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GOVERNMENT OF MEGHALAYA

A QUICK STUDY ON
THE EXPERIENCE OF CULTIVATORS
WITH THE TRACTORS/POWER TILLERS

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SHILLONG

EXPERIENCE OF CULTIVATORS WITH THE TRACTORS/POWER TILLERS.

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According to the list obtained from Agricultural Department, the number of cultivators hiring Tractor/Power Tiller during 1973-74 was 9 in Mairang area and 28 in the Bhoi Area. All the 9 Mairang area cultivators have been selected for interview. Another nine were selected by random from the Bhoi area and an equal number for substitution.

Of the 9 in Mairang area, only 6 could be contacted or found in the addresses given. 3 could not at all be located. Of the 6 contacted, one had hired the tractor not for agricultural purposes but for levelling of the play ground and preparation of site for a school building. 2 others were cultivators but had utilized the tractor only for transportation of fertilizer, manure and produce to and from Shillong. Only 3 cultivators had utilized the tractor in ploughing potato and maize cultivation.

In the Bhoi area, inspite of substitution only 5 cultivators could be contacted. Of these, two were contacted in their Shillong residences. Of the samples who could not be contacted, 3 have migrated to unknown places elsewhere and 2 were husband and wife who were not available for interview inspite of prior intimation. The husband is an extension officer in the block. Two others stated that they did not hire the machines and had not applied at all. Another 4 samples were not found and not known in the villages of their addresses. Of the five "cultivators" interviewed, one is an M.L.A. and another is a Project Officer (SFDA) hiring the machine for departmental work. All the five have utilized the machines for agricultural purposes mainly for paddy and maize cultivation.

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Efficiency of the machines.

The 3 Mairang cultivators agreed that the tractor was very efficient for maize cultivation. But in respect of potato the result was not as good. This was because it ploughed too deep burying the top soil thereby necessitating higher dosage of manure and fertilizer to ensure growth of the short-rooted potato crop on the exposed soil. The other two cultivators found the machine excellent for the purpose of transport.

In the Bhoi area, only one cultivator had to follow-up with bullocks in order to reduce the big lumps of soil dug by the tractor. The rest of the cultivators were satisfied with the condition of the soil as prepared by the tractor.

Trends towards ownership of the machines

None of the cultivators in Mairang area has purchased a machine of his own. Nor any one has such a desire at present due mainly to being ^{unable} to afford and subsidy not being available. One of them found hiring more convenient inspite of the many handicaps he has to face.

In the Bhoi Area, two of the cultivators interviewed have purchased a power tiller each on subsidy. One of them is the MLA and the other is also a doctor. Another cultivator is purchasing a power tiller as soon as available on subsidy. The other two cultivators have no such desire because they cannot afford and find hiring convenient.

None of the cultivators owning power tillers have hired out to other cultivators even in the available time. They have stated that the hiring charges cannot cover the running cost unless they charge very high rate. Also, the topography of the lands makes the machines vulnerable to breakdowns which they would not like to risk. Another reason would appear to be that these cultivators cannot devote enough time to the machine if hired out as they resided at Shillong.

Hiring Charges

The hiring charges for a tractor, according to one cultivator in Mairang, was Rs.60/- per day without subsidy and Rs.12/- per day when subsidized. This was in addition to free food and lodging provided to the operator and irrespective of the size of the plot ploughed. Once hired, part of the day was treated as full day. Without subsidy, this was considered too high. Apparently, this was a case of irregularity. For the other cultivators, the hiring charge was Rs.60/- per acre without subsidy and Rs.12/- per acre with subsidy. In an area, the subsidy was available only for one year. The Mairang cultivators resented the withdrawal of the subsidy after only one year. They would like the subsidy to continue. Short of that, they would like the hiring charge reduced to Rs.45/- per acre. Generally, it takes 15-20 man days to prepare soil in one acre of cultivation. At a wage rate of Rs.6/- per day, an acre would cost Rs.90-120/- in terms of human power. The other two cultivators who utilized the machine for transportation have nothing to complain about the rate of 75p per km.

In the Bhoi area, no subsidy was reported. There were, however, two rates. One is Rs.45/- per acre for heavy duty and the other Rs.20/- per acre for light duty. No body complains about these rates.

All the cultivators, except one in Mairang hiring by time, agreed that the cost of ploughing by tractor is much less than by bullock or human power. All of them, except the M.L. A., however, complained that they had to incur extra expenditure in shuttling several times between their village and Shillong in order to get allotment of the tractor. Each one had to spend Rs.50-60/- before he could get the tractor. If this is added, the advantage of the tractor is narrowed down. The uncertainty as to when he would get the machine has however not been assessed.

For applying for the tractor, an advance of Rs.100-120/- has to be paid. There was no complaint on this count.

Lengthy Formalities

The cultivators of both Mairang and Bhoi area found a common cause for complaint regarding the time taken in applying for the machine and getting it. This was same whether the application was submitted directly to the DAO or routed through the cooperative society. The procedure was considered too lengthy. The matter was to be finally disposed of by the Agricultural Engineer and the Foreman. The former sits in the DAO and the latter in the workshop at Mawlai Gate 5 Kms away. These functionaries had to be contacted in person several times before the machine was allotted. When the allotment was made, the same process had to be gone through in order to get the POL for the machine. The time taken in these processes depended upon the availability of the officers in station.

One cultivator from Mairang had to spend Rs.24/- for a spare part when the machine broke down. All other cultivators have not had this experience. They, however, resented the condition that in case of any break down they would have to bear the expenses including bringing the mechanic from Shillong and towing the machine to the workshop.

The cultivators of both the areas complained that the machine was never available when needed. Very often, they stated, they were told that the machine was not available or out of order or to come next day or next week. They also complained that they had to run very often between the AAE and Foreman in order to get the final decision.

Behaviour of Drivers

Both the areas complained regarding the behaviour of the tractor drivers. The drivers were stated to have worked as they liked. A piece of work which could be done in one day was very often extended to one week on a variety of excuses. During this period they would enjoy the free hospitality of the cultivator. It would appear that the tractor driver has not been made to realize the importance of timely completion of the work hired. This resulted not only in delay in a particular field but in other fields also in the waiting list.

CONCLUSION

From this hurried enquiry, one may conclude that the cultivators have appreciated mechanization of agriculture. But four points emerged which clearly merit serious consideration of the Agriculture Department.

1. There is need for more machines in order to be able to meet the demands of the cultivators in time.
2. In areas, like the Bhoi area where mechanization has started picking up, it would be necessary to set up in the area itself some kind of a machine tractor station or substation to obviate loss of time and energy in coming to the workshop at Shillong.
3. The procedures for applying require to be simplified, if necessary, delegating some powers to workshop foreman.
4. The performance of the tractor drivers in the fields needs to be occasionally supervised.

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