

Paints Grim Picture of Brazil's Coffee Land

Coffee Importer Surveys Frost Stricken Coffee Growing Regions of Brazil—Reports Widespread Damage to Trees; Deems Farmers' Demand For Higher Cruzeiro Prices Unwise

By Carl Borchsenius

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DURING the past few years, I have made regular trips to the interior of Brazil. The impressions of the new plantations in Parana were always most pleasant for a man who makes his livelihood in coffee, and who wants to see sufficient coffee grown to supply our "brown nectar."

To have flown over the enormous fazendas, with the endless rows of green trees, or to drive in a car or jeep, and see the coffee trees in fine condition—either with the wonderful scented flowers, or the beautiful green or red fruits, according to the season, was certainly a satisfaction—not only to the fazendeiro, but also to the visitor.

Now—everything has changed. In just a couple of hours during the frost, July 4-5, the leaves withered, and the endless rows of oval-shaped bushes turned brown. The leaves are still on the trees which stand as mute witnesses to fortune's rapid change.

With Mr. Gregory L. Martinez Jr., of Carbo Ltda., in Santos, I flew over all the coffee regions of Parana. We were able to view, not only the damaged regions, but also the green areas which miraculously had escaped the frost. It is difficult to explain how it happened that the frost hit one area and spared other trees close by. In some places, one hillside is totally damaged—yet the frost caused no damage at all on the other side of the hill. However, in Parana, in all the regions around Cornelio Procopio, only seriously damaged fazendas could be seen—and very few green spots. We landed in various sections, and drove around. This gave us a chance to inspect the degree of the damage to the individual trees. Although there are many variables involved in regard to the prospects for future

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croops, a sober generalization may be made—with the usual reservations—for possible later repeats of the frost or drought, etc.

Estimates of Damage

After having talked with several people—fazendeiros, buyers in the interior, and exporters at the seaports, who have been visiting the interior, I believe that for Parana, the present crop (1953/54) can be estimated at about 3,000,000 bags. Previously, others including the official IBC, estimated anywhere between 3,800,000 bags to 4,200,000 bags. However, the fact that the frost occurred at a time when the harvesting had just started, caused many unripe beans to turn black. Immediately after the frost, there were rains which were beneficial to the trees, but which caused many ripe beans to fall from the branches, and they were lying with some withered leaves where they will remain until the harvest is over—around September 1. Therefore, much less coffee can be recovered from the ground than under normal circumstances. In addition, many of the owners of ravaged fazendas are operating on the theory that inasmuch as they will not have a crop next year, it will be just as well to sell a substantial portion of the present crop, and hold the balance until next year. Obviously, if part of the present crop is held back, we would automatically have to increase the next crop by the amount held over.

Two Million Bags?

For the Parana 1954/55 crop, the fazendeiros, and other people in the interior, estimate about 1½ million bags; some say ½ million, while others go somewhat over 2,000,000 bags.

At the present time, it is my belief that an estimate of a future crop before the flowering, is only guess work; but making all usual reservations, I believe that some 2½ million bags can be expected for Parana. However, if the weather should be

favorable, it is quite possible that this figure may be increased. At least up to now, the weather has been very favorable, and the trees show a strong tendency towards recovery, inasmuch as new shoots are appearing—even on the badly damaged trees. There is no talk whatsoever about cutting down the trees, but all the fazendeiros want to see how the trees are sprouting, and only at a much later date will they cut off the dead parts.

Trees May Produce Again

On one of the fazendas which we visited, we were shown a twelve-year-old tree that had been pruned August 1952, to about eight inches from the ground. This tree has regained its strength, and since last August, it has grown to the size of a four-year-old tree. Unfortunately, this tree was damaged by the frost, and now one cannot tell whether or not it would have borne fruit next year. We can only assume, from the indications, that it would have borne fruit. This pruned tree is, therefore, indicative of the fact that very possibly the damaged trees may produce again—small quantities—in 1955/56, and if the trees continue to sprout as they now are, we should certainly realize better crops in the future.

Official IBC Estimate

For the State of Sao Paulo, the present crop—1953/54, can be estimated to be about 7½ million bags. The 1954/55 crop was estimated to be more than 10,000,000 bags, but the official estimate of the IBC reports the frost damage to be about 25 percent, and therefore, with all the usual reservations which must be made before the flowering, it can be expected that at least 7½ million bags will be harvested in 1954.

However, when estimates of crops in Brazil are made, it must be remembered that Parana—especially—is vulnerable to new frost. The fazendas which miraculously escaped the July 4-5 frost, might easily be plundered by a new frost, so that the