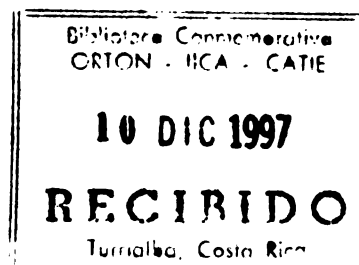


**RESEARCH PROGRAM ON SUSTAINABILITY  
IN AGRICULTURE (REPOSA)**



**Report No. 123  
Field Report No. 164**

**INVESTIGATION INTO THE LIVES OF WOMEN  
WORKING IN BANANERA EMPACADORAS  
IN THE ATLANTIC ZONE OF COSTA RICA**

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The Research Program on Sustainability in Agriculture (REPOSA) is a cooperation between Wageningen Agricultural University (WAU), the Center for Research and Education in Tropical Agriculture (CATIE), and the Costa Rican Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG). In addition, REPOSA has signed memoranda of understanding with numerous academic, governmental, international, and non-governmental organizations in Costa Rica. The overall objective of REPOSA is the development of an interdisciplinary methodology for land use evaluation at various levels of aggregation. The methodology, based on a modular approach to the integration of different models and data bases, is denominated *USTED (Uso Sostenible de Tierras En el Desarrollo; Sustainable Land Use in Development)*. REPOSA provides research and practical training facilities for students from WAU as well as from other Dutch and regional educational institutions. REPOSA's research results are actively disseminated through scientific publications, internal reports, students' thesis, and presentations at national and international conferences and symposia. Demonstrations are conducted regularly to familiarize interested researchers and organizations from both within and outside Costa Rica with the *USTED* methodology. REPOSA is financed entirely by WAU under its Sustainable Land Use in the Tropics program, sub-program Sustainable Land Use in Central America. It operates mainly out of Guápiles where it is located on the experimental station *Los Diamantes* of MAG.

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**Preface**

The following report contains a summary of the work I undertook during the 7 weeks from August to September 1997, based in Guapiles, Costa Rica. I was fortunate enough to be able to work within the research programme REPOSA ( Research Programme On the Sustainability of Agriculture). The programme is the result of interdisciplinary and collaborative research between Wageningen Agricultural University (WAU) in the Netherlands, the Tropical Agronomy Research and Higher Education Centre (CATIE) in Costa Rica, and the Costa Rican Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG). REPOSA aims to develop a methodology for the analysis and evaluation of alternative scenarios for profitable and sustainable land use.

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## 1. Introduction

The subjects of this study are women who work in banana packing factories, called empacadoras. This provides an interesting combination for not only does it deal with an industry of primary importance to the Costa Rican economy but it also focuses on women as part of the paid labor force in a country where “machismo” is an important structuring aspect of life.

My aim was to find out who the women working in empacadoras were. By this I mean to gather information about their backgrounds, family and working situations but more importantly to get an idea of their reality and of the everyday constraints faced by a few women in their working lives. Working under the REPOSA project, my research was directed towards providing a picture that could be helpful to their methodology.

REPOSA explores land use options in an interdisciplinary manner. It analyses the different scenarios using an assessment of the trade-offs between factors such as income, sustainability and environmental objectives. Different land use scenarios may affect the structure of the work force and thereby have important consequences for female labour and income. An assessment of the situations of the females working in empacadoras would help to provide information on the structure of this important labour force. I was also particularly interested in the position and frequency of female farmers working in empacadoras for this has a very obvious bearing on the income of such farming families. For this reason I tried to ascertain how common such a situation was by asking the foremen and women I met.

My primary objective was to obtain information on the banana empacadoras, in order to be able to clarify these interviews I have also carried out a second smaller set of interviews in Ornamental Plant empacadoras. I felt that a comparison between the two would be illuminating in the differences that appeared. This comparison would be between a well established, highly structured industry such as the bananas, and a more recent and less regulated example given by the ornamental plants. I was interested in the differences between women who choose to work in either place. Although the Ornamental Plant interviews have been included as secondary to the preceding ones I hope that they are also interesting in their own right. I have not, however, focused my research on the Ornamental Plant empacadoras and so they are not treated in the same depth as the banana industry.

The report is set out so as to first give some background information on the important aspects of both the banana industry and women in Costa Rica. I hope this provides enough practical data to make sense of the following interviews. I have then included my methods followed by the results of the interviews and a lastly few conclusions. I have not included the interviews themselves in the appendix for they are not subsidiary to the report, rathermore the reverse, everything else is included only to illuminate them. My goal was to use them as a means of obtaining a glimpse, be it somewhat limited, into the lives of a few women. To construct through this a picture of the functional realities they face, so as to be able to draw together their divergent threads into a wider frame but without losing sight of the women themselves, each with their own story to tell.

## 2. Women and Work

Many recent studies have noted the cultural and ideological rules concerning the sexual division of labour in Costa Rica (Chiriboga et al. 1995, Campillo, F.1994). If, following the Harvard Analytical Framework ( CCIC-MATCH,1994), work is to be divided into the three classes of productive, reproductive, and social; then in Costa Rica it is the women who have sole responsibility for reproductive labour. Reproductive labour may be identified as the care and maintenance of the domestic unit and its members, including such tasks as childcare, housework, shopping and preparation of food. That women have ultimate responsibility for this work whatever else they may also do has lead to use of the term “double day” in recognition of the full load of female work. The invisibility of reproductive work as well as its devaluation both by males and women themselves may be demonstrated by the low participation of Costan Rican women in the economically active proportion of the population as defined by government statistics shown in Table 1. Despite these limitations the same figures show the marked insertion of women in to the paid labour force over the last two decades. The number of women in the Economically Active Proportion of the population (PEA) has not only increased in total but also the proportion of the female population working has increased compared to that of male, whose proportion has stayed relatively constant around 75 %. The Encuesta de Hogares, responsible for obtaining this information, defines the PEA as “Persons who work for or participate in the activities required for the production of goods and economic services”.

*Table 1. Number and Percentage participation of each sex in the Economically Active Population, PEA, of Costa Rica.*

| Sex     | 1982    |                          |                     | 1991      |                          |                     |
|---------|---------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------|--------------------------|---------------------|
|         | PEA     | Population over 12 years | % of population PEA | PEA       | Population over 12 years | % of population PEA |
| Both    | 776 866 | 1 577 112                | 49.2                | 1 065 701 | 2 040 380                | 52.2                |
| Males   | 580 713 | 779 078                  | 74.5                | 746 916   | 997 763                  | 74.9                |
| Females | 196 153 | 798 034                  | 24.6                | 318 785   | 1 042 617                | 30.6                |

Source: Minister de Trabajo y Seguridad Social. 1981, 1991

Results of the same study gave an indication as to the activities in which women were considered engaged as part of the PEA, Table 2. These figures do not serve to give a picture of the females employed in empacadoras as opposed to other private firms, however they are necessary to justify and clarify use of the term *PEA, Economically Active Population*.



*Table 2. Occupational Structure of the Female PEA.*

| Occupation                                 | 1991<br>Female PEA |             |
|--|--------------------|-------------|
|  | Absolute           | Relative    |
| <b>Total</b>                               | <b>318 785</b>     | <b>100</b>  |
| <b>Independent:</b>                        | <b>60 368</b>      | <b>19.0</b> |
| Landlady / associate                       | 6 298              | 2.0         |
| Self employed                              | 54 070             | 17.0        |
| <b>Employees:</b>                          | <b>239 150</b>     | <b>75.0</b> |
| State                                      | 61 324             | 19.2        |
| Private Firms                              | 132 488            | 41.6        |
| Domestic Service                           | 45 338             | 14.2        |
| <b>Unpaid:</b>                             | <b>14 521</b>      | <b>4.5</b>  |
| Family Worker                              | 14 521             | 4.5         |
| Other                                      | -                  | -           |
| <b>Seeking work for<br/>the first time</b> | <b>4 746</b>       | <b>1.5</b>  |

Source: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social. 1991.

## **2.1 Campesinas**

Campesinas form the distinct class of women for whom farming forms a part of their life. This may be through a variety of situations whereby they themselves own land or, as is more common, the land is held by their partner or jointly. Studies show that the work undertaken by women on the fincas is variable and in general complementary to the work done by the men (Chiriboga et al., 1995. Aguilar, 1996. Orcheron, 1996). As mentioned, the household domain is always a female responsibility, but as to farm work there seem to be no hard and fast rules. Women vary in their participation from being confined almost entirely to the house and family garden to spending the majority of their day in the fields. The situations depend on such a range of factors including family size, child gender, age, history, health, farm size and land use that there a wide divergence between any two individual farms. In keeping with this picture of variability is the pattern of paid work. There is a saying "La agricultura no da para vivir,"( Martin, 1992), effectively this means that for many farmers agricultural production is not self supporting. They cannot afford to rely on the productive cycle alone and so use a range of survival strategies. These include

- \*Diversification of Production
- \*Production for autoconsumption
- \* Incorporation of family labour on the land
- \*Family and community solidarity

**\*External sources of income**

A study undertaken by R.Alfaro, UNA Heredia,gives an indication of the range of this diversification. He used data collected from 203 farms around the Atlantic zone to give the results shown in Tables 3 and 4.

*Table 3. Percentage distribution of principle workplaces for campesinos/campesinas*

|               | Men  | Women |
|---------------|------|-------|
| On farm work  | 63.8 | 85.6  |
| Off farm work | 6.5  | 7.8   |
| Combination   | 29.5 | 6.7   |

*Table 4. Percentage distribution of workplaces for those campesinos/campesinas working principally in off farm work*

|                      | Men  | Women |
|----------------------|------|-------|
| Day-labour           | 42.5 | 23.8  |
| Bananera/Exportation | 23.3 | 42.9  |
| Commercial work      | 8.2  | 14.3  |
| Others               | 26.0 | 19.0  |

Source: R.Alfaro, PZA, Survey 1994

Rodrigo Alfaro's research shows the flexible nature of the work undertaken by farmowners. In addition he indicated the temporal aspect of these strategies which are never fixed but instead adaptive to the changing circumstances. For example a number of factors, including crop prices and work availability, will influence the families' decision to work on or off the land. The Atlantic Zone is especially suited to this kind of strategising because of the opportunities it offers for paid work at the export companies. Work undertaken here can be in a temporary basis, so securing a guaranteed wage but still retaining the option of returning to farm labour whenever possible.

The figures show that bananeras are an important source of work to Campesinas who are employed in off farm work rather than Campesinos, who are more likely to work as day labourers. Even so it must be recognised that the majority of farmers are still occupied primarily by work on their own land ( 63.8% of men, 85.6 % of women). In fact R.Alfaro only found 7 cases where the woman Campesina was engaged primarily in work at bananeras, this was out of the 203 farms he visited in total.

### 3. The Banana Industry

#### 3.1 History

The history of the banana industry has been one of continual expansion from its first introduction as a large scale export in the late 19th century. It benefited along with other export products by the implementation in 1982 of new development measures directed towards the increase of the nation's productive apparatus. These were mainly aimed at those products destined for external markets and included a series of policies pertaining to customs tariffs, trade exchange and finances to remove any aspects which might have previously been obstacles to commercial freedom (Martin et al.,1992)

The end of 1984 however saw a stagnancy in the rate of growth of the banana industry. This was due to a withdrawal in land investment by companies such as La Compania Bananera and Standard Fruit Company as a reaction to the worldwide reduction in banana prices. As a result the rate of increase from 1984-85 was -13.7% (Murillo et al., 1987). The Costa Rican government responded by announcing a state of emergency in the country's banana production and in 1985 introduced their "Plan de Emergencia para la Produccion y Exportacion Bananera". The long term objectives of the plan were to increase the area under cultivation and encourage investment in new bananera fincas by national and foreign companies. The policy included giving attractive financial incentives and facilities to promote development. This can clearly be seen in the amount of credit extended by the Banco Central de Costa Rica to the banana sector between 1985 and 1992 shown in Table 5.

*Table 5. Credit authorised to banana activities by the Banco Central. per year, in thousands of colones.*

| YEAR | AMOUNT      |
|------|-------------|
| 1985 | 0           |
| 1986 | 0           |
| 1987 | 31 905,9    |
| 1988 | 283 089,1   |
| 1989 | 1 109 669,7 |
| 1990 | 3 025 266,2 |
| 1991 | 5 905 100,0 |
| 1992 | 4 423 100,0 |

Source: SEPSA, 1992

The results were such that the volume of production of banana increased by 1 407 806,0 metric tonnes ( from 1 224 794,0 to 2 632 600,0 metric tonnes), between 1988 and 1992 .

### 3.2 Importance

The banana industry is vital to Costa Rica's economy, both in its export value and in the employment it provides. In 1991 bananas were approx. 42.8% of Costa Rica's agricultural exports valued in US dollars (IICA, 1994). However if it is vital to Costa Rica as a whole, the heart of the industry lies in the Atlantic zone. It is here that the primary expansion of the industry has taken place and the zone has maintained its position as the center of banana production. From 1984 to 1996 the land used by bananeras in this area more than doubled, from 21 278 to 46 383 hectares (Chinchilla et al., 1996). This represents over 94% of the total land use in Costa Rica devoted to bananeras. Despite this rapid increase concentrated in the Atlantic Zone it should, however, be noted that 1996 proved an unusually bad year for production. As a result of major flooding and the hurricane in September '96, production of boxes fell by about 5% compared to the previous year (Chinchilla et al., 1996).

### 3.3 Producers

Banana production can be divided into two groups of producers, transnational and national. The nationals include local, independent and associated producers who have a contract to sell to one of the transnational companies. There are three transnational companies licenced to export, these are summarised in Table 6.

*Table 6. Trade names and subsidiary companies of the transnational producers active in the banana industry.*

| Transnational           | Subsidiary company   | Trade Mark       |
|-------------------------|--|------------------|
| Castle & Cooke Inc.     | Standard Fruit Company   | Dole             |
| R.J.Reynolds Industries | BANDECO  | Del Monte        |
| United Brands           | COBAL<br>Compania Bananera de<br>Costa Rica<br>Chiriqui Land Company | Chiquita<br>Tico |

Source: Kruiter, 1989.

The empacadoras visited have been classified according to the company trade mark to which they either belong or are contracted to sell to.

### **3.4 The Empacadora**

The empacadora is the name given to the site where the racimos of bananas are received from the fields and packed ready for exportation. Each racimo consists of a number of hands of banana; one racimo is produced per banana plant. The racimos arrive at the empacadora covered in plastic bags. They have been covered by bags for the last 12 weeks to prevent damage by flies and insecticides. The racimos are brought in to the empacadora by a worker who pulls them along a cable, this work and all the work done in the fields up to this point is done by males. The next series of tasks are shown clearly in the diagrams I to IV, Figure 4. They may be done by either sex.

1. The plastic bags are removed and the flowers taken off the end of the fruit.
2. The hands of bananas are cut away from the racimo, usually a male job.
3. The pegs are removed from the rails for re-use in the fields collecting bananas.
4. The bananas are selected from the trough where they are being washed to remove latex. Selection criteria include colour and length and may vary according to the intended market.
5. The bananas are classified according to size on to trays and then fumigated.
6. The trays are weighed and quantity of bananas adjusted accordingly.
7. At least one banana on each hand is stickered with the trade mark logo.
8. The trays are packed into boxes which may be vacuum packed or not depending on the length of the market's journey.
9. The final boxes may be re-weighed before they are loaded onto the container.
10. Loading of the truck, a male job.

## 4. Interviews

### 4.1 Atlantic Zone

The Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica is bordered by the Caribbean Sea to the north east, the central volcanic mountain range to the south and west, Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south east.

Several geographically distinct territorial definitions exist of the Atlantic Zone. The CATIE/MAG/WAU Atlantic Zone Program covers the northern part of the territory, this was the region used in this report and is shown in Figure 1. Land use within the Atlantic Zone can be roughly divided into three dominant types, forest, pasture and plantations. Amongst the plantations it is bananas that have the primary dominance. This can be seen in Figure 1. The region is particularly suited to the crop. Its high precipitation levels and average daily temperature of around 26° C make for ideal growing conditions.

The locations of the empacadoras visited can be seen in Figure 2. These were chosen with the aim of producing an even distribution within the region, so as to include empacadoras in the main banana producing areas and from each of the three main exporters. The final choice, however, also depended on the individual cooperation of the foremen of the empacadoras and a measure of chance in which empacadoras happened to be processing a harvest when I visited them. A summary of the empacadoras may be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Summary of the empacadoras visited

| Place                     | Number of Encuestas | Company Trade Name |
|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Bananas:</i>           |                     |                    |
| Pacora                    | 1                   | Dole               |
| Rio Frio                  | 5                   | Dole               |
| Roxana                    | 3                   | Del Monte          |
|                           | 3                   | Dole               |
| Maryland                  | 1                   | Del Monte          |
| Carmen                    | 1                   | Dole               |
| Cariari                   | 2                   | Dole               |
|                           | 2                   | Chiquita           |
| <i>Ornamental Plants:</i> |                     |                    |
| Rita                      | 2                   | Plantas y Flores   |
|                           | 3                   | Wualkiria          |
| Guacimo                   | 3                   | Costa Flores       |

## **4.2 Method and Materials**

The information in this report was collected through a variety of methods. These included a survey of current literature on the subject, discussions with people working on research in the field and of course most importantly the interviews with the woman working in the empacadoras themselves. I designed the interviews to collect as much information as was possible but with a spread between the general and the particular. The general information on the running of the empacadoras and the women's working situations was necessary, as well as interesting, to contextualise the particular aspects of each woman's life. I tried to use the interview format as a springboard from which to adapt the questions relevant to the woman concerned. For this reason the results vary in their focus and depth according to the direction the interview took.

The women used were selected in a random manner. By this I mean there was no formal method used to choose them, important factors generally included who was nearest to the aisle and most accessible. On occasion the foreman pointed out a woman to me but in the end it ultimately depended on whether the woman was willing or not to cooperate. I do not claim that the women give an exactly representative picture of the situation in the empacadoras, the sample number was too small to allow this. They do allow a glimpse of the wider picture but I would rather that they be taken as the individuals they are.

## **4.3 BANANERA EMPACADORAS**

### **4.3.1 Pacora.**

#### **Bertha Adilio Lopez, 53 years old**

Bertha has not worked in a bananera empacadora since 1986 when she and her partner took some free land near Pacora to start a farm. However previous to that both she and her partner worked continuously at empacadoras for more than thirty years.

Bertha was born in 1944 in Guapiles. She went to school until the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and left when she was 11 when she needed to start earning money. At this point she went to work in a cacao finca where she was paid according to the amount of fruit she cut per day. The conditions of work, pay and benefits were far less than she later received at the bananera fincas. When she was 23 a friend of hers suggested that she come and work at the bananera company where she was working at Roxana. This she decided to do because the pay was better, however it took her a while to decide to move because her mother didn't want her to go. She thought it was very unsafe with all the young single men working there who would go out and get drunk at night. When Bertha moved she went to live with her friend in a house provided by the finca. She started work as a box packer and continued to work in this position only during her time at the factory. At times when Bertha was tired she asked to change positions within the empacadora, she especially

wanted to work as a deflowerer as this job is less tiring, however her employers would not allow her to change positions. They said she had been instructed in the first place as a box packer and was not specialised to do anything else. Bertha moved factory three times during her time there, however she always stayed working for the same company and only moved when her employers decided she should.

It was during her life at the empacadora that she met her present partner who was also working there. She has been with him for the last 25 years, they are not married. They have 6 sons, the eldest is 34 and the youngest 27. The two youngest sons have been working as banana cutters in fincas since they were 14 years old.

When Bertha was working at the empacadora she lived in a house given by the company. It had no water or electricity but she had to pay no rent for it. The company allocated houses with priority given to families, however if there was room single women could sometimes get a space as well. All the single males lived together in a large building and were never given a house of their own. Bertha would start work at 5.00 in the morning and work as long as was necessary to get the job done. The workers were paid by the quantity of an order and so if they managed to get it finished by 4.00 PM they could leave then. If however they found they were working more than 8 hours to finish an order then they would be paid time and a half for the extra hours on top of the money they received anyway. They were paid in cash every 15 days. While Bertha was working her mother looked after the children. The orders did not come in continually so that it was unusual for Bertha to work packing every day for a week. On the days when she was not needed packing she would work either bagging the bananas in the field or helping to clean the factory. This work usually started at 6.00 AM and lasted only until 1.00. This pattern of work continued in the same way through out the year, interspersed with days off when there was neither an order nor any other work to be done in the factory. On her days off Bertha would catch up on the house work, clean, iron, shop for food and make clothes for her children.

Bertha liked her job in the empacadora, the money meant she could maintain herself independently, it was secure and she had good friends there. The company would pay her health care if she had an accident during her work, in addition there was a scheme whereby pregnant women would get the last three months off work with 40 days afterwards before they were taken back on. There was no type of pension but when people were too old to work they would be given a lump sum of money to leave. The amount depended on their job and how many years they had been with the company, usually it was about 150 thousand colones. In general Bertha felt that women were better treated than the men. If the men complained about something they were generally ignored whereas women were treated with more consideration. There was no difference in wages between men and women doing the same job. The factory had a system whereby every three months or so the workers would be signed off and then taken back on after a period of 15 days or so. Some workers used this time to move around and work at other factories but most of them just had the time off.

Bertha and her partner had always wanted to own a farm and when they heard there was free land in Pacora they decide to move there and give it a try. They have a finca of about 10 hectares where they grow cacao, pejobaye, palmito amongst other things. They sell to a trader and also produce for autoconsumption. They own hens, a turkey and pigs; Bertha



grows medicinal plants to use and for sale. At the moment Bertha does very little work on the farm but a few years previously she worked all day with her partner on the farm, only spending a few hours on the household chores. Bertha prefers working on this farm to the empacadora, there the money was more constant and secure but now she is working for herself.

#### **4.3.2 Rio Frio.**

##### **FINCAS 4/5, DOLE**

All the fincas at Rio Frio are owned by Dole. Workers live in housing villages around the fields and there are schools and colleges for the local children. Dole has houses for the use of its employees, they must pay around 10 000 colones for legal possession of these. This money is not actually for the house itself but the money needed to register the house owner as titlee.

Not all the empacadoras are working at any one moment but depending on where there is a harvest. There are usually at least 4 empacadoras working at any one time. This means that work for the trabajadoras is pretty much continuous since they can be moved around the fincas following the harvest.

Workers may be taken on a long term contract or a short term contract for two and a half months. Dole does not like to have too many employees on its books as permanent as this means giving out a lot of benefits. So a lot of workers will only be given short term contracts even though they may prefer to work long term. Long term employees are given annual holiday depending on the period for which they have been working there. Pay is equal in the empacadora itself and depends on the size of the order.

Work starts in the empacadora for the women at 6.00 in the morning. There are company buses that pick them up to bring them to work. Pay and hours of work are not fixed but depend on the quantity of the order. If workers do more than 8 hours work then they are paid over time accordingly. Women move around positions within the empacadora according to what the foreman decides, it makes no difference to their pay. Women and men doing the same job receive the same pay.

According to the women there is a system of health benefits that covers any accident at work. On becoming pregnant a woman is entitled to one months leave before the baby is due and three months afterwards. During this time she is paid half of her wages.

##### **Flores Viquriez, 40 years old.**

Born in Alajuela Flores went to school until 6th grade and started work for Dole 20 years ago. She has one son who is 23 years old and three daughters of 20,18 and 16 years old. They all have the same father but she was not married to him and they separated 15 years ago. She never received anything from him in terms of support for the children.

Flores has owned a finca of 4 hectares for 8 years now. The land is in her name and was awarded to her by the IDA. It is located by Rio San Jose, Parcela number 10. She used to grow maize and other crops for autoconsumption as well as having chickens. Recently

she has decided to start growing palmito because the money is good when you sell it. At the moment the plants are only small but she hopes to make money on it, up to now her farm has not made any money at all. Her eldest son and daughter live on the farm with her daughter's husband and their two small children. They all work on the farm and the house there is in her son's name, although the actual land is still in her name. Since Flores has had the farm land she has only worked for Dole as casual labour. This means she works for two and a half months at a time then she goes back to work on her farm and returns to Dole after a few months more. She needs to do this because she earns money with Dole to invest in her farm and could not make a living only on the auto consumption of the farm. In addition to her farm Flores owns a small house in Rio Frio that she bought from Dole. She lives there with her two youngest daughters when she is working at the empacadora because her finca is too far away to be able to travel to work. When she is not working they all move back to live and work on the finca. It is Flores who works at the empacadora and her son who takes care of the farm rather than the reverse situation because the labour on the finca is too arduous at times for her, she wouldn't know how to use a machete whereas she is easily able to work at the empacadora earning the money to keep the finca going. Of course she would prefer to be able to live permanently on the finca herself but this is just not feasible financially without the support of a husband.

Her son hardly ever contracts peones on the finca, only when there is some really hard work to do such as putting posts up. They do not generally need them for harvest time because the family is enough. The finca is a good investment for the future, you never know when the bananera company will tell you to stop working. It could come at any time and Flores knows she is getting old. By having some land in her own name Flores is able to retain a little bit of the security she has lost by not having a husband.

#### Eleona Sugaro Malez, 24 years old.

Eleona has worked for 8 years on and off at Dole. She has never had a fixed contract but only ever worked in a casual capacity. This used to suit her because she was able to take long periods of time off when she had her children. She has three children who are 10, 8 and 5 years old. The oldest two go to school but the little one is still at home. The eldest children stagger their time at school so that one goes in the morning and one goes in the afternoon. In this way one of them is always able to look after the little one whilst Eleona works. Eleona is married and her husband works in a bananera company in Siquirres. He is working as a casual labourer too and so is able to come home every 15 days for 2 days. Eleona herself works two and a half months on and one month off. They would both like to be able to obtain long period contracts now but the company has not offered them any. Her husband took the work in Siquirres because he was in-between work at Dole but he hopes to return soon. At the moment Eleona is earning more money than him because Dole pays better, he doesn't like this too much. Eleona earns about 30 000 colones every 15 days, this is a bit less than long contract people earn.

Eleona was born in Golfito, Puntarenas but lived most of her childhood in Zone Azul where her parents worked, she left school when she was 16 and her parents split up. Eleona and her mother moved to Rio Frio where they started work on the empacadora.

Her mother still works on the empacadora and lives alone. Eleona and her husband have bought the title to their house off Dole in Rio Frio. For this reason they would like to stay working here and have no other plans to move on.

Eleona thinks life on a farm is better because it is your own whereas in the empacadora that feeling is missing. But life on a farm is just as hard work and Eleona has no ambitions to own a farm now that she has her own house here. Her only dreams are now for her children, she wants to be able to give them a nice home and maintain them well so they can become professionals. None of her 7 other brothers and sisters work in an empacadora, they have jobs like teaching and office work. They were able to get better jobs than Eleona because they were at school longer. She had to leave school earlier than them because she was the eldest and needed to start work when her parents split up. Her lack of education meant that Eleona could not do anything else other than work in the empacadora but this won't happen to her children.

#### Susan Marat, 28 years old.

Susan is one of the 24 children that her mother has had. Not all of them survived and only 8 are alive now. They mostly all had different fathers. Susan's own father left her mother when she was two years old. Her mother and siblings moved around the countryside following her mother's jobs harvesting coffee. Susan herself was born in San Jose and left school when she was 8 years old to help look after her little brothers and sisters. She started work here 8 years ago.

Susan has two children of 8 and 5 years old. She divorced the father two years ago and receives no help from him at the moment. When they divorced Susan bought the house off him where she now lives with her children and mother. Her mother is 78 years old and too old to work any more. She looks after the children whilst Susan works, this is better than getting someone else to look after them who is not family.

Susan has a long term contract, she only gets 18 days holiday a year though because she has only been permanent for 4 years now and was casual before. At night when Susan goes home she helps her children with their studies. She spends her money on keeping them and her mother and the house, there is not much money left over at the end. Susan's house has enough land for two flower trees but nothing else. Susan would like to have her own farm with orange and avocado trees, this would be easier because she would also have a partner if she had a farm.

#### Cecilia Ramirez Sandual, 44 years old.

Cecilia has been working for Dole for 27 years now so she is entitled to 5 weeks holiday a year. This she spends with her family on the beach, usually in Jaco. She has one son who is 11 years old and she pays a girl to look after him while she is at work. Her husband died 2 years ago and she has no other partner. She lives with her son in her own house and bicycles to work every day.

Cecilia went to school until she was 14 years old and then left to work at home. She left home to come and work here when she was 17 years old and her aunt was coming to work here, so she came to live with her. She lived 5 years with her aunt before she

moved out to live with her then partner, who she later married.

When she goes home in the evenings Cecilia does the housework but she also likes to watch television. She likes to work at the empacadora because she earns a lot of money, about 43000 colones every 15 days. This she mostly spends on food and her son. When Cecilia was pregnant she got a month off before and a month after, she was paid 21000 colones during this time. A year ago this rule changed and now women are entitled to 4 months off.

#### Olga Blandon, 38 years old.

At the moment Olga works putting stickers on the bananas, she is only a casual labourer and so every two and a half months when she stops work she comes back to a different job in the factory. She has been working as a casual labourer since she was 18 years old. Olga is married and her husband works in the same place. She has three children, the oldest girl is 22 then 15 years old and the youngest boy is 7 years old. The oldest daughter looks after the youngest whilst Olga works and then studies at night from 5 till 10.00 when the other daughter gets back from college .

Olga was born in Liberia, Guanacaste. She left school and the province with her family when she was 10 years old because her father was working in a factory and there was never much work for him. There were more opportunities in this province. She lived with her family until she was 26 years old when she went to live in a house given to her by the company, she paid the light but nothing more. She earns about 35 000 colones every 15 days depending on the work she has done.

#### **4.3.3 Roxana**

##### GUADALUPE, BANDECO.

#### Marjorie Mora, 20 years old.

Marjorie is in the unusual position that her father works for the company administration, she is single, living at home with her parents and has no children to support. For these reasons the claims on Marjories money are not great and she spends her earnings on clothes, makeup, going out and most importantly on her studies. At the moment she is enrolled in the university of San Jose where she is studying accountancy. She has been studying for 6 months already, she has another two and a half years to complete. At the moment she is on holiday but usually she studies 17 hours a week. This she fits in by taking every Wednesday off to go to university and doing the other hours in the evenings. She never works at the empacadora past 6.00 PM because she needs this time to go home and study. The empacadora fits in her hours accordingly and even when there is a big order she has permission to these hours off. Apparently any worker who asks for a similar dispensation can come to the same arrangement with the empacadora. It makes no difference that Marjorie's father happens to work in the administration office.

Marjorie was born in Guapiles, she has been living in San Antonio though for more than 16 years now. She went to both school and college, leaving when she was 17 years old and had completed her time there. In the two years between finishing school and starting work at the empacadora Marjorie stayed at her home doing "nothing". Although she enjoys her work at the empacadora Marjorie does not have plans to stay there. Another 4 months at university and she will be able to find a better paid office job having completed part of her traineeship. In the long term she plans to work in a bank or as an accountant .

Mariela Bonilla Moralez, 27 years old.

Mariela has only been working at the empacadora three months. She started work because her husband hurt his knee playing football and so was unable to work until he recovered. At the moment he stays in their house in San Antonio to recuperate and look after their two children of 9 and 1 years old. When he returns to work again in his factory they will hire someone to look after her children so Mariella can continue working herself since she enjoys the job.

Mariela was born in San Isidro, Buenas Aires. She left school when she was 7 years old and went to help her mother harvest coffee. When she was 12 years old she started to earn a wage of her own in the coffee finca. She married when she was 19 years old and she and her husband moved to Puerto Viejo in search of work when she was 22 years old. She worked there in a marmalade factory for three years until the owners of the house they were hiring decided to sell it. The couple then moved to San Antonio where they bought a house. They plan to stay here now that they have a house of their own.

Emilia Castillo Pasce, 46 years old.

Emilia was born in Guanacaste. She went to school for 2 years then stayed at home to help her mother on their farm. She married when she was 15 years old and had her first son when she was 16 years old. She has three sons who are 30, 27 and 26 years old. None of them live at home. She and her husband moved to the province of Limon 20 years ago because there was no work for them in Guanacaste and she was tired of the heat. She has been working in this empacadora now for 14 years, having started work once her children were old enough to start looking after themselves. She needed to work because her husband works as a cargo taxi driver in Guapiles and so has a very insecure wage and needs her support. They live in Punta Riel, Roxana and have been living in the same house since they first came here. The house has enough land for a few orange tree but nothing more and they do not keep any animals.

Emilia is particularly aware of approaching the retirement age. She hopes to continue working here for the next 14 years or so until she is 60 and old enough to get a company pension. This will be 10% of her earnings. For those people retiring earlier they get a lump sum which is an average of their earnings.

## SANTA CLARA, DOLE.

### Gloria Inga Alfaro, 28 years old.

Gloria was born in Punta Riel. She went to school until she was 12 years old and then started work in the empacadora where she is now. She has two sons of 10 years and 2 years old and a daughter of 3 years old. These are all from her partner of ten years. They are in a union libre, he works in the management of the bananera company and deals with fumigation of the plants. Together they live in his house, it is near her parents house and her mother looks after Gloria's children during the day .

At night when Gloria returns from work she does domestic chores, cooking, cleaning, sewing. She does not have enough time to do any other paid jobs. All of her money goes on articles for the house or children and she spends very little on herself. She likes her job and plans to stay in it until she is too old.

### Zoraida Vorga, 48 years old.

Zoraida was born in San Jose. She never went to school and started helping her mother in the coffee harvest. When she was 15 years old she left San Jose and came to live in Roxana because there was more permanent work there. She met her husband of 28 years there and he works in the same factory. They have 9 children who are: 28,27,26,22,21,6 years old. The older ones look after the young one whilst she works. They live in their own house which has 1000 square metres of land. Here she grows oranges to eat and has pigs and hens for the use of the family.

### Elisa Castrillo, 23 years old.

Being single and without any children, Elisa lives with her four brother and sisters at home with her parents. There are 8 of them all together but the other 3 live away from home. Elisa left school when she was 12 years old and started work at the empacadora when she was 18 years old. She helped her mother at home in the 6 years in between. When she gets home at night she helps her mother make clothes for the family and sometimes to sell to neighbours. She gives some of her money to her parents but most of it is saved to spend on her studies. She has been studying computers now in a course that began 4 months ago. She studies three hours a night. She is doing this so that she will be able to get a better paid job in the long term, maybe some office work. She goes to church whenever she has any free time.

#### **4.3.4 Maryland**

##### **IMPERIO 1, DEL MONTE.**

##### **Linda Campos, 42 years old.**

Linda lives in the allotment of Parcelas adjacent to the empacadora. The land here is very wet and marshy, it is not fertile and so unfeasible to grow many crops. For this reason most of the land owners here only use the land as pasture and rely on the man's work at the banana company to make ends meet. Linda is not unusual in this respect, she and her husband own 10 hectares of land that they only use for pasture. However she is unusual in that unlike most other farm wives she does not stay at home but also works at the empacadora. Linda has a son of 18 years old who is still at college, he wants to go to university afterwards, and a daughter of 20 years old who is married and living in Rio Jimenez. Linda's husband lives with her daughter in Rio Jimenez where he works as a canal digger in a bananera company, he has gone to work there at the moment because he misses his daughter. He is only working as a casual labourer and comes home to Linda in his periods off work.

Linda was born in San Jose, she completed her time at college leaving when she was 18 years old. she meet her husband and got married when she was 20 years old. He was from Guapiles so they both came to work in a bananera company in Guacimo when they got married. They lived there for 6 years and hired a house. She and her husband moved to her present house when they heard there was land for sale. They bought the house and land off someone that had taken the land previously but had it for so many years now that it had been granted to them by the IDA. She started working at the empacadora when she moved here to earn money so that she and her husband could buy cows to graze the land. Work at the empacadora is hard, especially when the bosses are watching and you have to really concentrate, but the money is good. Linda generally earns about 40 000 colones every 15 days depending on how much work she has done. She has now been at the empacadora for 16 years working on and off with fixed and casual contracts. For the last four years she has been working on casual contracts for the last four years to spend more time with her family but before that she worked on a fixed contract for four years. Workers have the option of being given longer term contracts if they are seen to be efficient and rapid. If you work well then you should have no problem getting a long term contract if you want one. Linda has worked for three periods this year. When she is not working she likes to have a rest at home. She also earns money by selling clothes that she buys from San Jose in the pueblo.

Linda's son takes care of the cattle. They have 19 cows and 1 bull. They only have enough land for 20 cows at a time so when a new calf is born they will sell one of the cows on. They have only been able to sell 7 this year, it has been a bad year but next year

should be better. The money that the cows make pay for their upkeep and vitamins. The rest of the money that Linda makes goes on food, clothes, her son's studies and she tries to save as much as she can for when she gets old. In Linda's opinion there are two types of people, those that think of the future and those that only ever think of the present. Most people working in the empacadora belong to the later group, as fast as money comes in it goes out again, spending it on enjoying themselves. Linda likes to plan for the future when she knows that she will not be able to work any more, that was part of the reason that prompted her and her husband to buy cattle and land in the first place. She thinks of the cows as her "walking money".

#### 4.3.5 Carmen

##### CARMEN 3, DEL MONTE.

##### Marie Aburado, 19 years old.

Marie has only been at the empacadora for a month now. She lives at home with her parents and 2 sisters who are 15 and 17, they are both still at college. Marie left college when she was 15 years old to help her mother in the house. Her parents live on a parcela of 14 hectares. They took the land 20 years ago, her father works in the banana fields digging canals and her mother stays in the house. Her parents own 30 cattle which they only use to sell they do not milk them or make any cheese. They set aside one hectare to plant yuca and platano for selling.

Marie gives half her salary to her parents and saves what she can of the rest. She wants to be able to do an English course, she has an aunt who is living in the USA and she would like to go and live with her.

#### 4.3.6 Cariari

##### CARIBE, DOLE.

##### Marietta Matanavaris, 32 years old.

Although Marietta has been working for Dole for more than 8 years now she has a grand plan to become a beauty therapist. She has friends who work in beauty salons and when she has time off she likes to go and watch them at work. Marietta thinks that's a real job where you are treated as a person rather than a pair of hands. If you are good to your clients then you build up a regular clientele as well, and with prices of 1200 colones only for a pedicure then its even possible to earn a decent amount of money. Marietta knows she would ever earn as much money as she does now (around 32 000 colones every 15





days), but would just have to be more careful with her spendings. Marietta started a beauty course 2 years ago but had to give it up because it needed at least one fixed day a week, her work at the empacadora is always variable depending on the orders, so there was never one day that she could always take off as free. She gave up the course after 8 months but is going to ask the company if she could have a fixed day off and if so re-enrole.

Marietta was born in Guacimo, one of 8 children. She only went to school and not college as she had to start work and didn't have enough time for both. She started work cleaning houses and after two years got a job in a restaurant she was there for 9 years before leaving to work for Dole because the money was much better. She lives in her own landless house in Cariari with her three year old child, she left the father 2 years ago because he was maltreating her. They weren't married. She lives 100m away from her 78 year old mother who looks after the little one during the day. Her father is dead and her mother receives a state pension of 7 000 colones a month, this isn't enough for her to live on and so Marietta has to look after as well. At the moment Marietta's mother is well enough to look after her grandchild but Marietta doesn't know what she will do when she becomes too ill or old and needs help herself.

#### Maria Louisa Grastrillo, 38 years old.

Maria Louisa was born in Guanacaste one of the 6 girls and 2 boys that her parents had. Like her they are all working in bananeras now. The family left Guanacasta when she was three years old so her father could work in the Bananeras near Limon, before that he had been working as a peone and coffee collector, but there was very little work. Maria Louisa left college after one year and started work in the empacadora, her family were living at that time in Estrella in a house temporarily given by the firm. She had a child when she was 26 years old but she never had a long term relationship with the father and he has no responsibility for his son. After the earthquake of 1991 the whole family moved from Estrella because there was so much damage everywhere. They all came to Cariari and have been working here ever since.

Maria Louisa lives in her own house with its small flower garden, her 12 year old son is at school, she is very keen that he completes his education so he can get a professional job and not work for a bananera. Her parents live near by, they are both too old to work any further, her father is now 76 and stopped work when he was 48. Because he only ever worked in a casual capacity he does not receive any kind of pension and he relies on his children to support him. The main burden of this responsibility falls on Maria Louisa because she only has one child whereas her other brothers and sister are all married with much larger families to support.

Maria Louisa has started trying to save money recently because she realises that the calls on her money will increase in the next few years as her son grows up. The question of whether she likes her job or not is a hard one for her. She would like to do something else of course, it is very boring. But the money is good and she needs to carry on earning because there are people depending on her.

## **BALATANA, CHIQUITA.**

### **Domia Manuaria, 50 years old.**

Born in San Jose, Domia left school when she was 9 years old because it cost too much to keep her there and being the oldest of 10 she need to help at home with the little ones. She left San Jose when she was 20 years old to get married and come to Guapiles with her husband because they knew there was much more work around there. She had her only son and started work when he was one year old hiring someone to look after the child. She has been working at Bananera empacadoras ever since and earns about 28 000 colones every 15 days. Her husband works repairing shoes. They hired a house for 5 years but bought their own house 15 years ago. Domia is very proud of her son who works in the office administration of the bananera.

### **Bertha Castrillo Ropez, 38 years old.**

Bertha was born in Guanacaste and left college after one year because she didn't understand it and didn't like it. She left her province when she was 18 and her parents came here to find work in the bananas. She has worked on and off here since then. Berth got married when she was 25, she has two sons who are 11 and 4 years old. She pays a girl to look after them at the moment but usually it is her sister who looks after them whilst Berth works. Her sister however is busy at the moment with her mother who had an accident a couple of weeks ago and is house bound now. Berth pays the girl 4 000 colonies every 15 day, Bertha herself earns about 25 colones over the same period. Her husband also works in the empacadora and they rent a house nearby. They have not bought one because they never seem to have enough money saved. The money comes in and goes out again each month all too easily without any left over.

## **4.4 ORNAMENTAL PLANT EMPACADORAS**

### **4.4.1 Rita**

## **CARAMBOLA, PLANTAS Y FLORES.**

The women work packing flowers 5 days of the week, they usually get Sundays off unless there is a special shipment and Tuesdays are free because there is no shipment on that day. They start work at 7.00 AM and finish depending on the load, this can be as early as 2.00 or as late as 7.00PM, usually it is 4.00PM. They are paid 217 colones per hour and overtime of 320 colones after more than 8 hours work a day. They are paid

weekly in cash, it is usually around 10-12 000 colones.

When a woman gets pregnant she is entitled to 4 months time off, she will receive 1300 colones per day during this time from the social security. Retirement age varies but is usually around 46 or older if the woman is capable. They receive a lump sum on retirement.

The company does not provide any kind of housing benefit scheme.

### Gladis Alfaro, 36 years old.

Gladis was born in the house in Punta Riel that she now lives in with her husband and two sons of 13 and 14 years old. Her parents live in an adjoining house with her sister who also works in the empacadora with Gladis. The houses are on land of about 7 hectares, her father grows platano and yuca on the land to feed the family. Her father used to work in a bananera company in the banana fields but now he is retired and gets a pension of 2000 colones per month. Gladis' husband is a lorry driver, they have been married 16 years.

Gladis left school when she was 12 years old to help her mother in the house and on the land. She started earning money as a cleaner when she was 15 years old. She stopped work when she got married to have children. She started work at the empacadora 3 years ago because her children were older and she was bored at home, working was more fun because there were lots of other people around and it was small and friendly. She heard about the job through her sister who was already working at the empacadora. Gladis is pregnant again at the moment so she will soon leave. She doesn't think she will come back when she has had the baby, her husband wouldn't like it.

### Carmen Matise, 37 years old.

Carmen was born in San Jose, she went to school and college leaving when she was 17 years old and had finished her time. She started work in a local supermarket and got married that year. When she was 26 she and her husband decided to move to Guanacaste because there seemed to be work there. Her husband works as a salesman. They lived there for 4 years and rented a house, she did not work because she was busy with the 2 small children she had then. Her children are now 17 and 13 years old and both at college. They want to be an agriculturalist and a doctor.

After 4 years the family moved to Guapiles where the relatives of Carmen's husband were living. Her husband bought the house where they are now living. It has a small garden, only large enough for a few flowers but no fruit or vegetables. Carmen started work in a shop, she was there for three years until the owners changed and brought new staff along with them. Then Carmen came to work in the ornamental plant empacadora. She likes working there because she likes the flowers, her husband doesn't mind her working because it is not too hard for her. He didn't want her to work in a banana factory because she would get too tired as it is much heavier there. She has been here 8 months now and plans to stay at least a year. She spends her money on food, light, water and her childrens' studies. The money she earns is her own to spend but her husband is a good man and gives her money for the children as well.

### WUALKIRIA.

The women here work Monday to Friday with a half day on Saturday and sometimes Sunday if they are needed. They are paid 196 colones an hour and more for over time, the amount depends on the number of hours they do. The women do all the jobs of packing and are paid the same for each type, they usually take home between 12 and 13 000 colones a week.

### Anna Gomez Himenez, 26 years old.

Anna was born in Guanacaste but spent all her childhood in Limon where her father was working in a bananera finca. She went to school and college for one year and then left to get married. Her husband worked as a customs official in the port of Moin. She was married for 5 years before she got divorced, she has two children from the marriage who are now 5 and 8 years old. When she got divorced Anna went to live with her parents again and started work cleaning in the local escuela. Her parents decided to move to Cariani 5 years ago when there was very little work in the bananera fincas of Limon. Anna and her children moved with them. They all live in her parents house now, her father works in a bananera finca and her mother stays at home to look after the children and the house. The house has a plot of 2 hectares where they grow oranges, yuca, pipa and avocado to eat.

Anna has been working at the ornamental plant finca for 4 months before that she alternated between working here and in the bananera finca near her house. She prefers working with the ornamental plants because the hours are less, the work less demanding and you get less tired; however the money is better at the bananera finca and it is also nearer to her house so she only has to take one bus instead of two. If she had the chance Anna would like to own a farm and be a campesina as the land would be her very own, but that would only be if there was electricity and running water otherwise it would be too uncomfortable.

### Grettel Delgado Satas, 26 years old.

Born in Rio Frio, Grettel left college after only half a year because she was too tired doing her school work in the evenings and working cleaning houses as well. She started working cleaning a year before she decided to quit her education because her family needed the money. She carried on working in this way until she was 23 when she got married to the father of the child she had had 3 years previously. She came to live in Roxanna with her husband. They live in the house of mother in law's sister which has no land, they are "borrowing" the house and don't need to pay rent.

Grettel has one girl of 6 years old. She pays a lady to look after her whilst she works, her husband works in a bananera finca. She has been working for 4 months and plans to stay for as long as she is able. She got the job when a friend of hers asked her to come and work because they were short of people. She was glad to be asked because she wanted a change of scene from her house.

#### Jariella Isaacs. 14 years old.

Jariella has only been working for 1 month and so far she really likes it because it is pretty to work with all the flowers. She was at college before but she didn't like studying, it was too much effort for her head. She decided to come and work at the empacadora because her father works in the fields cutting the flowers so she could get to work by travelling with him. She lives with her parents at home in Rita, they have no land but they do own the house.

#### **4.4.2 Guacimo**

##### COSTA FLORES.

Work starts in the factory at 6.30 AM every morning and goes on as long as needed, this could mean the workers go home from 12.00 to 8.00PM. They are paid every 15 days according to the hours they have worked, there is no over time and the hourly rate is 248 colones. On average they earn 25 000 colones over the 15 days. Workers in the empacadora work Monday to Friday and about three times a year they will be required to work Sundays as well. Thursdays the harvest is generally smaller than on other days and so a few women will stay behind to clean the factory. Which women stay behind is rotated, they earn the same money. The workers receive 12 days a year holiday. The farm is over 100 000 hectares in size and they grow 1000 classes of plants there, it is all destined for export. The foreman explained that the women have to be trained to pack all the different plants. For this reason it does not pay the factory to hire casual labourers in the same way that bananera fincas do because every worker takes time to train. The workers are only ever contracted on a fixed contract basis and there are no casual labourer of only 3 months or so. However despite the time investment and contracts offered most women only ever stay at the empacadora for about 2 years, the longest working women at the moment has been there 6 years now. The foreman said this was because most women working were young and single and invariably they left once they got married or had children. Because the hours are variable and at times can be quite late the job is not compatible with looking after children and so the women usually have to leave. The work force in the empacadora is always changing for this reason.

#### Maribel Madrigal. 31 years old

Maribel is the youngest of eight children born to her parents in Turrialba. She lived there until she was 15 years old and the bananera company where her father was working closed down. She had to leave college then to come with her parents to live in Rio Jimenez, they decided to move there because her other brothers and sisters were already living in the area. Her father started work in a bananera finca near Guacimo and she started work cleaning houses. She used to work about 8 hours a day and earned on average 5 000 colones every 15 days. She stopped working when she got married aged 23, her

husband was a meat seller. Her marriage only lasted 6 years, they have one son who is now 9 years old and at school.

Maribel went to live with her parents after she got divorced and she started work as a cleaner in San Jose. She would only clean two houses and used to live in one of them during the week only coming home at weekends, her mother looked after her son when she was away. Maribel found the work cleaning very boring and she didn't like being away from her son, so she decided to try and find work nearer to home. She got the job at the ornamental plant empacadora a year ago, however she will leave soon to get married to her present novio. She never considered going to work at a bananera because it would be too tiring and she has seen what her father's friends are like. He is now a pensioner and gets 6000 colones a month from the banana company for having been with them 20 years. He stopped work when he was 55 years old, now he spend his time looking after the garden. They have one hectare of land where he grows oranges, mandarins, platinos, pinapples and other vegetables to eat.

#### Perguinia Denofio, 20 years old.

Perguinia is single, has no children and lives with her parents and two sisters in their house. Her sisters are 16 and 10 years old and still at school and college. Perguinia herself finished school but didn't want to go to college, she wasn't interested in learning. She started working in the fields at Costa Flores when she was 15, she only stayed a year because she wanted to work as packing instead so she went to work in another empacadora, "Bosque". It was very far away from where she lived and she had to travel too far each day so she decided to return to Costa Flores, but this time to work in the empacadora. Her long term plans are to get married and have children as soon as she can, she loves children.

Her parents own their house, it has very little land. Her mother stays in the house during the day but her father works on her grandfathers farm. She doesn't know how big it is and herself she never helps out there. They grow a lot of maize to sell, in addition her parents own 15 cows which graze on her grandfather's land. These are not meant for selling but are kept in case of any emergency, only then will they sell one of the cows to raise money.

#### Miriam Ramirez Albaruz, 49 years old.

Miriam is the only female worker in the field at the moment. She works harvesting the flowers and leaves, sewing new plants and general maintenance of the cultigens. The pay for field workers is 218 colones, 30 colones less than in the empacadora, however Miriam prefers the work outside because she has an ulcer on her foot that means it is painful to stop moving for any long period of time. In the field she is on the move constantly so it hurts her less than usual. The problems with her foot has meant Miriam has had to take long period off work when she had problems. This has been the pattern since she was 35 years old and first started work because her husband didn't give her enough money to feed the children because he was spending it on drink.

Miriam was born in Guacimo to a farming family. She had to leave school when she was

9 years old because her older sister got married and her mother needed help in the house looking after her father and four brothers. When her brothers got married and went to live away from home she started to help her father on the farm. He grew mostly maize but also yuca and beans, they didn't have any animals. Miriam used to spend all of her time out on the farm helping her father whilst her mother took care of the household duties. At harvest time her mother would also chip in to help. Miriam got married when she was 17 years old and went to live with her husband in his house in Guacimo, he worked in construction. Miriam started having children when she was 19 years old, she then had a child "more or less every year" until she was 30. Miriam has 8 children from 30 to 18 years old, 6 girls and 2 boys. They are all married. Nine years ago Miriam left her husband because he was abusing her. She now lives with her mother and two sons in her mother's house, her sons have both left their wives and work in the bananera fincas. Her mother owns a small house that she bought 8 years ago when Miriam's father died. On his death the farm was sold and the money split between all the children and Miriam's mother.

## **5. Discussion and conclusions**

As mentioned earlier my primary objective was to let the interviews speak for themselves. This I have tried to do for two main reasons; to avoid generalisations that lose the essence of the different situations, and, perhaps just as importantly, because I did not feel I had completed a significantly large number of interviews to be able to make such generalisations valid. Despite my reservations, however, I feel that some points do emerge from the interviews that allow, and would benefit from, wider comparisons and conclusions.

These can be most clearly in amongst the types of differences that were apparent between the women working in the two types of empacadoras.

### **Working conditions**

The disparity between wages is striking, whilst women at bananeras can expect to take home between 30 and 40 000 colones every 15 days those at the ornamental plant empacadoras are more likely to see around 25 000 colones over the same time. When this is added to the other benefits that employees of bananeras obtain, such as paid pregnancy leave and accommodation bonuses, then work at the banana empacadoras seems a much more favourable option. However it is an option open to all the women working at the ornamental plant empacadoras, and one which they have chosen against. Foremost in the reasons for this decision seem to be the opinion that the work in bananeras is harder and more labour intensive. From my own experiences in the empacadoras I would agree, the atmosphere was certainly more pressurized and the workers rapid. This could be because the work involved in packing ornamental plants is more delicate and requires care or else simply because bananeras are a larger scale operation that has developed over time to run more efficiently. For these reasons the women working in bananera empacadoras tend to be more permanent and, for want of a better word, serious workers. By this I mean that they are long term workers who continually think of the bananeras as a source of income, whether fixed or temporary, to them. Women who work at ornamental plant empacadoras seem less likely to consider doing the job for a long period of time in the same way, in some cases it is only a temporary fill in from their real job which is raising a family. This may be demonstrated by the average length of employment of the women interviewed. The longest worker in the ornamental plant empacadora was 3 year, the others had all worked a year or less, whilst the average time women had been working in bananeras was 15 years. Of course it must be remembered that the ornamental plant industry is relatively new, only of the last twenty years, when compared with the banana industry which was started in the 19th century. The shorter working periods could reflect the fact that the ornamental plant empacadoras are more recently established than the bananas.

### **Life histories**

An interesting perspective on this difference between workers may be provided by a consideration of their life histories. Whilst 6 out of the 8 workers in plant empacadoras



were born in the province of Limon only 7 out of 18 of the women in the bananeras came from the province. The workers therefore are much more likely to be immigrants from another province. The high rate of immigration into the Atlantic zone over the last few decades has been noted and explained in part through a combination of factors including:

- \* Processes of land colonisation encouraged by the IDA (Instituto de Desarrollo Agrario). The IDA is a semi autonomous government agency in charge of establishing and awarding land titles to petitioners.

- \* Increased access through infrastructural improvements, like the San Jose- Limon highway.

- \* Job opportunities provided through the expansion of bananera fincas

The net result has been a population increase in the province of Limon which has consistently outstripped the national average (Lok, 1992). It is to be expected therefore that workers who come into a region seeking jobs will be likely to prove long term when they find them. In addition this could explain why they are involved in the more labourious but better paying work at bananera fincas.

Only three women out of the total of the 26 interviewed completed their education at school and college. The rest left school at an average age of about 12 years. Their personal situations varied widely between married, divorced, separated, single and those living with an unmarried companion. However without exception, where ever the women had children but were living separately from the father, he shared no responsibility for the upbringing of the children.

### **SITRAB**

A study carried out by SITRAB (Syndicato de Trabajadores de Agricultores y de Plantaciones) interviewed all of the women working in the 7 bananeras in the surroundings of Siquirres. These results on a larger scale give a similar picture. Of the women working they found that 90% had children whose partner had no current responsibility for them. In addition they claimed that 45% were illiterate and the remaining 55% had incomplete education. These women were divided into 22% who lived with their parents, 11% rented houses, 4% lived in their own house and the remaining 63 % lived as "precarios". This term is used for a person who lives on a piece of unoccupied land they have taken themselves but to which they do not have formal legal ownership, a squatter. The situation is common in the Atlantic Zone and it is the responsibility of the IDA to manage the system whereby such land may be legally awarded to petitioners. Until this happens, however, it is difficult to develop the land or use it to cultivate crops because credit cannot be obtained from the bank without proof of ownership.

### **Campesinas**

As far as the occurrence of campesinas working temporarily in the bananeras was concerned, I came across only two such cases. Indeed when I asked around the empacadoras as well, it seemed to be true that although this situation does occur it is not common. The majority of women who work in bananeras are a separate sphere to those involved in farming the land. This is not however to diminish the importance of the bananeras as a source of income to campesina. That a high proportion of those

campesinas who are involved in paid work do this through bananeras does not, however, mean that a high proportion of the workers in bananeras will be campesinas. It must be remembered that only a small number of campesinas are primarily involved in off-farm work in the first place, ( 7.8%, R. Alfaro, 1994).

### **5.1 Limitations**

This study has been limited for a number of reason, not least of which was due to the time constraints I faced. Time permitting I would hope to carry out more interviews so as to be justified in going deeper in to the story of banana empacadoras in the Atlantic zone. As it stands these interviews provide only a preliminary study and are of more value for what they reveal individually.

My time constraints extended not over the whole project but also in the particular interviews and so that at times I could not go into the depth I would have liked. This was forced on me by the necessity of interviewing the women whilst they worked which curtailed really long depth discussions. I fear my Spanish skills may have also been a hindrance at times.

The women themselves proved to have very different reactions to my interview. Some were wary and reticent, giving almost only monosyllabic replies. Others however were happy to answer me more freely and expressively, allowing me access to a part of their lives. I hope I have managed to do justice to them in this report by providing at least some accounts of those lives they let me see.

## **6. Acknowledgments**

My list of acknowledgments is long because I was fortunate enough to receive help from all corners. Initial interviews with Rodrigo Alfaro, Isle Acosta from Upagra, Patricia Gamboa from ACPSAA and Doris Monge from SITRAB helped set me on the right path. I especial benefited from the research and reports lent to me by Laura Perez. Of course I could not have completed this report without the kindness of the foremen who allowed me to interrupt and distract the women workers in the empacadoras. And it was the patience of those women that allowed me to complete the interviews.

My work was supervised by Dr.Bas Bouman and I am especially grateful to him for all his time and advice as well as the interest he showed throughout my work. I would also like to thank Dr.Hans Jansen for making my time here possible.

It was thanks to all the people at the project that my time here was so enjoyable. The Ticos and Ticas were tireless in teaching me Spanish and were always ready to help me wherever I needed it. Lastly it was the other students here provided a fund of continual support and encouragement. So thanks to Hugo, Harke, Aria and especially Karel for teaching me cooking, dancing, pool and being there whenever I needed him.

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Figure 1. Study Area in the Atlantic Zone

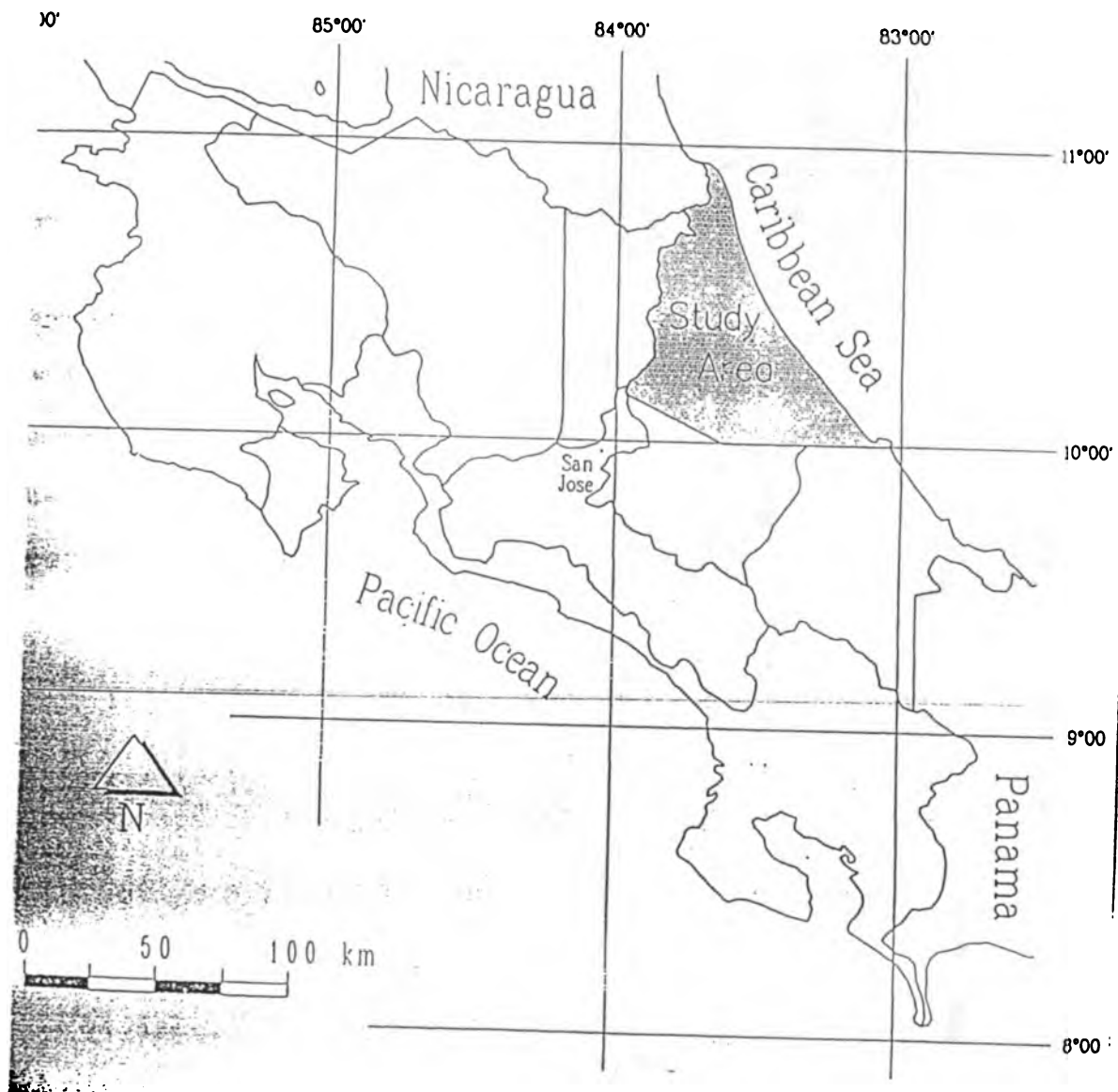


Figure 2. Map showing areas used in the interviews



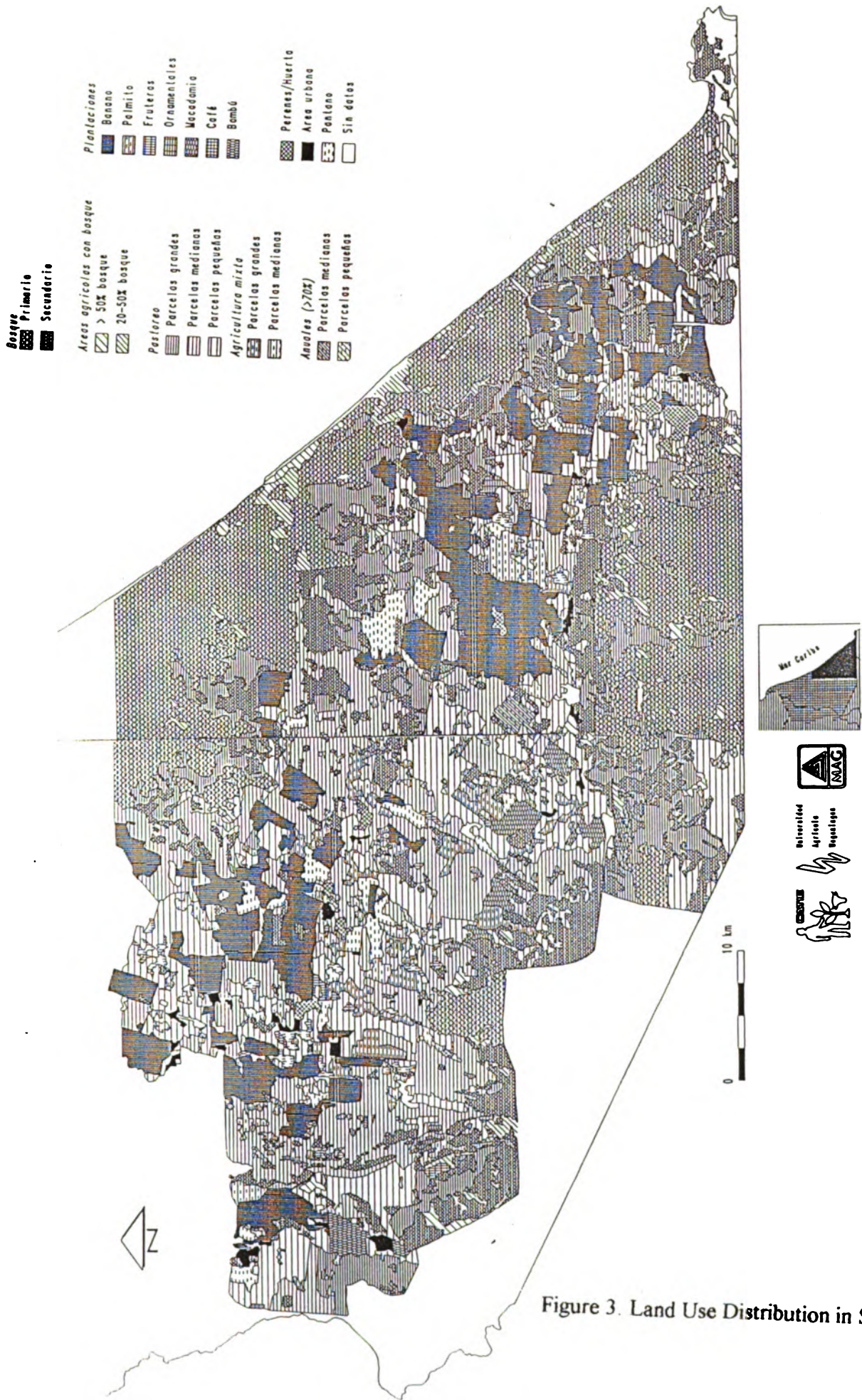


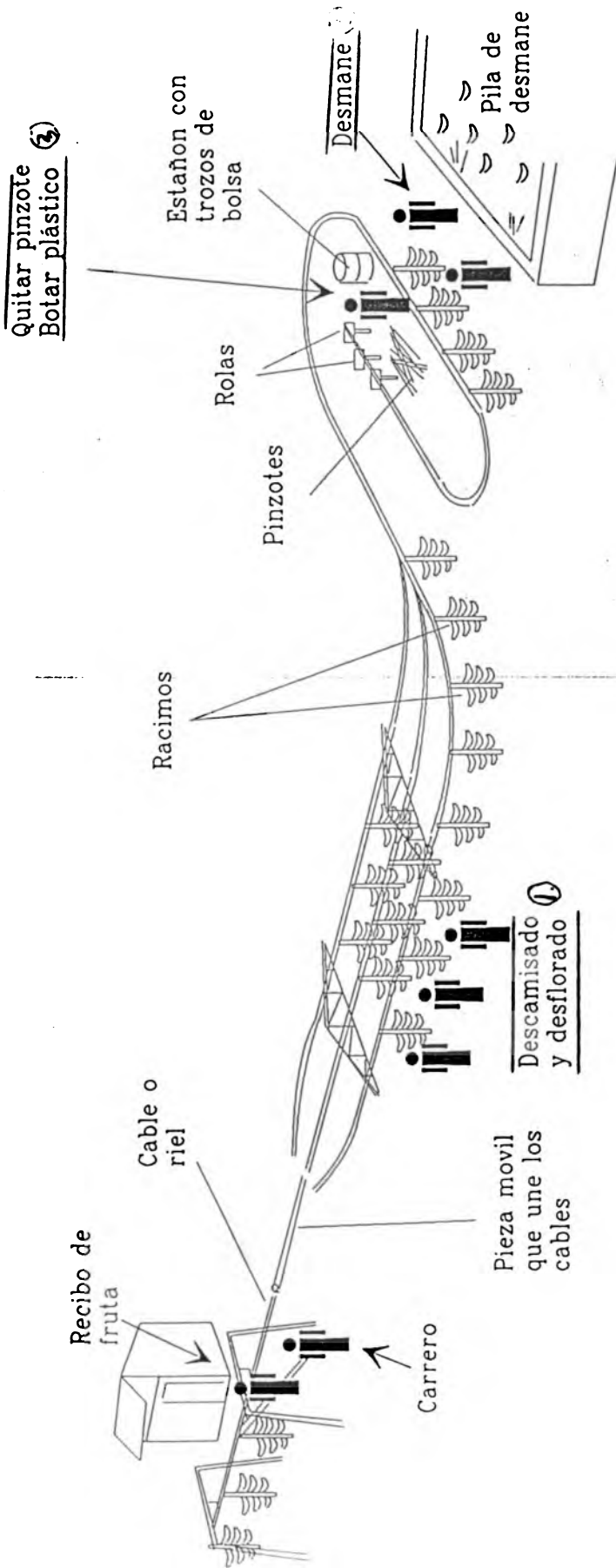
Figure 3. Land Use Distribution in Study Zone



Figure 4. Packing Processes occurring in the Banana Empacadoras

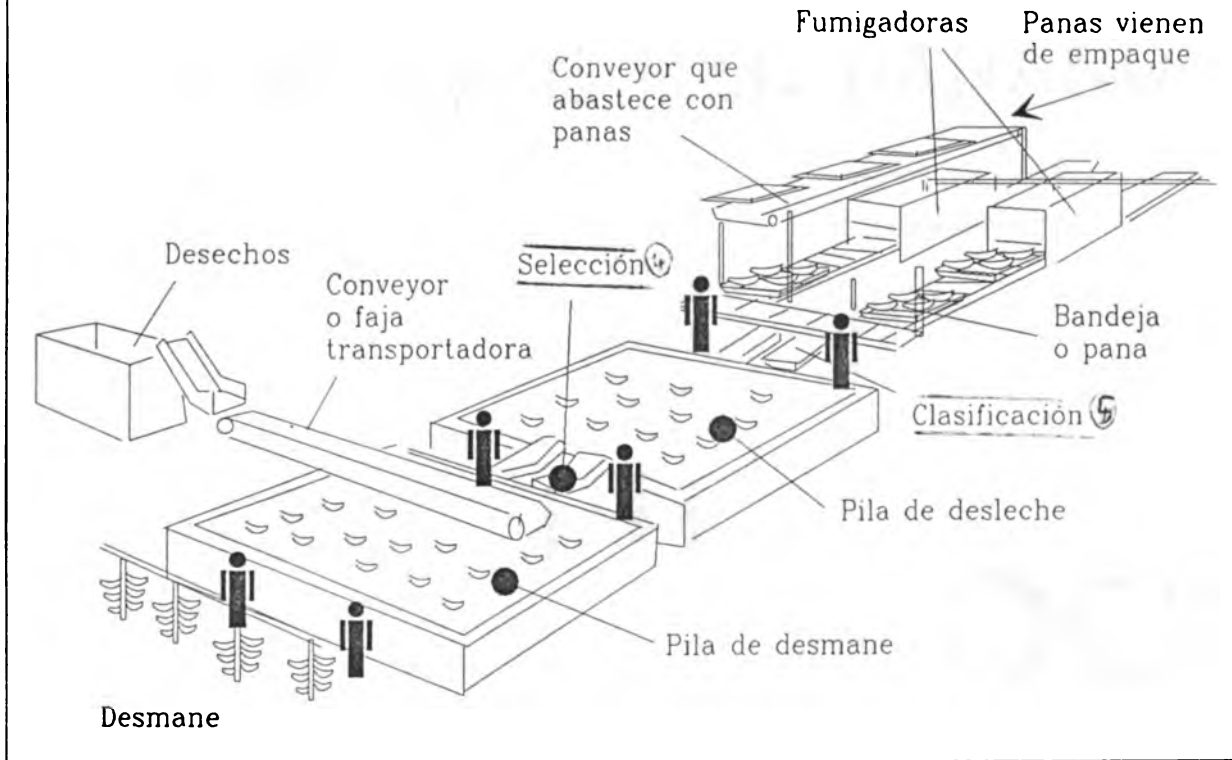
# EMPAQUE DEL BANANO

## PARTE I

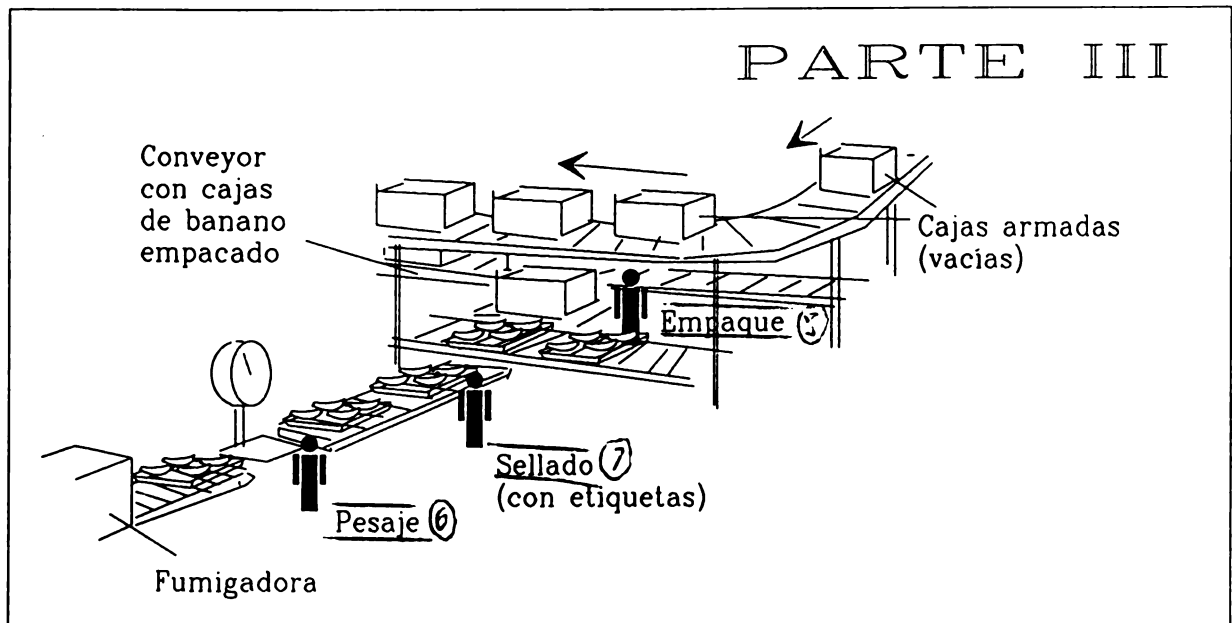


# EMPAQUE DEL BANANO

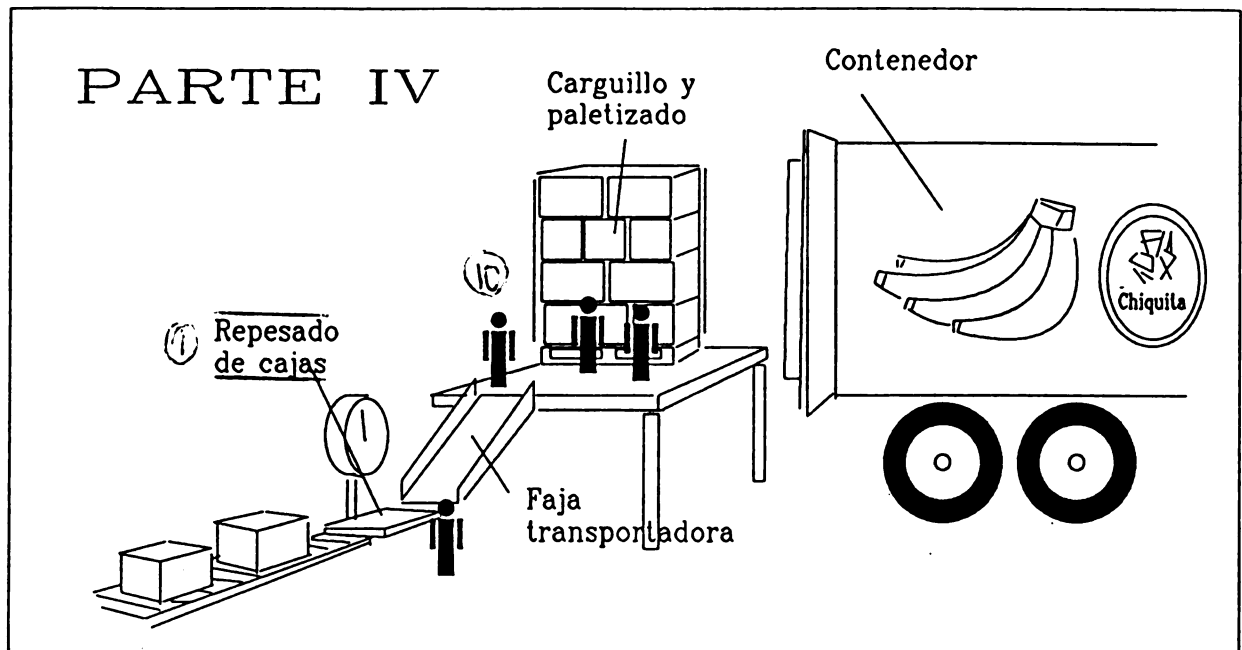
## PARTE II



## PARTE III



# EMPAQUE DEL BANANO



**Appendix**

La Entrevista

¿Cómo se llama usted?

¿Hace cuánto tiempo que empezó a trabajar aquí?

¿Qué hace en su trabajo? ¿Cuales tareas?

¿Su situación de trabajo es fija o se traslada y hace tareas diferentes dentro de la finca? Por ejemplo, colocar los sellos un día y escoger los banafios otro día.

¿A qué hora de la mañana empieza su trabajo normalmente y a que hora termina?

¿Cuántas horas trabaja usted aquí durante el día?

¿Sus horas de trabajo varían o siempre son las mismas?

¿Trabaja usted cada día de la semana?

¿Trabaja usted continuamente todo el año?

¿Por cuánto tiempo a una vez?

¿Qué hace los días que no esta aquí?

| Casada                        | Unión libre                           | Divorciada<br>Separada                       | Soltera |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|---------|
| ¿A qué edad se caso?          | ¿Por cuánto tiempo han estado juntos? | ¿Recibe alguno tipo de ayuda de parte de el? |         |
|                               |                                       |  |         |
| ¿En qué trabaja su compañero? |                                       |  |         |
|                               |                                       |  |         |

¿Tiene usted hijos? ¿Cuántos años tienen?

|       |  |  |  |  |  |
|-------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Hijos |  |  |  |  |  |
| Hijas |  |  |  |  |  |

¿Cuántos años tiene usted?

¿Durante el día que hacen sus hijos? ¿Quién mira por ellos?

¿A qué distancia vive usted de la finca?

¿Cuál es su dirección?

¿Hace cuánto tiempo que esta viviendo allí?

¿Usted ha vivido siempre en la provincia de Limón?

-¿En qué provincia y que pueblo nació?

-¿Cuántos años tenia cuando salio de su provincia?

-¿Porqué la salio?

-¿Porqué decidió venir a vivir aquí en esta provincia?

-¿Planea continuar viviendo aquí o quisiera trasladarse a otra parte ?

¿Fue a una escuela?

¿Por cuántos años.

¿Fue a uno colegio?

¿Por cuántos años?

¿Qué hizo usted después de su educación?

¿Cuál fue su primer empleo?

¿Cuáles otros empleos ha tenido antes de este?

¿Cómo obtuvo este empleo?

¿Tiene otros empleos, pagado o no?

|                          |                    |                       |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| ¿Qué hace en las noches? | Con Paga:          | Sin paga:             |
|                          | Las limpiezas      | Las domesticas        |
|                          | Las obras manuales | Los estudios          |
|                          | Otros              | Las obras de la finca |
|                          |                    | Otros                 |

¿Quisiera quedarse aquí en este empleo a largo plazo?

¿Le gusta este empleo?

¿Quisiera quedarse en su situación actual o quisiera realizar otra labor dentro de la finca?

¿Siente que a usted le tratan de la misma manera que a los trabajadores, en las obras

el salario

el trato en general

¿Sabe si usted es elegible de algún tipo de seguridad social en su retiro?

¿Qué piensa que pasaría si se enferma o tiene un accidente dentro del empleo?

¿Qué pasa si usted queda embarazada?

¿Tiene algún tipo de seguro para estos casos?

¿Hay algunos privilegios que usted recibe después de un cierto tiempo de trabajo?

¿Esta viviendo en una casa dada por la empresa?

¿Tiene que pagar alquiler otros costos?

¿De qué manera le pagan, por hora, día, mes, por caja de producción o por tarea?

¿Le pagan al contado?

¿Como arregla sus gastos semanal?

Por lo general, en qué gasta el dinero: los alimentos

el alquiler

los artículos para los niños

La ropa

Las cosméticos

Diversión

Los cursos de un idioma

Los artículos para su esposo

Los artículos para la finca

### *En la finca:*

¿Cuántas hectáreas tienen ustedes en total? ¿Cuáles cultivos tienen ustedes?

maíz

frijoles

plátano

pastos

ñame

yuca

cacao

otros

¿Cuáles animales tienen?

¿Su esposo contrata peones?

¿El los contrata por todo el año o solamente por un periodo, por ejemplo para cosechar?

¿Por qué prefiere trabajar aquí en este lugar que en la finca?

¿Qué piensa su esposo de que usted esta trabajando fuera del hogar?

¿Ayuda en la finca en alguna manera?

¿Qué hace en las mañanas antes de irse a la fabrica?

¿Qué hace en las noches después de regresar a su casa?