

Book Review

INTRODUCTION TO TROPICAL AGRICULTURE

by J. A. Sutherland. Angus & Robertson
1971. 242p.

ALL those involved in the teaching of agriculture in Papua New Guinea are plagued by the lack of suitable texts related to the conditions of this country. Any text which helps to fill this gap is welcome. Mr Sutherland's book attempts the difficult task of presenting an overall picture of tropical agriculture to secondary school pupils. Given intelligent teachers who are aware of the book's rather serious shortcomings, it should be successful.

The book claims to be aimed at the junior secondary level, but this is somewhat optimistic in a country where English is a foreign language. *Introduction to Tropical Agriculture* has a place in the country's education but it would be more appropriate for students in senior secondary school and even as an introduction to post-secondary agricultural courses.

The book uses refreshing self-educating practical activities and projects as a vehicle for introducing some simple principles of agriculture. However, this approach necessarily means that the book concentrates on short term crops and livestock which best fit themselves to stu-

dent projects. Thus coffee, the country's most important cash crop, is dealt with in only three pages while poultry has two chapters; even goats have a full chapter to themselves. Accepting the need for this specialization on selected areas, and the difficulties of explaining agricultural principles in simple language, there is little room for criticism of Mr Sutherland's handling of the purely technical aspects of agriculture. Agriculture is however, a socio-technical system, involving people. Wherever he discusses the social aspects of tropical agriculture the author falls into the old trap of assuming that economic development in underdeveloped countries is only possible if the social relations are reformed to resemble those of his own Western capitalist country. The result is a paternalistic pleading for reform of traditional "bad" ways in favour of "good" Western ways. This takes a ludicrous flavour in Chapter 1 "What is Agriculture" and Chapter 26 "Farm Management", but becomes outright dangerous when he deals with "Land Tenure" (Chapter 8).

It is to be hoped that this book will be used only by experienced teachers who can recognize the dangers of these chapters and avoid them in favour of the more valuable technical descriptions.

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