



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release To PM's, MAY 14, 1958

INTERIOR RODENT CONTROL MEN HELP FIGHT INVASION OF HAITI RICE FIELDS

"Der -- twa -- cat -- patat" -- and down goes another sweet potato; which means the end of one or more of the rats invading Haiti's valley of the Artibonite, feasting on the rice crop and threatening the health of the residents.

In mid-March the United States Department of the Interior, through its Fish and Wildlife Service, answered a hurry-up call from the International Cooperation administration to combat the plague which had hit the valley months previously, but which was then rising to a point of fury. A trained rodent control man from the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife was rushed to the Island by airplane to develop local control techniques. This was followed up by the assignment of a control technician on an emergency basis to supervise the actual control work. In less than a week "things were moving".

Actual extermination began while the organization to handle the problem was being built. Numerous impediments such as lack of equipment and of trained personnel were soon overcome and the extermination campaign got underway, picking up momentum as it moved. Its effectiveness is evidenced by the fact that check-backs show from 10 to 80 lifeless rats on an acre of rice land. How many more had been killed but not seen could not even be guessed.

By the end of April the Fish and Wildlife Service rodent specialist had completed his work--established a bait-mixing plant, supervised the improvising of mixing equipment, set up and trained a field force--and returned home. The work of ridding the valley of its plague is being handled now by the permanent unit of the Haitian Government known as the Organization for the Development of the Valley of the Artibonite, under the direction of Leonce Bonnefil of the Ministry of Agriculture.

That part of the campaign which centers in the villages and around the farmsteads is necessarily moving slower than the field job. In the all-out campaign in the rice fields a poison is used with chopped sweet potatoes as the bait. Around the villages and farmsteads an anticoagulant is used. Anticoagulants are slower acting but effective. Because they must be taken repeatedly to kill, anticoagulants do not offer any serious threat to human life.

There are more than 80,000 acres in the valley of the Artibonite and all of these acres must be treated. Each farmer treats his own land--average about two acres--under the supervision of an agent, who in turn is under an agronomist. Every hour paces the poisoned bait is dropped in the field. The colloquial French "dieux, trois, quart, patate"--two, three, four, potato--is further localized and euphonized into "der, twa, cat, patat". (The specialist explains that "one" is not counted because "that's where the man is standing".)

At the bait mixing station 20 women are being used to cut the sweet potatoes. Seven men run the mixers and do the heavy work. The mixers are oil drums converted by local welders. One agronomist supervises the treating of from 7,000 to 15,000 acres of land. There are five or more agents to each agronomist. They will have from 300 to 420 farmers volunteering each day to help in the extermination work. There are about 33,000 farmers in the valley. At present approximately 2,500 acres a day are being treated.

x x x