



ESCUELA AGRICOLA PANAMERICANA  
TEGUCIGALPA HONDURAS

### MONTHLY NEWS LETTER

FEBRUARY 1954. The last two weeks of this month were devoted to final examinations. The school year terminates with graduation exercises on 6 March. On the whole, we are satisfied with the grades made by our students, especially the second and third year boys. Since we have just finished two weeks of close contact with the whole subject of classroom work, this may be an appropriate time to make some comments.

One of our major problems, from the time this school was founded, has been the lack of textbook material, adapted to tropical American conditions, and in the Spanish language. We just simply cannot get it. We think we have made a fairly thorough search, but cannot find a biology text which meets our ideas of the kind and amount of biology a school of vocational agriculture in tropical America should teach. Now can we find a text which we think covers the kind and amount of mathematics our students need - not much theory, but lots of practical problems. We believe we have adequate texts for the study of the English language.

But how about the agricultural and horticultural sciences? We have had to prepare multigraphed outlines on field crops; we use our own "Fruticultura Centroamericana" for the fruit crops; and we are at last preparing a multigraphed text on truck crops, based on Prof. MacGillivray's "Western Vegetable Production"; the excellent bulletin from the Federal Experiment Station in Puerto Rico, "Vegetable Growing in the Tropics"; and our own experience. In Spanish, we have seen nothing in the field of agricultural engineering which satisfies us - drainage, irrigation, and farm machinery. Still more difficult is simple veterinary science.

The Instituto Agropecuario Nacional in Guatemala has turned out excellent bulletins on hogs and poultry, which we use. The United States Department of Agriculture published an excellent book on dairying in the tropics - but we are told it is no longer available. So there we are; but this is not, of course, the whole story.

Habits of study present another problem. There is a tendency to memorize. Reading the final exams in horticulture, we observed that among the fifteen or more students who got an "A", five really understood the subject well; the others seemed to have memorized the text successfully but we doubt that they really understood it. Wherever possible, we like to use the "thesis" type of examination, which our students call the "examen de criterio". It takes a lot of time to correct the papers, but you really get an idea of how well the student has absorbed what he has studied. We realize that it is not possible, in large schools, to use this type of examination to the extent that we can, with only 50 to 60 students in a class; and it is not feasible in all subjects, for example, mathematics. This year Walter Fick developed an excellent examination of the thesis type for his students in Farm Management. The boys really had to use their heads.

There is one more problem which we believe must be common in schools of this kind: How to keep classroom instruction on the same level throughout? (We are not worried about the practical training our boys get in the vegetable garden, the handling of field crops, the dairy, and so on). This, of course, is something which must be handled by the Administration, but it is not as simple as might appear at first glance. Objectives must be kept in mind at all times. If the student is going to be an extension agent, or simply a good farmer, how much and what kind of biology does he need? What kind and how much mathematics? The danger, we feel, lies in too much theory.