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SAIGON--This is the story of the three little pigs of Vietnam. It is one of the most visibly effective, American-sponsored programs in rural Viet Nam, to which the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas have many arguments, but no real answer.

In early 1962, American provincial representatives for the Agency for International Development (AID) began distributing or improved white pigs from the Mekong Delta throughout the entire countryside. The program called for a package deal in which eight bags of cement would be given to build a combination pig sty-compost-pit, while three improved pigs and American surplus corn would be loaned to the farmer. One of the pigs would later be marketed, which would repay the entire \$50 cost of the venture; the others would be kept for breeding.

"The pigs had a fantastic impact," one American agricultural technical explained casually: "The farmers followed the old Chinese custom--and daily washed their pigs. Some of them put red ribbons around the ear of the pig. Almost all of them became a pet for the children.

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"Of course, we had a few problems. Some of the Vietnamese farmers had never even seen cement before and they didn't understand why they should have cement-floored pig sty and compost-pit when for centuries they had moved the pig waste out on the ground. Some of the farmers moved their cots into the compost-pit area of the pig sty; some of them put the pigs in their house and moved their family into the pig sty. After all, it was better than their dirt-floored house. Some of the farmers put, tiled roofs on the pig with curlics use of an ancient Chinese temple. They became the new cloths symbol in the village; we never could understand why they made them so elaborate.

"Then, of course, the most profitable time to sell the pig is when he's about one-year old," he continued. "But the Vietnamese let the pig get fatter and fatter and sell him only when they need the money. They use the piggy as a living bank."

He explained that at first the richer village families got the pigs, or the friends of the local Vietnamese government agricultural technicians; now--three years and 40,000 pigs later--"the thuc nhien pig has seeped into all levels of the village strata.

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The neighbors buy little pigs from the first family to have them. In one northern city, two years ago you wouldn't see one improved pig a day come through the slaughter house; now about one-third of a day's production is the improved breed."

He explained that the Viet Cong political cadre attempt to sabotage the program by telling the farmer that it is a "giveaway program" rather than a loan, so that the farmer will not make the repayment to the government. So far, the rate of repayment has been low, but in most of the cases the 18-month deadline for repayment has not been reached.

"The pig program doesn't make the farmer pro-government or pro-Viet Cong," the technician explained. "But it does expose him to government cadre, to the government administration and to an American veterinarian. Maybe this is the first time in the farmer's life that the government has done something to help him. So gradually, it creates a better feeling for the government.

"The Viet Cong do not steal the pigs and we have lost very few of our pig herds to the Viet Cong."

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In addition to the pig program, Vietnamese agricultural technicians, assisted by Americans, have also started programs for better ducks, chickens, cattle, and a wider distribution of water buffaloes which are used to pull the farmer's plow. Other technicians have established experimental stations for improving rice seed (which some Vietnamese prefer to eat rather than use for seeding)

Recently, Vietnamese agricultural agents conducted three-day courses on improved farming techniques for farmers during the slack seasons; twenty piastres (thirty cents) was given the farmer for lunches "and that really had an impact," one American agricultural expert explained. "It was part of our pacification program; but the Viet Cong even welcomed the agents into their areas to help their farmers."

In other another instance, Vietnamese government administrators have implemented a credit-loan system whereby farmers can buy fertilizer before the rice planting, but repay the loan after harvest. Production has more than doubled in some areas; in other areas small irrigation pumps have been bought on loan which allows two or three crops of rice a year instead of only one.

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The Viet Cong retort that the fertilizer will destroy the soil; that in the first year of using fertilizer, production will increase but in future years it will drop; that the government will double the price when it comes to paying the loan or that the government will make the farmers dependent on the fertilizer year after several years and then skyrocket the price.

"So the poor Vietnamese farmer, who has alot of superstition and no knowledge of chemical ingredients, he's in the dark, an American technician said. "The Viet Cong play on the farmer's past lack of faith in the government."

American-supported rural economic aid is scattered in the secure "oil spots" in each of Vietnam's 49 provinces, which at times underscores the impact that it has had nationwide. The Communist-initiated war has produced an economic deterioration and social upheaval in the countryside as young farmers are drafted instead of planting rice, as large tracts of land are abandoned because of Viet Cong pressure, when other large tracts, now uncultivated, could be developed into excellent farming land. Despite this, the standard of living has improved during the past ten years; ten years ago a bicycle was "a status symbol;" now motorcycles, three-wheeled Lambrettas, bicycles and buses are regularly seen in the countryside.

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(A Vietnamese factory produces locally bicycles and puts a USAID emblem on them as a status symbol).

The nation-wide statistics on education are also impressive. In 1955, 329,000 pupils attended elementary public school; in 1964 the number had increased to 1.5 million students. In 1964 alone, 900 new rural schools were built and 1000 elementary education teachers were trained--a total of 4,600~~0~~ rural schools were built in the decade. In 1955, there were 2,900 university students in Viet Nam; by 1964, the number had increased to 20,000 with a new university established in the northern provinces. More than 2500 Vietnamese students and technicians have been sent to America through USAID programs for advanced degrees.

However, the current population growth is 2.6 per cent yearly.

In the rural health field, Vietnamese villagers often find it difficult to understand what has been prevented-- such as cholera epidemics or malaria eradication. During the past six years, however, the American-backed 842 million malaria eradication program, part of a world-wide effort, has dropped known malaria cases from 7.22 cases per 1000 to less than one per cent.

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More than one million Vietnamese farm homes have been sprayed twice year; more than six million persons had been directly affected by the spraying. The Viet Cong propagandists told the villagers that the spray would cause their thatched roofs to crumble; or would kill their cats and chickens.

"The Viet Cong say the farmers don't have enough cats to eat all the rats," one American medical expert explained, "and the rats eat rice. They use this argument when there's a poor crop rice and a good crop of rats--and it's very effective with the peasants."

The malaria rate has dropped to the extent that medical experts simply keep tabs on it by collecting blood samples.

"The Viet Cong spread the word that the Americans were collecting Vietnamese blood to give to the wounded Americans," the medical expert continued. "This even happened on the outskirts of Saigon. One American educational lecturer started to give a lecture on the taking of these blood samples for malaria control; suddenly all the men and little kids started throwing rocks at him.

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The police had to escort him out--all because of that outlandish Viet Cong propaganda. But Vietnamese people don't like to give blood; they are superstitious about that and it's very strange to them."

More than 8000 rural health workers are currently operating in the Vietnamese countryside ; nine gleaming white surgical suites, costing \$900,000 each, have been established throughout the country and are staffed by Americans, Filipinos, New Zealanders, Australians, and Italians.