

Venezuelan 5-V Clubs

Venezuela provides one interesting example of an Extension Service's improvement of rural youth educational opportunities in a developing country. Rural youth development clubs, sponsored by the Agricultural Extension Service, can expedite new agricultural technology to rural farm families.

In the past, agricultural scientists and Extension agents had little practical knowledge to offer their clients because teaching of agriculture in Latin America was largely academic and divorced from more urgent rural problems.

However, young men and women with new ideas are reshaping agricultural institutions and bringing about important changes in Extension work. The objective of this write-up is to describe a successful rural youth development and Extension project in Venezuela.

During the mid-60s, I personally observed problems of improving opportunities for rural youth while working with Venezuelan rural youth development clubs (5-V Clubs) in Mérida, a state near the Venezuelan-Colombian border. The district home economist organized 4 viable 5-V Clubs at several small rural schools where she conducted weekly

knitting and sewing classes for the girls and discussed nutrition and health care with older women. The boys received little attention except for a small school garden project organized by the elementary teacher. The farm Extension agent responsible for their program seldom visited the club, and hence morale was very low.

Vocational resources of these rural 5-V Clubs were very limited. Girls practiced knitting and sewing on the school patio when the weather permitted. The boys seldom had a table for carpentry projects and only local hand tools for gardening. But, club members were still interested in developing new enterprises.

Five-V Club members at one of the more active groups expressed interest in developing a coffee nursery since their families made part of their living from small coffee plantations. Many trees were old and unproductive; yields had steadily declined. Club members, informed of new high yielding varieties of imported coffee, decided to start a nursery project.

The Venezuelan Extension Service agreed to supply improved varieties of seed, plastic bags, and fertilizer for a coffee nursery. The Extension staff held several demonstration lectures on planting and transplanting the coffee seedlings. Students provided additional materials for the seed beds and the labor for transplanting.

When the coffee seedlings were ready to plant, members were very responsive to instructions from the Extension staff. In turn, the Extension Service took a renewed interest in working with rural youth. They also introduced several other new projects to the 5-V Clubs. Furthermore, Extension agents and adult farmers established new rapport due to the increased contact between Extension agents and farm families.

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