

6 ORGANIZATION OF THE FARMERS

INTRODUCTION

The new maize recommendation promoted in 1968 was used by 103 farmers located throughout most of the Project area. Their average yield was 3.98 ton/ha on a total of 76 ha. These results were extremely favorable, and it was decided that the new technology should be promoted as rapidly as possible among all farmers in the area.

In 1968, the technical assistance agents had worked directly with individual farmers. With an estimated 43,300 farm operators in the area and only four technical assistance agents and their assistants available in 1969, it was clearly necessary to find a way to work with groups of farmers, rather than individuals. In addition to facilitating the flow of information to and from farmers, organized groups of farmers could better: (a) arrange for credit, inputs, and other agricultural services; (b) encourage favorable change in the operating procedures of the service institutions; (c) secure more favorable prices in the purchasing of inputs and the marketing of produce; and (d) plan and conduct projects for community improvement.

A review of organizational experiences in other parts of Mexico and other countries with many kinds of farmer organizations, produced no particular organizational model that seemed appropriate for the farmers in Puebla. As a beginning, therefore, it seemed advisable to: (a) acquire as much information as possible about farmers' experiences with, and attitudes toward, group action; (b) provide farmers with information about the advantages of working together; and (c) assist farmers in organizing in the ways they felt most appropriate.

ORGANIZATION OF FARMERS PRIOR TO THE PUEBLA PROJECT

The political unit in the State of Puebla is the *municipio*, or county. It is governed by a council consisting of a president, secretary, and treasurer. The council is usually housed in a central building in the principal town in the *municipio*. Most of the legal and administrative actions affecting the citizens of the various communities in the *municipio* occur in that building, including: payment of property taxes, civil wedding ceremonies, registration of births and deaths, etc. Each village in the *municipio* has an auxiliary council with the responsibility for less important transactions. This type of organization was introduced by the Spaniards during the Colonia Era and has undergone few changes.

Many of the villages in Puebla are *ejidos*. These are communities of farmers who received land from the government as a result of the agrarian reform. (The title to the land remains with the *ejido*. The *ejidatario* retains use rights to land within the *ejido* without paying rent as long as he farms it, and at the time of his death may will these rights to a member of his/her immediate family.) The highest authority within the *ejido* is the *comisariado*, or executive committee. Its principal function is to represent the interest of the *ejidatarios* in their relationships with higher authorities and service institutions. A second function is to participate in political actions at the community level and, through the Agrarian Community League, at the regional and national levels. The *comisariado* consists of a president, secretary, treasurer, and vigilance committee.

Credit societies were functioning in several *ejidos* at the time of the 1967 survey. An *ejidal* credit society consists of those *ejidatarios* who wish to receive credit from the National Ejidal Credit Bank, an official credit agency formed with the express purpose of providing credit to the *ejidatarios*. The society is represented in its transactions with the Bank by a delegate. A vigilance committee is responsible for watching over transactions between the *ejidal* authorities and the Ejidal Bank and for seeing that the credit received by the *ejidatarios* is used for production purposes. The credit societies functioning in 1967 limited their action to arranging for credit; they were not involved in acquiring better information on crop production practices or other activities to increase net income from agricultural production.

Small landowners in at least two villages in the area had been organized in agricultural credit societies prior to 1967. These societies consisted of landowners who wished to obtain credit from another official bank, the National Agricultural Credit Bank. Neither of these societies was functioning at the time of the 1967 survey.

ACTION OF THE PUEBLA PROJECT IN THE ORGANIZATION OF FARMERS

To obtain a better understanding of farmers' attitudes toward organized group action and their previous experiences in trying to work together, the interviews in the 1967 survey asked the farmers specific questions about matters of organization. The majority of farmers interviewed showed no desire to belong to an organization. Few members of the community, even members of their own families, were considered worthy of their trust and confidence. Many of those interviewed declared that they preferred "to work alone," "not to depend on anyone," and that "each person should do whatever his means permit."