

Transforming Brazilian Agriculture

The experience of the Brazilian-American commission for the production of foodstuffs, 1942-1945

Earl Richard Downes, independent researcher

Abstract: Responses by the Brazilian and U.S. governments to the pressures of World War II fundamentally altered the course of Brazil's agricultural development. As fears of a European war arose in the late 1930s, Brazil's political leadership became convinced that collaboration with the United States was essential to boosting the output of Brazilian agricultural and extractive products. The mutual search for ways to increase the output of agricultural and extractive products created an important incentive for wartime cooperation. Importing technical expertise and equipment from the United States became the primary option for Brazilian economic planners while securing Brazil's support emerged as a political priority for the Roosevelt administration. While the joint food production commission was conceived as an instrument for aiding rubber production in the Amazon, Getúlio Vargas's government transformed it into an important binational subsidy for the chronically suffering Brazilian Northeast. The commission also exposed multitudes of farmers to the benefits of increased federal governmental support. Efforts by the Ministry of Agriculture and the commission to introduce even rudimentary agricultural implements accelerated the replacement of the digging stick with the hoe and marked the beginnings of support for more capital-intensive cultivation. Linkages between Brazil's agriculture and the United States also grew, as more Brazilians became aware of the potential benefits to Brazil of the agricultural revolution underway in the United States.

Keywords: Brazilian-American commission, production of foodstuffs, rubber, World War II, Amazon

Introduction

Analyzing the impact of the United States upon Brazil's agricultural development is no small task. During the early empire, José Silvestre Rebello, generally remembered for engineering U.S. diplomatic recognition of Brazil's independence in 1824 as Brazil's first Ambassador to Washington, dedicated himself to overcoming Brazil's agricultural challenges based upon U.S. experiences. In the aftermath of the U.S. Civil War the imperial government encouraged migration of U.S. cotton growers experienced in cultivating upland cotton, the variety preferred by Brazil's British customers. The twentieth century brought an infusion of U.S. agricultural education practices through reform of the Escola Agrícola Luiz de Queiroz of Piracicaba, São Paulo state, and the founding by U.S. agriculturalists of the Escola Agrícola de Lavras, Minas Gerais, in 1908 and the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais at Viçosa in 1926. On the eve of World War II, foreign minister Oswaldo Aranha and U.S. plant geneticist Walter Tennyson Swingle explored whether shared interests in Brazil's agricultural development could lead to closer relations – a de facto



agricultural alliance.¹ The experiences of the Brazilian American Food Production Commission (Comissão Brasileiro-Americana de Produção de Gêneros Alimentícios) would test such an idea.

Establishing the Joint Food Commission

The central characters in the establishment of the joint food commission met at Santos Dumont airport in Rio de Janeiro in the afternoon of Tuesday, September 1, 1942, only several days after Brazil's declaration of war on Germany and Italy. Sporting a wide smile and dressed in dark suit with striped tie, Nelson A. Rockefeller, the 34-year-old son of oil mogul John D. Rockefeller, disembarked from a Pan American Airways Clipper. Standing by to welcome him were Finance Minister Artur de Souza Costa and Minister of Agriculture Apolônio Sales and a host of other dignitaries. The warm reception reflected his family's considerable prestige in Brazil generated by the Rockefeller Foundation's more than three decades of support for a broad variety of public health programs (Williams, 1994; Cueto, 1994b: 127; Marinho, 2001: 30-35). After brief remarks in Portuguese by Rockefeller, the entourage departed for the Palace Hotel to prepare for the 7 PM courtesy call on President Getúlio Vargas. The meeting was a prelude to the signing, two days later, by President Vargas of an agreement to create the joint food production commission.²

The agreement culminated extensive deliberations within the Vargas government and intense maneuvering by Rockefeller. Brazil had begun to consider the war's economic impact following the September 1, 1939, German invasion of Poland. In early September 1939, the Vargas cabinet confidentially determined that Brazil would remain 'strictly neutral' but reserve the right to conduct business with countries in either belligerent camp involving the 'excess of its production and primary materials.' Brazil would develop its economic potential 'through all means,' and determine the nation's capacity for exporting agricultural products without prejudicing domestic market needs. The ministry of agriculture became responsible for 'promoting and stimulating the intensification, on a large scale, the agricultural, pastoral, and mineral production' to meet domestic needs but also to supply 'countries menaced by war.'³ To carry out the directive, Vargas met separately with Minister Souza Costa on September 12, 1939, to consider 'the development of certain products' as well as ways to 'avoid increases in the cost of living.'⁴

One region offered enticing opportunities to increase the production of primary goods: the Amazon. In 1939 the government created the Instituto Agrônomo do Norte (IAN) in Belém do Pará to promote production of rubber, an important strategic resource, as well as other tropical crops. The effort was designed to preclude other tropical regions, including India, Africa and even other South

¹ Aranha to Vargas, Mar. 27, 1939, Getúlio Vargas Archive, CPDOC, GV 39.01.09c; Aranha to the Secretary of State [Translation], Mar. 8, 1939, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1939, The American Republics, Volume V*, 832.51/1406; TS, "Complementary Crops for Brazil," Sept. 10, 1940, Walter Tennyson Swingle Collection, University of Miami, Folder 11, p 1, and TS, "Need for a Brazilian Plant Introduction Service," Aug. 22, 1940, Folder 13, p. 1.

² *Diário de Notícias*, Sept. 2, 1942, p. 2; United States Department of State, *United States Statutes at Large, Containing the Laws and Concurrent Resolutions Enacted during the Second Session of the Seventy-Six Congress of the United States of America, 1942, Vol. 56, Part II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), pp. 1876-1882.

³ TS, "Diretrizes Gerais No. 1 Aos Ministérios," Sept. 12, 1939, Gustavo Capanema Archive, CPDOC, GCi 1939.07.06.

⁴ Entry for Sept. 12, 1939, in *Getúlio Vargas, Diário. Vol. II*, p. 255.



American countries, from displacing Brazil as a primary producer. Critical to increasing the output of natural rubber from trees deep within the Amazonian rainforest was an increase in rubber tappers, or *seringueiros*. The government's promotion of migration into the valley initially proved largely unsuccessful. Between October 1940 and July 1942 only 435 migrants reached the Amazon (Garfield, 2010: 1003). Moreover, providing incentives for migrants to become productive laborers in the Amazon required subsidies, transportation, and major improvements in health, sanitation, and the supply of food.

President Vargas's plans for Amazon development presented Rockefeller with an opportunity to engage in a project of high political impact. Rockefeller was concerned about the nature of Nazi influence within Brazil and about Brazil's role in the Allied war effort (Tota, 2014: 77-78; Reich, 1996: 167-173; Cobbs, 1992: 33; Persico, 1982: 32). His influence on U.S. policy had increased greatly when, on July 3, 1941, he was appointed 'Coordinator' of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA). Reporting directly to the President, the CIAA wielded broad authority to carry out an aggressive program of pro-Allied activism. This included public health and food development in the Americas through 18 corporations that Rockefeller eventually established with the support of U.S. and local governments. A plethora of business executives directed the CIAA's various divisions to implement a 'long range, continuing program of Hemispheric economic development and cooperation' (Rockefeller *apud* Cobbs, 1992: 41). Rockefeller's actions were consistent with concerns of his family's foundation for the 'stability of the international capitalist system as a whole, and for the cultural and political role that the United States was beginning to play in it' (Cueto, 1994a: xi).⁵

The CIAA sought a role for the United States in the Amazon even prior to the U.S. entry into the war. In September 1941, Rockefeller informed adviser Berent Friele that 'this office is prepared to examine the possibility of cooperation with the Government of Brazil in the efforts the latter is making to secure the opening up and development of the Amazon basin.'⁶ Rockefeller gained an opening to implement his plans when the United States offered, in February 1942, to support 'the long-development of the resources of the Amazon basin in addition to developing raw rubber under project.'⁷ A U.S. agreement to provide US\$100 million to fund a 'cooperative program for the development of strategic and basic materials' soon followed, supplemented by US\$ five million to increase wild rubber production.⁸

⁵ Rockefeller's motives in promoting the Amazon development are the subject of much contention. Wilkinson (2009: 112) offers no support for her affirmation that the Rockefeller's goal was to open the Amazon to North American investment. Likewise, Colby and Dennett (1995: 138) offer no support for the contention that the Rockefeller's selection of J. Caldwell King, vice president of Johnson & Johnson, to survey the basin reflected a desire to place the company at the 'cutting edge of American penetration of the South American drug market.' (p. 138). Cobbs (1992: 8) argues that Rockefeller 'sought to prove that U.S.-style democratic capitalism could be a fair, constructive basis for regional development.'

⁶ Memo, Nelson A. Rockefeller to Berent Friele, "Cooperation by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs in Development of the Amazon along the lines Suggested by the Brazilian Government," Sept. 24, 1941, Record Group 59, Office of Inter-American Affairs, General Records, Box 76, U.S. National Archives.

⁷ TS, Creswell M. Nicou, Memorandum to the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, March 5, 1942, Record Group 59, Office of Inter-American Affairs, General Records, Box 76, U.S. National Archives.

⁸ TS, Memorandum by Mr. Emilio G. Collado to the Under Secretary of State (Welles), Feb. 28, 1942, *Foreign relations of the United States: diplomatic papers, 1942, The American republics*, Vol.



The needs of additional workers engaged in higher rubber production gave Rockefeller an inroad for implementing aspects of his original development proposal. As part of the Washington Accords, the CIAA received US\$ five million to improve health and sanitary conditions in the valley and train Brazilian health and sanitation experts (Wilkinson, 2009: 112-114). Seizing the initiative, Rockefeller ordered a comprehensive survey of the valley in April and May 1942 by confidant Caldwell King. The study revealed the supply of labor to be the most pressing issue, accompanied by logistical issues created by necessary increases in the labor supply and gathering and transporting higher amounts of latex. King reported that ‘if we are to get all the rubber that can be gotten with sufficient man-power, a half million people must be moved into the valley in the next 12 months, fed, clothed, sheltered, supplied with materials for work.’ He concluded that ‘a public health program alone is not the full answer as these people must have food as well.’⁹

Supplying food for an expanded work force faced formidable obstacles. King reported that there was ‘a growing shortage, caused by less planting, increased production and high prices.’¹⁰ Steps to accelerate the arrival of new rubber workers threatened to exacerbate the situation. Almost immediately after the signing of the agreement to support rubber production, the Vargas government began encouraging migrants into the Amazon from drought stricken Ceará. Per a December 1942 agreement with the Rubber Development Corporation (RDC), the Brazilian government promised to support the transfer of 50,000 laborers into the Amazon by May 1943. The RDC was to provide a US\$100 per man subsidy for the transfer of laborers and provide foodstuffs at discounted prices (Garfield, 2013: 74). On April 9, 1942, Vargas announced that rural workers migrating to the Amazon would ‘be able to count on technical, economic and financial assistance.’¹¹

Supporting new workers in the region, however, also depended heavily upon the viability of Brazil’s coastal shipping trade, a doubtful proposition. A member of Vargas’s inner circle reasoned that any interruption in transport would reduce food supplies from southern Brazil and raise the cost of living in major cities in the Center-South and North.¹² Such was the situation by early 1942, when shortages of

V, p. 45. The Washington accords consummated years of negotiations between Brazil and Washington strongly influenced by U.S. fears of Nazi penetration of the South Atlantic and Brazil’s difficulties in sustaining ties with Germany. From mid-1940 onward Brazil agreed to allow the United States to construct airfields in Brazilian northeast to support ferry, supply and patrol missions, and utilize Brazilian ports to support anti-submarine patrols. In return, the United States responded positively to the Brazilian military’s request for armaments and furnished economic support designed to reinforce Brazil’s status as an ally. Through lend-lease agreements, the United States supplied more than US\$200 million worth of weapons and equipment and eventually supported training and equipping a 25,000-man Brazilian expeditionary force that engaged Axis forces in Italy from November 1944 onward. The United States also provided US\$30 million to fund construction of a modern steel mill that would become the anchor for Brazilian industrial development. See McCann (1973), Moura (2012), Hilton (1979), Oliveira (2015), and Conn/Fairchild (1989: 265-330). For a nuanced view of the impact of the de facto alliance on Brazil’s national character, see Tota (2009).

⁹ TS, John C. McClintock to Mr. Nelson A. Rockefeller, May 21, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 76.

¹⁰ TS, I. Caldwell King to Mr. Nelson Rockefeller, June 17, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 76, p. 2.

¹¹ TS, Memorandum Co. No. 865, Apr. 13, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 76.

¹² TS, “Relatório sobre atos e resoluções governamentais que visaram garantir a estabilidade socio-econômica do Brasil durante o período de Guerra,” Getúlio Vargas Archive, Centro



fuel for shipping and rail transport reduced the transport of food to the Northeast, which, according to the U.S. Embassy, depended upon coastal shipping for at least 50 percent of its staples. Drought conditions depleted supplies in Natal, and purchases by U.S. Navy ships created shortages of vegetables in Pernambuco.¹³

The increasing presence of Brazilian and U.S. military personnel in Northeast also raised pressure for a coordinated food production effort beyond the Amazon valley. The War Department judged that protecting air bases in Northeastern Brazil, constructed surreptitiously in the pre-war era, to be a priority below only protecting the continental United States, Hawaii and the Panama Canal Zone. In its view, the ‘occupation of Natal by American forces in considerable strength’ was essential to maintaining communication in the South Atlantic and providing a launch point for airplanes enroute to Africa, the Middle East and the Far East.¹⁴

In March 1942, President Vargas approved the stationing of an additional 800 U.S. military personnel in the region, and by July over 18,000 Brazilian military personnel were dispersed throughout the Northeast. The sinking of five Brazilian merchant ships by German submarines between August 14 and 17, 1942, followed by Brazil’s declaration of war on Germany and Italy on August 22, intensified apprehensions about the ability of coastal shipping to supply the Northeast’s food needs (Conn/Fairchild, 1989: 307; McCann, 1995). The onset of unrestricted submarine warfare against Brazil’s shipping, in the CIAA’s opinion, could lead to ‘drastic food supply shortages in areas of strategic importance to this government.’¹⁵ By June 1942, food shortages in the rubber-gathering region prompted the governor of Amazonas state to encourage rubber gatherers to plant subsistence crops. Overall, the average price of key food goods (sugar, rice, beans, manioc flour, and fresh beef) in Brazil’s 22 capital cities rose by 50 percent between 1941 and 1942, a trend that would continue to war’s end (see figure 1).¹⁶

de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC), Fundação Getúlio Vargas, GV Confid 1942.00.00/3, p. 23.

¹³ Telegram, Ambassador Caffery to the Secretary of State, May 13, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82.

¹⁴ Diary of Henry Stimson, entry for Dec. 17, 1941, cited in Conn/Fairchild (1989: 307).

¹⁵ TS, George Doherty to Alfred E. Hurt, Sept. 4, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82.

¹⁶ TS, Memo, Caldwell King to Mr. Nelson Rockefeller, June 17, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Coordination Committee for Brazil, Box 1272; Gordon-Ashworth (1980: 96-97); Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Conselho Nacional de Estatística. *Anuário estatístico do Brasil, ano VII 1946* (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço Gráfico do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 1947), pp. 357-360.

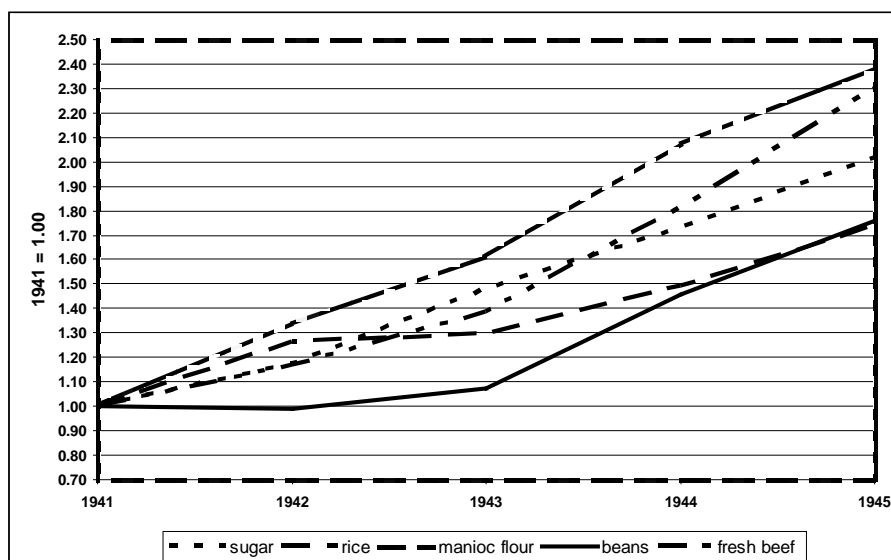


Figure 1: Indexed prices for key food goods in Brazil's 22 capital cities (1941-1945). Source: Calculated from Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Conselho Nacional de Estatística. *Anuário estatístico do Brasil, ano VII, 1946* (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço Gráfico do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 1947), pp. 357-360.

The CIAA's evaluation of the situation led it to propose an activist role for the agency with a solution drawing from the U.S. agricultural experience. Despite the State Department's argument that 'food production in the rubber producing areas be increased but feels that this is a Brazilian responsibility and should be affected primarily by Brazilian initiative through Brazilian agencies', Rockefeller's CIAA advocated a more aggressive U.S. role. It gained support when the Board of Economic Warfare charged the CIAA with responsibility for food supply issues in the Americas and recognized that 'the production of subsistence food crops in the Amazon Basin was of extreme importance.'¹⁷ In July 1942 the CIAA urged setting up 'field centers for the production and distribution of supplies [...] for the purpose of encouraging the growth of subsistence foods in the Amazon valley.'¹⁸ The CIAA then dispatched its executive director, John McClintock, and the director of its food supply division, James D. LeCron, to Brazil to consult with Ambassador Caffery and Brazilian government officials about 'the means whereby we may assist in overcoming some of their more critical and immediate food supply problems.'¹⁹

Planners predictably considered U.S. practices applicable to Brazilian agricultural development needs. The Brazil Division recognized in May 1942 that 'Agriculture in Brazil offers an equally important field for cooperation between the two countries and for extending a knowledge and appreciation of United States methods.'

¹⁷ TS, Alfred M. Hurt to George Doherty, "Food Production, Supply, Storage and Distribution Problems in Brazil," Sept. 4, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82.

¹⁸ Attachment to TS, J.C. McClintock to Board of Directors, Institute for Inter-American Affairs, July 22, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82; TS, Secretary Hull to Nelson Rockefeller, July 27, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82.

¹⁹ TS, Alfred M. Hurt to George Doherty, "Food Production, Supply, Storage and Distribution Problems in Brazil," Sept. 4, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82.



Director LeCron reasoned that ‘In some ways our own experience may provide us with a background for attacking the problems of food production and distribution along the Amazon.’ In his view, the combination of local and federal support, especially in the U.S. South, could serve as a model for Brazil. This arrangement had shown the utility of ‘promoting home production and preservation of highly nutritive foods and the supplementation of local production with foods shipped in by the Surplus Commodities Corporation.’²⁰

After preliminary discussions, on September 3, 1942, President Vargas approved creation of the Comissão Brasileiro-Americana de Produção de Géneros Alimentícios, the Brazilian American Food Production Commission.²¹ The agreement called for ‘stimulation of production of foodstuffs in Brazil, especially in the Amazon area, and north and northeastern Brazil, including Bahia, where war and transport difficulties have created deficiencies in foodstuffs.’ It called for technical assistance for producing foodstuffs, the provisioning of equipment, insecticides, support for establishing an effective extension service, assistance in developing plans for irrigation, technical and financial assistance for agricultural colonization, and assistance in bettering the nutrition of populations covered by the agreement.²² It committed Brazil to expend the equivalent of US\$1.4 million during the program’s first two years and for the United States to provide food production specialists and contribute US\$2 million through September 1943.²³ The agreement also required payment by the United States of US\$500,000 to an account at the Bank of Brazil under control of the Ministry of Agriculture.²⁴

Implementation of the Agreement

Rockefeller’s staffers quickly used the agreement’s mandate to adopt parameters like those proposed for the defunct Amazon development corporation. For the CIAA, there was no question that the ‘food problem’ in the Amazon as ‘enormous’, given that production of food for the estimated million and a half residents of the valley was limited by allocation of only 100,000 acres of land in the valley for food production. Staffers calculated their challenge as overcoming a deficient of 350,000 tons of food per year for the Amazon region alone.²⁵ Nevertheless, the office immediately sought to widen the project’s scope, commencing discussions on ‘an over-all project for collaboration with the Brazilian Government to meet food shortages and develop subsistence agriculture in other parts of Brazil.’²⁶

²⁰ Memorandum, J.D. LeCron to John G. McClintock, Aug. 11, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82.

²¹ United States Department of State, *United States statutes at large, containing the laws and concurrent resolutions enacted during the second session of the seventy-six Congress of the United States of America, 1942, Vol. 56, Part II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), pp. 1876-1882.

²² “Mr. Nelson Rockefeller’s Visit to Brazil,” *Brazilian Business* 22 (9), Sept. 1942, pp. 22-25; “Foodstuffs Production,” 56 Stat. 1875 in Bevans (1970), pp. 932-935.

²³ 832.5018/7: Telegram, Ambassador Caffery to the Secretary of State, Aug 31, 1942, *Foreign relations of the United States: diplomatic papers, 1942, The American republics, Volume V*, pp. 688-689.

²⁴ Ltr., John C. McClintock to John E. Lockwood, Sept 4, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, U.S. Department of State, Office of Inter-American Affairs, General Records, Box 76.

²⁵ TS, Alfred M. Hurt to George Doherty, “Food Production, Supply, Storage and Distribution Problems in Brazil,” Sept. 4, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82.

²⁶ *Ibid.*



Rockefeller's concern for raising food production for the rubber-gathering effort coincided with the Vargas government's efforts to improve the standard of living, not only in Amazonia but also the Northeast. Since the 1930s Vargas had directing relief efforts to demonstrate his responsiveness to the Northeast's needs. The approach typified Vargas's crisis-driven support for the Northeast that focused on infrastructure projects (dams, roads, and railroads) without addressing historic inequities in land holding (Buckley, 2017: 125-177).²⁷ His new agricultural minister, appointed in February 1942, was a native Northeasterner with strong regional ties. Professional agronomist Apolônio Sales (1904-1982) had graduated from Bahia's Escola Superior de Agricultura de São Bento in 1924 and served as secretary of agriculture of Pernambuco from 1937 to 1942. He was acutely aware of the challenges created for the Northeast by wartime conditions and familiar as well with U.S. agricultural practices. An expert in sugar cane and irrigation, Sales had made several trips to the continental United States and Hawaii. The U.S. Embassy considered him 'pro-American' with status in Brazilian circles as 'a competent scientist and able executive.' He proved eager to cooperate, departing shortly after the agreement's signing with key members of the CIAA staff for an extended survey of the Northeast's food needs.²⁸

Sales adroitly leveraged the resources of the food commission to provide an important subsidy to President Vargas's ongoing *plano de emergência*, implemented in early 1942 to combat the scourges of the Northeast's latest devastating droughts. The 1941-42 drought in Ceará wreaked havoc on thousands of sharecroppers and small holders who lost their crops and animals. With little hope for a harvest, small cotton producers were unable to acquire advances for food, forcing them to abandon their houses, lands and plantings. Destitute farmers migrated to cities and small towns, often resorting to begging to survive (Garfield, 2013: 132; Smith, 1952: 130-132). Tenant farmers who remained on irrigated lands surrendered half their harvest to the lands' owners, worked three days of work per week in return for

²⁷ Buckley points out that the engineers overseeing the various entities established to counter the impact of the drought attempted to encourage support for small holders, but such efforts foundered because they ran counter to the interests of politically influential large land holders.

²⁸ *Jornal do Brasil*, Feb. 20, 1942, p. 6; TS, John F. Simmons to Secretary of State, "Appointment of Dr. Antonio Sales as Minister of Agriculture," Feb. 20, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 166, Foreign Agricultural Service Narrative Reports, Brazil (1942-45), Box 50; TS, "Travel of agricultural attaché Erwin P. Keeler, in northern Brazil," July 9, 1941. U.S. National Archives, Record Group 166, Foreign Agricultural Service, Narrative Reports, (1920-1941), Box 16; Ltr., John C. McClintock to John E. Lockwood, Sept 4, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, U.S. Department of State, Office of Inter-American Affairs, General Records, Box 76; Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, *Weekly report on activities*, Oct. 10, 1942. p. 1. Sales communicated freely with CIAA's officers. In December 1942, he forwarded a copy of a poem he had written while flying up the Amazon to the director of the CIAA food program. See Ltr., John D. LeCron to Apolonio Sales, Dec. 9, 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82. Sales remained in contact with the U.S. agriculture after leaving the ministry in 1945. While serving as a senator for his native Pernambuco state in 1949, Sales requested State Department assistance in acquiring copious data on sugar cane experiments in Hawaii. See Telegram, U.S. Embassy, Rio de Janeiro, "Request for Sugar Cane Information," July 6, 1949, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 166, Foreign Agricultural Service, Narrative Reports 1946-49, Box 536; "Apolonio Sales," https://cpdoc.fgv.br/producao/dossies/AEraVargas2/biografias/Apolonio_Sales [accessed 24 January 2022]. Sales would become an important link between the United States and Brazil in 1955, briefly serving as the Brazilian coordinator for technical cooperation between the two countries.



starvation wages, all the while residing in wattle and daub houses with gasoline cans as typically their only furniture (Buckley, 2017: 159).

Minister Sales placed special emphasis on aiding the Northeast. Soon after assuming office, Sales named a trusted aid from the Northeast to serve as head of the Division of Development of Vegetable Production (Divisão de Fomento da Produção Vegetal). Agronomist and Paraíba native Oscar Espinola Guedes had been integral to efforts to increase food production as Sales's assistant in Pernambuco. Sales soon arranged for President Vargas to approve a RS\$2.5 million subsidy for the 'productive forces', principally in the Northeast, to stimulate increased production of vegetable and animal sources of food. The funds, destined for five Northeastern states, supported the purchase of small tools (hoes, root pullers, and scythes), insecticides, small irrigation pumps, and machines for processing rice, corn and beans, and construction of grain storage facilities. Leading the effort to coordinate the federal government's response with the state directors of development (*fomento*) and serving as primary interface with U.S. members of the commission was Oscar Guedes.²⁹

Working relations between Brazilian and the U.S. members of the commission –termed within U.S. correspondence as the 'CBA' – ranged from friction to admiration. In the commission's early days, U.S. members complained that commission president Guedes was 'away from Rio a great deal of time and when he leaves, all authority to buy or make decisions goes with him.'³⁰ A prominent U.S. member of the CBA, probably John B. Griffing, observed that 'instead of the easy going, suave, polite individual we have come to expect,' Guedes was 'more blunt, brusque, and aggressive than North Americans.' When subordinates did not get results, Guedes fired or transferred them or fined them 'with ruthless vigor'. Guedes was 'loyal to Brazilian ways with an intense nationalism, and somewhat reluctant to endorse innovations from the U.S. until they can be proven.' Nevertheless, Guedes's division was 'remarkably active and efficient as compared with other departments.'³¹

At the regional level, U.S. members of the CBA encountered cooperative approaches from agriculturalists with previous exposure to U.S. practices. Antônio Secundino São José de Araujo, one of the first graduates of the Viçosa agricultural school, had obtained a master's degree from the University of Iowa where he studied corn hybridization. Secundino served as a technical advisor to the commission. Otavio Gomes de Moraes Vasconcelos, educated in Georgia and California, directed the Federal Fruit Experimental Station in Itapirema, Pernambuco. A U.S. commission member reported that Otavio was 'one of the best authorities on the climate, soils, and crop plants, particularly horticulture, of Northeast Brazil.' He 'enjoys contacts with North Americans and spares no pains in rendering such assistance as they may request.' Equally helpful was Julio Silvério Gonçalves, Director of the Estação Experimental de Frio in Recife. A former student at the Colorado and New Mexico schools of mines, Gonçalves was 'cordial to North Americans' with 'a great admiration for ways of doing things in the United

²⁹ *Jornal do Brasil*, Feb. 20, 1942, p. 6; *A Manhã*, Mar. 14, 1942, p. 3; *Jornal do Brasil*, Apr. 5, 1942, p. 11; *A Manhã*, Apr. 22, 1942, p. 5.

³⁰ TS, Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, Food and Nutrition, Brazilian Division, Monthly Report for March 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.

³¹ TS, "Dr. Oscar Espinola Guedes," n.d., U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-50, Box 4.



States.’ He noted that ‘there is no Brazilian more desirous of introducing new ideas from the United States.’³²

Beyond aggressive planning, little was achieved during the first few months of the commission’s existence. By December, though, implementation of the agreement slowly gained momentum. The commission prioritized increasing production of beans, rice, corn, tuberous plants, vegetables fruits, and peanuts while committing to free distribution of seeds, trees, tools, insecticides and technical assistance to small farmers. CBA planners apparently overlooked the possibility that the region’s fish reserves could provide additional nutrition, since it considered the typical resident’s diet to consist of ‘manioc flour, black beans and rice, with small quantities of jerked beef, dried fish, lard, sugar and coffee.’³³

Technicians from the United States with experience in poultry development and livestock began arriving in December 1942, followed by mid-1943 by engineers, and specialists in irrigation, general farming, nutrition, grass and forage crops, and training and extension as well as an entomologist. Especially valuable for the commission’s work was John B. Griffing, a Kansan with extensive experience in Brazilian agriculture. Griffing had graduated from Kansas State College with a degree in agronomy in 1904 and became an agricultural missionary, serving in Nanking, China, from 1919 to 1927. He succeeded Peter Rolfs as director of the Escola Superior da Agricultura e Veterinária in Viçosa, Minas Gerais from 1936 to 1939 when Rolfs’ collaborator João Carlos Belo Lisboa fell out of favor with the state government.³⁴ Praised in the Vargas-friendly *A Manhã* newspaper as ‘a renowned technician to whom Brazilian agriculture owes much,’ Griffing became the CIAA’s representative for its Division V, encompassing four key northeastern states. He also served as a personal link to Oscar Guedes. Griffing interacted with several of his former agricultural school’s graduates who, by 1943, had attained important positions in various agricultural entities in the Northeast.³⁵

Moving from planning to the creation of increased food supplies required overcoming a myriad of technical and market-based obstacles, beginning with the minister himself. Sales preferred supporting his native Northeast and initially was ‘not outstandingly sympathetic to the production of foodstuffs in the Amazon.’ In an April 14, 1943, meeting with U.S. administrators of the commission, Sales outlined steps his ministry had taken to support food production in the Amazon but noted that he would ‘leave the handling of the food production program in the

³² <http://www.personagens.ufv.br/?area=antonioSecundino> [accessed 24 January 2022]; TS, “Dr. Otavio Gomes de Moraes Vasconcelos,” “Dr. Julio Silvério Goncalves,” “José Guimarães Duque,” and “Dr. Heitor Tavares,” U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-50, Box 4.

³³ TS, Brazilian-American Food Production Committee Report No. 1, Jan. 1942, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.

³⁴ *Kansas Industrialist*, Sept. 23, 1926, p. 2; Freitas (2013: 58); TS, Erwin F. Keeler, “Order of the Coordinator of Economic Mobilization ...,” Mar. 19, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 166, Foreign Agricultural Service Narrative Reports, Brazil (1942-45), Box. 90.

³⁵ *A Manhã*, Feb. 6, 1942, p. 7; Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, “A summary report of the activities of the Comissão Brasileiro-Americana de Produção de Gêneros Alimentícios,” Sept. 3, 1942 to Dec. 21, 1944. “John Benjamin Griffing,” <http://www.personagens.ufv.br/?area=john> [accessed 24 January 2022].



Amazon largely in the hands of Mr. Kadow,' the U.S. representative.³⁶ The commission also faced other challenges. The lack of U.S. personnel and their limited familiarity with Brazilian agriculture hindered program development.³⁷ The U.S. livestock specialist seeking to increase production and distribution of meat in the Amazon region found it a 'very, very difficult task.' Perhaps unaware that all of Brazil's eleven *xarque* (dried beef) plants were located in distant southern states, he reported that preparation of *xarque* in the humid atmosphere of the Amazon was unfeasible and that no refrigeration was available.³⁸ The lack of transportation and widespread flooding in late 1942 and 1943 hindered delivery of supplies.³⁹ Hopes that the Instituto Agronômico do Norte in Belém would aid production of vegetables faltered when its workers abandoned the Institute for higher wages in the local municipality, thus ending 'a wonderful opportunity to produce corn and rice for the Belém area.'⁴⁰

Commission members also encountered resistance from established interests. Increasing production at Santarem incurred the opposition of local merchants 'who control 80% of the commerce within a closely guarded ring, which drives out of the district by threats, slander, and taxes all growers who refuse to sell to them.' As the merchants never paid cash, 'crop values must be taken out in merchandise from their stores.'⁴¹ In Recife, efforts to increase production of vegetables conflicted with the local farmers' cooperative, 'a first-rate monopoly.' The cooperative limited production quotas to 'keep prices where they want them,' allowing no one to 'produce or sell farm products in the state of Pernambuco unless it clears through the cooperative.' As the sole purchaser and seller of produce, the cooperative sold the farmers' goods for as much as a 1,200 percent markup. The issue was infused with political tensions, as Minister Sales had championed development of the cooperatives as the state's secretary of agriculture. U.S. members of the commission stayed clear, reporting that the situation was 'so full of dynamite that our boys are keeping their hands out of it 100%.' Resolution came through creation of a committee representatives of the state government, the local military region, the Ministry of Agriculture and the food commission, under the guidance of the local

³⁶ TS, U.S. Embassy Rio de Janeiro to Secretary of State, "Brazilian American Foodstuffs Production Agreement," Apr. 17, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 166, Reports from Agricultural Attaches Relating to International Conferences and Congress, 1931-58, Box 15.

³⁷ TS, K.J. Kadow, "C.B.A. activities in the Amazon: special report," Aug. 18, 1943 U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.

³⁸ Brazil. Ministério da Agricultura, *Boletim* 30 (6) (June 1941), p. 69; TS, Kenneth J. Kadow to James D. LeCron, "Monthly report," Mar. 16, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.

³⁹ TS, K. J. Kadow, "CBA activities in the Amazon special report," Aug. 18, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.

⁴⁰ TS, Kenneth J. Kadow to James D. LeCron, "Weekly report," Mar. 1, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.

⁴¹ TS, Kenneth J. Kadow to James D. LeCron, "Monthly report," Mar. 16, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.



military commander. This led to ‘perfect cooperation and the maximum increase in production.’⁴²

The commission did, however, advance its mandate by working through its primary contacts at the Ministry of Agriculture, the *Divisão de Fomento Agrícola* (Agricultural Development Division) and by reaching out to educational and religious groups. In October 1942, the commission’s ministry contacts purchased a large amount of hand tools in the São Paulo area for shipment to the Amazon region, and several thousand pounds of seeds and ten tons of dry milk were en route from the United States. The Ministry contracted with cooperatives to grow rice, beans, corn and manioc in the North and Northeast, establish a farm for milk and vegetable production near Natal, and install several chicken farms.⁴³

By May 1943, the commission reported that over 200,000 hectares of new land had been placed into cultivation through commission financing by farmers on small plots in Ceará and Pernambuco states and in the Amazon region.⁴⁴ The commission also launched a Victory Garden program, mirroring a similar U.S. program, through the Legião Brasileira de Assistência, chaired by President Vargas’s wife Darci. Portions of the 1,300 pounds of seeds shipped to the commission in Belém were forwarded to the bishop of Guajará-Mirim, Mato Grosso, for placement distribution to rubber workers in the region. Other seed packets went to residents of Manaus, a schoolmaster on the Rio Negro, and a bishop on the upper Solimões tributary of the Amazon near the Bolivian border.⁴⁵ Ironically, the commission’s efforts to promote agriculture may have adversely affected the campaign to boost rubber production. Migrant workers arriving in Manaus insisted on engaging in farm work rather than tapping rubber. More than half the migrant workers imported into the Amazon region by March 1943 settled in the Bragança agricultural region near Belém (Garfield, 2013: 195).

Despite its slow start, by the first-year anniversary of the program administrators claimed a variety of short-term results. For the 1942-43 growing season, 345,077 farmers received seeds of corn, beans, rice, and potatoes or cuttings of manioc, resulting in a total of over 450,000 acres of new plantings. Over 400 owners of land received seeds, tools, insecticides, transportation and technical advice through the ministry’s cooperative farming program, planting 6,416 acres of vegetables and over 550,000 fruit trees and plants. Clearing of land in Pará, commenced in December 1942, allowed for planting of nearly 600 acres for seeds of corn, rice, manioc, and sweet potatoes. By mid-1943, distribution of the seeds to local farmers yielded nearly 7,000 tons of corn, beans and rice. The commission began development of a hog farm near the air base at Belém with between 300 and 600 hogs and sponsored

⁴² *A Manhã*, Mar. 16, 1943, p. 4; TS, Kenneth J. Kadow to James D. LeCron, “Weekly report,” Mar. 1, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2; TS, Kenneth J. Kadow to James D. LeCron, “Monthly report,” Mar. 16, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.

⁴³ Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, *Weekly report on activities*, Jan. 2, 1943, pp.1-2.

⁴⁴ Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, *Weekly report on activities*, May 8, 1943, p.1.

⁴⁵ TS, Memo, Berent Friele to the Ambassador, “Annual report of the activities of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs,” Mar. 2, 1944, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Records of the Department of Information, Coordination Committee for Brazil, TS, Box 1259; Kenneth J. Kadow to James D. LeCron, “Weekly report,” Mar. 1, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.



construction of 20 grain silos in Pará, along with a 25-acre vegetable farm to supply rubber workers at Tapanã, on the outskirts of Belém.⁴⁶ To overcome the lack of loans for farmers, the commission extended US\$265,000 in small loans. It also furnished over 100,000 hoes, 1,212 axes, 733 pieces of animal drawn equipment and over 80 tons of arsenic, an insecticide. By the end of its first year, the commission's roles had expanded to 800 employees of the Division of Vegetable Development, over 1,000 farm laborers, and 23 U.S. employees, including clerical help.⁴⁷

Results of the first year of the commission's efforts gained praise from Minister Sales but registered few results for the rubber workers for whom the project was nominally intended. Minister Sales expressed his appreciation privately to U.S. administrators for the 'work which is being done' and credited the Brazilian farmer for the commission's accomplishments. In a joint press conference, he heralded the commission's work as 'not just a typical effort of war,' but instead signifying the 'launching of the bases of a ruralist movement of great importance for the renovation of agriculture in the vast area from Bahia to the Acre territory.'⁴⁸

Results varied from region to region. Pará benefitted from a nearby agricultural lands and a good distribution network, but rubber tappers in the western Amazon suffered from food shortages and abuses of a distribution system controlled by intermediaries. Recent migrants from the Northeast were unfamiliar with their new habitats and knew little of the hunting lifestyle that sustained local residents. Moreover, the persistence of malaria and tuberculosis and parasitic infections led to high mortality rates (Garfield, 2013: 188). Minister Sales gave priority to the Northeastern states for subsidies provided by the commission. This decision reflected not only Sales preference for developing the Northeast, but also the difficulty of clearing land and planting on inhospitable soil within the Amazon's tropical rainforest. According to an observer, in 1942 Amazonian agriculturists limited their planting to soil left along the banks of receding rivers that shifted from year to year (Smith, 1952: 108). This and other impediments to large-scale agriculture in the Amazon hampered the Medici government's efforts to open the Amazon to agriculture three decades later. Sixty percent of subsidies distributed in 1944 flowed to Northeastern states (see figure 2).

⁴⁶ Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, "A summary report of the activities of the Comissão Brasileiro-Americano de Produção de Gêneros Alimentícios," Sept. 3, 1942 to Dec. 21, 1944; TS, K. J. Kadow, "CBA activities in the Amazon special report," Aug. 18, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.

⁴⁷ Memorandum, Berent Friele to the Ambassador, "Annual report of the activities of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs," Mar. 2, 1944, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Records of the Department of Information, Coordination Committee for Brazil, TS, Box 1259, p. 41.

⁴⁸ *A Noite*, Sept. 3, 1943, pp. 1, 8; TS, Memo to the Coordinator from the Brazilian Division, Dec. 24, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, General Records, Basic Economy, Box 76.

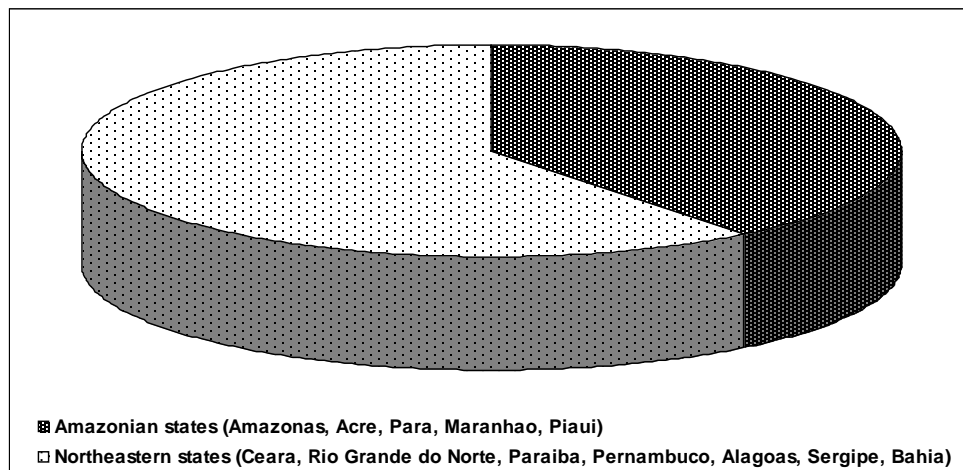


Figure 2: Destination by region of subsidies distributed by the Brazilian-American Food Production Commission, 1944. Source: TS, “Ministerio da Agricultura, Trabalhos em Execução nos Estados e Respectivas Dotações Orçamentarias,” Getúlio Vargas Archive, Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC), Fundação Getúlio Vargas, GV MinA, 44.06.00.

Poultry production received special emphasis as a rapid solution to the deficiency of protein resulting from shortages in the beef supply. The CBA reconditioned existing aviaries and ordered construction of new installations, resulting in 19 new poultry production units with a capacity of 34,000 birds. The CBA imported new breeds of chickens from the United States along with two large flocks of turkeys and several small flocks of Peking ducks. The ministry of agriculture and the CBA organized a three-month course on practical poultry farming attended by 62 individuals. The CBA also sought inexpensive ways of maintaining high production while researching a more nutritious feed for the birds. After two years and the dedication of over US\$100,000 to its poultry program, the CBA concluded that ‘the success of the CBA poultry efforts, along with the high interest in this field by farmers, bids well for the future of this industry in Brazil.’⁴⁹

By the end of its second year, the CBA could boast of successful projects in most of the Northeast and Amazonia. In Pará, the commission was operating two poultry farms, a large vegetable garden and a pork project with the capacity for 1,000 hogs. In São Luis de Maranhão the CBA was maintaining a large farm producing fruits, vegetables and eggs, while in Fortaleza it operated two farms producing vegetables, fruits, and fresh eggs for the U.S. military mission. In Rio Grande do Norte, the CBA operated two farms that produced a variety of vegetables and over 82,000 pounds of pork. In Paraíba, the CBA’s farms were meeting the food demands of the Brazilian military forces as well as much of the population of João Pessoa. In Pernambuco, the CBA maintained large pork and poultry projects, organized a large vegetable garden, and planted several thousand fruit trees. In Alagoas, the commission operated three farms producing fruits and vegetables, as well as turkeys and ducks, for Brazilian and U.S. armed forces. The

⁴⁹ TS, Memo to Mr. Kinports from W.G. Casseres, May 21, 1944, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, General Records, Basic Economy, Brazil, Box. 82; TS, John B. Griffing, “Two-year comprehensive report,” Dec. 1, 1944, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs, Periodic Reports, 1942-50, Brazil, Box 3; Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, “A summary report of the activities, p. 46.



commission's reach extended even to the island of Fernando Noronha, where CBA members provided technical assistance, seeds, tools, and fertilizers.⁵⁰

True to Rockefeller's vision, the CBA extended its activities to other regions of Brazil. In the Rio Doce river valley of Minas Gerais, the boom in mining strategically important high-grade iron ore, mica, and quartz crystals and related railroad and road construction had diverted workers from agricultural pursuits, leading to food shortages exacerbated by the lack of transportation. Moreover, as one CBA staff member commented, 'not only is there a shortage of food, but the increased earning power of the workers induces them to eat a great deal more than before, which adds to the demand.'⁵¹ With the support of CBA technicians, schools and railroad construction camps in the region created vegetable gardens. The CBA distributed seeds for cereals, beans, and vegetables as well as small tools, insecticides and agricultural machinery. Its agronomists worked with county governments to increase food production.⁵²

Gaining Support for U.S. Agricultural Practices

A far more enduring impact resulted from the commission's special emphasis on the education and training of Brazilians in U.S. agricultural techniques, in both Brazil and the United States, a program that evolved from long established ties related to agricultural education in São Paulo and Minas Gerais. The training program was crucial to supporting U.S. long term objectives in the region. As explained by an anonymous document prepared by Rockefeller's staff, increasing the food production in Latin America would lead to higher 'levels of living,' and the resulting increase in purchasing power 'will thus create new and expanded markets for the United States.' One staffer reasoned that while the commission's efforts to introduce the benefits of North American techniques were important, the program also sought to 'further the spirit of good will existing between Brazil and the United States through the means of an operating agricultural program.'⁵³ Training agriculturalists and nutritionists would create the capability to 'carry on the program of food production after the Institute's assistance has ended.' Even prior to establishment of the agreement, Rockefeller and the Ambassador Caffery used the resources of the CIAA to expose Brazilian agricultural students to U.S. agricultural education. In 1941 the office provided US\$15,000 to support a tour of U.S. agricultural facilities by 48 students of the Piraçicaba agricultural school, resulting in ringing endorsements of U.S. agricultural practices. Upon return, the mentor of the student group, Mello Moraes, commented positively on U.S. agricultural practices in his weekly column in São Paulo's *Folha da Manhã*, focusing on

⁵⁰ Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, "A summary report of the activities of the Comissão," pp. 81-87.

⁵¹ TS, "Meetings of the weekly policy meeting," Mar. 22, 1944, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Coordination Committee for Brazil, Box 1272.

⁵² Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, "A summary report of the activities of the Comissão," p. 81-87; Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, *Weekly report of activities*, July 11, 1944, p. 5.

⁵³ Memo, Berent Fricke to the Ambassador, "Annual report of the activities of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs," Mar. 2, 1944, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Records of the Department of Information, Coordination Committee for Brazil, TS, Box 1259.



‘agriculture in general, stock and poultry raising, and forestation . . . as practiced in the United States.’⁵⁴

The food commission’s program reached multiple Brazilians by offering training in both Brazil and the United States under the motto of ‘learning by doing.’ The in-Brazil training program utilized the commission’s seed production and demonstration farms producing hogs, poultry, cattle, fruits, vegetables, and cereals, as training sites for future farm managers. Nine units located in the Northeast and Amazonia hosted between and 16 to 24 trainees each. Because none of the trainees could read or write, the commission instituted a night course in reading and writing. The commission also established a specialized unit in Maranhão with a one-year course for 16 students focused on poultry development in all aspects: incubation, egg production, and broiler production.⁵⁵

Trainees selected to travel to the United States received a far more comprehensive introduction to U.S. farming. The training, funded solely by the U.S. government, was designed to ‘provide a means of practical agriculture and home economics training for worthy boys and girls and boys’ through six to nine months with ‘a county agriculture or home demonstration agent.’ After rudimentary English classes, trainees received a monthly stipend (US\$ 135 if single, US\$ 195 with dependents) and engaged in a ‘wide range of practical farm enterprises.’ By mid-1944, 49 Brazilians were participating in program. Thirty-three focused on livestock, poultry, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, farm machinery, and processing byproducts, while another 10 concentrated on public services, including extension services, organization of 4H clubs, and research. Six were studying home economics and nutrition.⁵⁶

Participants in the training program experienced U.S. farm life through contacts with farm families and local agricultural organizations. Ceará native Francisco Diogenes Nogueira lived at the 60,000-acre Painter Hereford Company Ranch, home to 1,000 cattle, near Greeley, Colorado, and spent a month at a dairy farm in Weld County. He visited the local county agent in Greeley who was president of the National Association of County Agents, an association of agricultural extension specialists. Hugo Frota lived with the family of the president of the local farm bureau active in 4H work near Fort Collins and assisted his host family in preparing for the annual Western Livestock Show in Denver in January 1944. At least one trainee promoted a better understanding of Brazil to local communities. Pará native and medical doctor Eduard Cattete Pinheiro, training in Mariana, Arkansas, made presentations to multiple local business, church and civic groups.⁵⁷

The long-term impact of the new perspectives obtained by these and the other 39 agriculturalists and nutritionists who participated in the program through 1944 cannot be precisely measured. In the very least, their experiences in the United

⁵⁴ TS, “Project authorization,” Oct. 9, 1941; TS, “Memo to the Coordinator from the Brazilian Division,” June 5, 1942; TS, Arnold Tschudy to the Coordinator, Mar. 20, 1943; Ltr, Miguel Bechara to Nelson Rockefeller, Feb. 19, 1942, all U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, General Records, Basic Economy, Brazil, Box. 82; *A Noite*, Dec. 4, 1941, p. 1; *A Manhã*, Feb. 5, 1942, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, “Summary report,” p. 61.

⁵⁶ Ltr., W. C. Brister to Kenneth J. Kadow, Dec. 17, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Country Files Brazil, Box 82; Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, “Summary report,” p. 69.

⁵⁷ *The Tribune*, April 5, 2012; Ltr., W.C. Brister to Kenneth J. Kadow, Dec. 17, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82.



States oriented their thinking about agricultural practices and reinforced the notion that the U.S. model of agriculture held relevance for Brazil. Ozaman Frederico Marra, upon returning from a year's exposure to U.S. agricultural practices, especially poultry raising, in Delaware, Ohio, New Jersey, and New Hampshire, remarked that 'for me, no activity could have been more beneficial; I acquired, then, a stock of experiences that, I am certain, will be most useful in Brazil in view of the problems of our still depressed poultry industry.'⁵⁸ Other participants returned to Brazil to become leaders in agricultural education, home economics education, and the burgeoning poultry industry.⁵⁹

The endorsement of U.S. agricultural practices also occurred at the policy level through the visit of agricultural minister Apolônio Sales to the United States in mid-1944. Accompanied by Oscar Guedes and a personal secretary, Sales embarked upon a 45-day tour of agricultural facilities at the invitation of Nelson Rockefeller and Secretary of Agriculture Claude R. Wickard. He marveled at experiments underway at the Beltsville, Maryland, agriculture research station, especially 'the most interesting' machines being tested for future application on various crops.⁶⁰ He visited a poultry farm in Newark, Delaware, and observed hydroelectric plants in Schenectady, New York, and those of the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville, Tennessee. In Ames, Sales was honored at a University of Iowa forum attended by 200 Iowa farmers, gathering information on corn hybridization in the process. He also visited the King Ranch in Texas and large-scale vegetable projects in Illinois, met with Chicago manufacturers of farm equipment, and toured vegetable and soup canning installations in Pittsburg.⁶¹

Sales's visit added to his conviction that Brazil needed to increase the technical knowledge and mechanization of its agricultural endeavors. At a press conference upon his return, he proclaimed that 'It is not an exaggeration to say that the technician, upon standing on North American soil, feels enveloped in an aura of confidence in technique and work.' In his own words, Sales had seen the 'most prosperous agricultural nation of the world.' He returned to advocate a stronger federal government role in both the mechanization of agriculture and electrification of the São Francisco river valley, a topic of vital interest to his Pernambucan base. He met with President Vargas soon after returning to recommend an agricultural development plan that would assure 'the rapid penetration of the technical, principally mechanization, in farming and agricultural resources from "north to south.'⁶²

⁵⁸ *Diário de Pernambuco*, Oct. 20, 1944, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Ltr., W.C. Brister to Kenneth J. Kadow, Dec. 17, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82; Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, "Summary report," pp. 69-70.

⁶⁰ Sales (1944: 3-7); *Correio da Manhã*, July 28, 1944, p. 1; *Diário de Pernambuco*, July 30, 1944, pp. 2-3.

⁶¹ "Brazilian Minister of Agriculture Tours the United States," *Weekly report of activities* [Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs], July 4, 1944, p. 1.

⁶² Sales (1944: 3); *Correio da Manhã*, July 28, 1944, pp. 1, 3. Oscar Guedes returned also convinced of the applicability of the U.S. experience to the needs of Brazilian agricultural needs after visits to the King Ranch in Texas and observing machinery at work in the fields of Iowa. He reported that he carefully observed "the agricultural organization in the states that I visited with the view of transplanting – adapting, of course to our conditions – everything that I found interesting in the visited zones." He also visited with several Brazilian trainees sponsored by the CBA who reported that they were satisfied with the program and looking forward to taking advantage of their new knowledge. *Diário de Pernambuco*, July 30, 1944, p. 2. The CBA also gave substantial support to development of a large "agro-industrial



Sales's embrace of mechanization for Brazil's agriculture complemented measures proposed six months earlier by the Conselho Federal de Comercio Exterior (Federal Council of Foreign Trade) to subsidize the national manufacture of farm equipment. After a study of national agricultural machinery production, the council judged that 'the precarious situation of the industry of agricultural machines' and the 'scarcity of agricultural implements,' required urgent measures. The manufacturing of agricultural machines was to be standardized, with profits controlled at both the manufacturers' and retail levels. For 1944, the government was to purchase a modest five million *cruszeiros* worth of equipment (about US\$250,000). Specifications for each item of equipment to be developed cited exact models of imported equipment, although the council affirmed that 'we do not wish to intimate that the national industry is going to copy the type indicted.'⁶³ The impact of the decree was certainly limited. A serious effort to develop a national agricultural machinery industry, focusing on the domestic manufacture of tractors, was still decades away.⁶⁴

The Demise of the Commission

The flurry of activity of the two years of the food commission soon faded as events in Europe and Asia lowered the perceived threat to Northeastern Brazil and increases in food production stabilized prices, albeit at levels higher than during prewar years. In October 1943, Berent Friele informed the U.S. staff of the commission that 'the feeling in Washington was that the food shortage emergency in the Northeast was now over.' The remainder of funds allocated for the program, he recommended, 'should be used more to cover Brazil's need for nutritional and agricultural education.'⁶⁵

Moreover, the commission was quickly losing relevance. One of its principal mandates--providing food for migrant rubber workers--was becoming less urgent as the flow of workers into the rubber gathering effort fell far short of Caldwell King's estimate that a half million new residents would relocate to the Amazon to gather rubber. Between late 1942 and December 1945, less than 35,000 'rubber soldiers' and their dependents migrated to the Amazon area under government sponsorship (Wilkinson, 2009: 158). By April 1944, consideration was clearly being given to terminating the program, but staff members argued that 'the job cannot be stopped at this point until the eight training schools and the thirty-one other stations are running smoothly.' The agreement was extended for an addition year through

colony" at Itaparica in the São Francisco Valley. By December 1944 the colony housed several hundred colonists and boasted a slaughterhouse and *xarque* plant capable of processing 200 cattle per day. From 1943 forward, Sales campaigned for the development of the hydroelectric resources of the river's Paulo Affonso waterfalls. Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, "Summary Report," p. 87. "Apolonio Sales," https://cpdoc.fgv.br/producao/dossies/AEraVargas2/biografias/Apolonio_Sales [accessed 24 January 2022].

⁶³ TS, Jack B. Neathery, "Brazilian government provides a subsidy for the agricultural machinery industry," Jan. 18, 1943, in Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Basic Economy, Box 82.

⁶⁴ Secretaria da Agricultura do Estado de São Paulo, *Anais do I Simposio sobre Fabricação do Tractor e Implemento Agrícola no Brasil, 16 20 de Novembro de 1959* (s.l., c. 1960).

⁶⁵ TS, "Meeting of staff of Brazilian Division," Oct. 20, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Coordination Committee for Brazil, Box 1272.



June 30, 1945, allowing for continuation of ‘various projects in operation which will not be concluded at the expiration of the present agreement.’⁶⁶

Undeterred, Brazilian agriculturalists and Nelson Rockefeller himself continued to envision a further extension of the agreement. Despite a February 1945 request from Fernando Costa, former minister of agriculture and since 1942 appointed governor (*interventor*) of São Paulo, for U.S. participation in a large-scale agricultural development plan, both governments agreed to end the program by June 30, 1945. The commission closed the books on pending expenditures and transferred funds from the sale of CBA facilities to the Ministry of Agriculture to maintain works in progress.⁶⁷ The joint food production commission closed its doors, but Nelson Rockefeller would continue to be a factor in Brazilian agriculture for decades to come (Silva, 2015).

Brazilian Agriculture at War’s End

As the commission’s work was winding down, friends and colleagues of Apolônio Sales gathered on February 28, 1945, to celebrate his third anniversary as agriculture minister. Aside from praising his plans for mechanizing agriculture and constructing grain silos, they highlighted his work with the food commission as having brought ‘great benefits’ to Brazil ‘from Bahia to Acre.’⁶⁸ In a broader perspective, the activities of the joint food production commission were part and parcel of the unprecedented intervention of the federal government into the agriculture sector.

This process had begun in September 1939, when the federal government established the Commission of National Defense (Comissão da Defesa da Economia Nacional) to control the economic impact of the war on the nation’s population. It was charged with tracking food stocks, promoting exports, and controlling shipping and transport fees. Far from achieving ‘a complete unity of the productive forces and the effective collaboration of public powers for a framework of immediate action that would possibly normalize our social life without great clashes and without many surprises,’⁶⁹ the program opened a wide fissure between producers and policy planners. No longer would government intervention focus only on remedying the ills of specific crops, now it would attempt to control the destiny of the entire agricultural sector.

The level of intervention sparked concern among business sectors and generated unintended consequences. The Coordenação’s setting of prices for bread, sugar, and beef in May 1943 generated protests from producers and provoked the formation of a black market. Business groups allied under the umbrella the Commercial Association of Rio de Janeiro organized the First Brazilian Economic Conference in late November and early December 1943, ostensibly to examine the relations between government and the economy. In reality, according to a confidential report prepared by a U.S. Embassy observer, the meeting stemmed in part from

⁶⁶ TS, “CIAA-Brazilian Division Meeting of the Policy Committee,” Nov. 19, 1943; TS, Minutes of Weekly Policy Meeting,” Apr. 3, 1944, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Coordination Committee for Brazil, Box 1272; Ltr., G. C. Dunham to Apolonio Sales, July 24, 1944, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 286, Records of the Agency for International Development and Predecessor Agencies, Institute of Inter-American Affairs Periodic Reports, 1942-53, Box 2.

⁶⁷ Memo, William B. Gotaas to the Board of Directors, CIAA, June 23, 1945, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 229, Office of Inter-American Affairs, Country Files, Brazil, Box 82

⁶⁸ *A Manhã*, Mar. 1, 1945, p. 6.

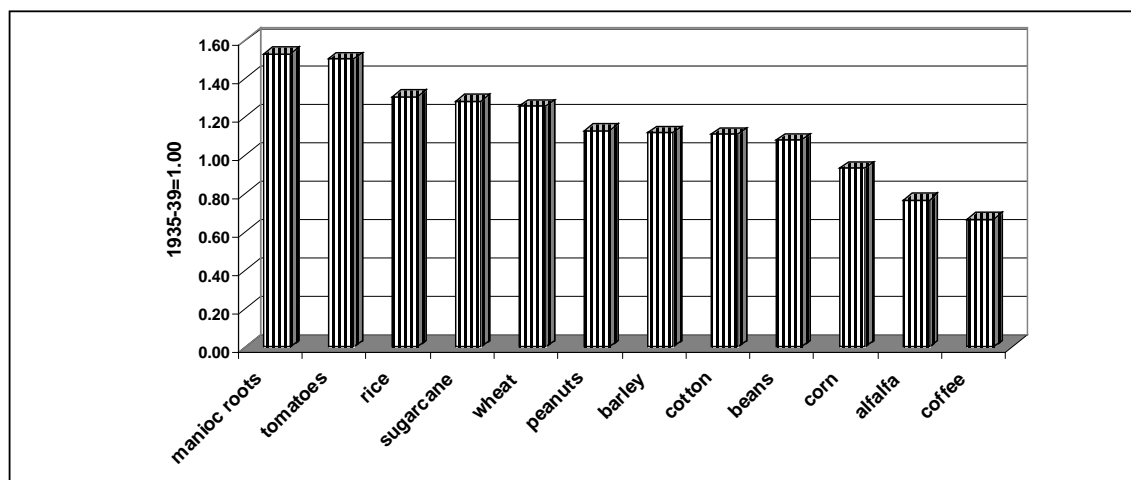
⁶⁹ Brazil. Coordenação da Mobilização Econômica, *Economia de guerra no Brasil: o que fez a Coordenação da Mobilização Econômica, Vol. II, Setor Abastecimento*, (s.l., c. 1946), p. 42.



businesses' wish to register a 'rebuke to Government controls, taxation, and mismanagement',⁷⁰ forecasting a political reaction that would eventually result in the Vargas government's downfall. In one analyst's opinion, the federal government's efforts to promote alternatives to the scarcity and high prices of goods had resulted in an unsatisfactory situation marked by long lines, high prices and rationing (Abreu, 2015; Neves, 2016: 18).

Despite such turbulence, the Coordenação did offset some of the negative impact of the war on Brazil's agriculture by agreements with the United States to buy commodities deprived of usual markets. In October 1942, the U.S. Commodity Credit Corporation agreed to buy US\$100 million worth of Brazilian coffee and smaller amounts of Brazil nuts, cacao, and cotton oil. In May 1944, in cooperation with the United Kingdom, the United States also agreed to supply a US\$2.5 million loan to support increased cultivation of rice in Rio Grande do Sul.⁷¹

The status of Brazilian plantings for 1945 reflected a dynamic agricultural sector beginning to diversify away from a dependence upon coffee while trying to meet the demands of domestic and global markets within an uncertain political environment. Spurred by a five-fold increase in agricultural credit by the Bank of Brazil's Portfolio of Agricultural and Industrial Credit (Carteira de Crédito Agrícola e Industrial) (Silva, 1999: 149), and the continuing availability of virgin lands, farmers brought nearly one million hectares of new land into cultivation between 1939 and 1945.⁷² With the assistance of the CBA, the output of several major crops – manioc roots, tomatoes, sugar cane wheat, barley, cotton, and beans – expanded despite the vicissitudes of war. Meanwhile, coffee production registered a 34 percent fall in output as cotton and food crops provided more attractive returns (see figure 4).



⁷⁰ TS, Reginald S. Kazanjian, "The First Brazilian Economic Conference," Dec. 10, 1943, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 166, Foreign Agricultural Service, Narrative Reports 1942-1945, Brazil, Box. 50.

⁷¹ USDA, *Foreign crops and markets*, vol. 45, no. 16 (Oct. 19, 1942); vol. 46, no. 13 (Mar. 29, 1943); vol. 50, no. 9 (Feb. 26, 1945); vol. 48, no. 20 (May 27, 1944), p. 267; TS, "Relação do produtos cujos projetos de acordo já forma encaminhados ao governo dos Estados Unidos pela comissão de control," Getúlio Vargas Archive, Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC), Fundação Getúlio Vargas, GV Confid 1943.00.00, Relação da Comissão de Controle.

⁷² Brazil. *Agricultural production and trade statistics* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1951), p. 4, 7.

Figure 4: Indexed change in production major crops, average production 1940-44 versus 1935-39.

Source: *Brazil. Agricultural Production and Trade Statistics* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1951), p. 7.

Conclusion

Responses by the Brazilian and U.S. governments to wartime conditions fundamentally altered the course of Brazil's agricultural development. Aside from the leading to expansion of foodstuffs and the intervention of the Brazilian government into the agricultural decision making, actions of the Ministry of Agriculture and the joint food production commission exposed multitudes of farmers to the benefits of increased federal governmental support. Efforts by the ministry and the CBA to introduce even rudimentary agricultural implements accelerated the replacement of the digging stick with the hoe and marked the beginnings of a shift toward favoring capital-intensive cultivation. The Brazilian government leveraged U.S. strategic concerns not only to obtain important subsidies for research on rubber development, but also to receive major subsidies for a relief program for the politically volatile and drought-stricken Northeast. Thus, the joint food production program stands as a clear example of Gerson Moura's observation that Brazil was able to manipulate its relationship with the United States to obtain political and economic success (Moura, 2012: 206).

It also supported U.S. geopolitical goals. The United States gained not only access to a dependable source of raw materials – especially rubber – but also a supportive political and economic partner within an American system under U.S. leadership. Closer ties with the Vargas government reduced chances of a German beachhead in the Americas and laid the basis for a broader vision of Pan-Americanism in the immediate post war period (Weis, 2000: 133-134). Within this charged political and economic environment, the search for ways to increase the output of Brazil's agricultural and extractive products, especially those related to the Amazon, created an important incentive for wartime cooperation. Many of its proponents considered the effort merely a prelude to a broader economic alliance.

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