexico but also as a possible model, or at least as a planning framework, for other countries facing increasingly severe food-supply problems.

Two concerns not directly raised by any panel participant may be worth noting here. First, there is a certain paradox between the heavy emphasis on the SAM as a production program and its concentration on the marginal, rain-fed agricultural zones. The apparent logic is that investments in infrastructure and technology will improve the productivity of these zones. While such investments would undoubtedly help, they cannot change the fact that these zones are marginal precisely because of the scanty and variable rainfall that they receive, a concern apparently ignored in official and semi-official documents on the SAM. One puzzles at the notion that major increments in food production would come, on a dependable basis, from areas traditionally characterized by limited productivity due to uncertain weather patterns.

Second, despite the serious unemployment and underemployment problems in rural Mexico, analysts have undertaken surprisingly little analysis of the employment impact of the SAM. As suggested earlier, the introduction of new crops, technologies, and other changes in the rural sector could quite possibly displace substantial amounts of labor. The designers of the SAM apparently expected that displaced labor would find employment in various agribusiness activities, such as processing, transport, and support services. But a clearer conception of this process seems essential, since failure to absorb this labor, whether in rural or urban employment, would undercut much of the nominal benefit of the program.

In the end, the debate over the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano, like so much else in contemporary Mexico, appears filled with tensions and contradictions. Cassio Luiselli offered the prospect of dynamic innovations which promise improvement for rural Mexico in a way not seen since the 1930s. Against this positive vision, Redcliff and Bailey and Link cast doubt upon the administrative system's capacity to work as effectively as official goals would require; they questioned whether the SAM's proponents had accurately predicted the program's long-term consequences; and they called attention to the political issues which remained unresolved. The future of programs such as the SAM is uncertain; but the crisis which called the program into being will continue for some time to come.

APPENDIX B

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San Diego, California
February 25-27, 1981

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