



Shipment of tractors from Russia sits in a Havana depot. Cuba also is seeking Russian cane-cutting machinery.

Cuba Seeking Soviet Machinery

By Norman Gall
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HAVANA—Cuban agrarian reform director Carlos Rafael Rodriguez says the revolutionary government is "desperately" seeking to end Cuba's dependence on volunteer manpower in agriculture through an accelerated mechanization program.

Rodriguez, one of Cuba's most important veteran Communists and head of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA), said the Castro regime is trying to persuade the Soviet Union to deliver 500 specially developed cane-cutting machines in time for the 1965 harvest.

Interviewed on Monday in his spacious office in the 18-story INRA building, the af-

fable goateed former editor of the Communist daily Hoy said: "Mechanization is our most decisive problem. The Russian engineers still do not consider the cane-cutting machine satisfactory.

"They have already agreed to send us 100 by next year, but we need many more. The machine seems all right to us. It does not pick up weeds or stones with the cane. But the Russians seem to be very sensitive about perfecting the machine because they feel that Soviet technology will be on display and they do not want anything to go wrong."

Rodriguez said Cuba would need 4000 cane-cutting machines by 1968 to meet its goal of mechanizing from 40 to 50 per cent of all cutting

operations within the next four years.

"The Russians are also developing a seed-planting machine that their technicians are reluctant to release because they say it does not dig deep enough," he added. "However, we are so desperate for manpower we are ordering them for shallow plantings."

Agrarian reform chief since 1961 and member of the directorate of the Marxist-Leninist United Party of the Socialist Revolution, Rodriguez explained that the 1963 "second agrarian reform" collectivization of agriculture had given the government control of vast quantities of private sugar lands.

On top of this the Premier

Fidel Castro regime converted additional rice lands to sugar cane to capitalize on high world sugar prices.

After the 1961 harvest, a bumper crop of 6.8 million tons produced for the depressed world sugar market with the price at 3 cents a pound, Cuba cut back its sugar acreage in an effort to diversify agriculture.

But high world prices of 9 cents a pound last year and 6 cents now have brought Cuba back into full sugar production.

"In the ten years before the revolution, our force of professional sugar cane cutters averaged 350,000 men," Rodriguez said. "In the last two harvests, owing to the conversion of cane cutters to other kinds of work, we have never had more than 210,000 full-time cutters and no more than 50,000 volunteers from



Magnum Photos

Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, above, is trying to solve Cuba's agrarian reform problems.

to Speed Up Sugar Cane Harvest

offices and factories at the peak of the cutting."

Rodriguez said the Castro regime's new policy of "Sugar discretion" prevented him from saying what the current labor costs are.

"But I can tell you we hope to get our costs down to 4 cents per pound for the 1965 harvest," he added. Three cents a pound is considered the highest sugar production (from field to shipside) cost in most Western sugar cane countries.

Asked whether the government might have staked an excessive degree of its prestige and resources in expanding sugar production toward a goal of 10 million tons by 1970, Rodriguez said the new sugar agreement with the Soviet Union, similar to the old United States quota system suspended by President Eisenhower in 1960,

"will give us a guaranteed market for 20 million tons over a five-year period."

"By 1968, when we are scheduled to deliver 5 million tons to Russia at 6 cents per pound, we should have assured sales of at least 6 million tons between domestic consumption and shipments to other Socialist countries," he said. "By that time, of course, we will not have to ration domestic sugar consumption for export purposes."

Russian payments under the sugar agreement signed last January will be made in goods rather than currency. Rodriguez said "sugar discretion" may require Cuba not to divulge harvest totals this year. In 1963, Cuba harvested 3.8 million tons.

Rodriguez opposed moves by former Communist Party organizational secretary

Anibal Escalante in 1962 to install veteran Communists in nearly all dominating positions within INRA. This resulted in Escalante's expulsion after a public denunciation by Premier Castro.

Both Rodriguez and Industries Minister Ernesto (Che) Guevara have exhibited a great frankness in public discussion of economic problems.

The regime has established an elaborate system of checks and balances to resolve differences among Party and government officials and technicians that would otherwise endanger production.

"We had thought to do a second agrarian reform after the 1964 harvest but we had to deal this blow sooner to the counterrevolutionary forces in the countryside," Rodriguez said.

In late 1963, all farms be-

tween 150 and 1000 acres were nationalized. They comprised more than one-fifth of Cuba's arable land, and had been owned by what Rodriguez called "a rural bourgeoisie" similar to the kulaks in old Russia.

"These large landholders remaining from the 1959 agrarian reform tried to wreck the revolution in the countryside," he said.

"Many of the estates were abandoned and many owners were trying to persuade the poorer peasants to oppose the revolution. They were saying the revolution was the peasants' enemy and arousing fears that the peasants' small plots would be expropriated. This of course is not so, and Fidel has promised many times since then that farms under 150 acres would not be nationalized."