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ORIENTAL CROPS

Submitted by Kathryn Keller

May, 1944

The Indians of Tapotzingo, a typical Chontal town, raise two main crops--corn and beans. The fields are out from the center of the village, and may be either owned or rented by the man who cultivates them. The size is dependent on the wealth, ambition, and size family of the person. It is often the case that a man possesses more tillable land than he plants, and many families go hungry between crops as a result.

There are two times of the year for planting corn--May and June, and November and December. In preparation for planting, the people do not plow or harrow, but simply cut down the weeds with the machete. In May and June, the dry season, the fields are also burned. There is a saying that the singing of the locust is the harbinger of summer planting time.

The grains of corn are placed in a hole in the ground made with the machete or a pointed stick and is about four inches deep. They are not covered. For fifteen days after planting someone stays in the field all day long with his sling shot to chase the birds away. A little boy can earn about 25 centavos a day for this work. Then about two and a half months after planting, when the ears begin to come, it is necessary to watch for birds again. The worst enemies of the corn are the birds, which are more numerous near the towns. Rats, ants, worms, grasshoppers, dogs at night, and occasionally the floods and heat of the sun also take their toll.

The bean crop is smaller and there is only one planting a year--November and December. Black beans are most common, though there are some white ones as well. They are planted in the same manner as

the corn, but not watched so closely. About three and a half months is necessary for maturing, and the plants reach a meter and a half in height. The people know about rotation of crops, and follow the principle to some degree.

The greatest amount of the harvest is used locally for food, but some is sold to the neighboring Mexican town of Macajuca. A few sweet potatoes, squash, rice, and small tomatoes are grown, as well as coffee and cocoa, and tropical fruits such as the mango, papaya, oranges, and lemons.