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“Competition for Resources in a Changing World:
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Cattle Cooperatives in Cuba: How Will Policy Changes Affect their Members?

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Abstract

Cuba is apparently heading to a period of changes in the way it handles its economy. In the agricultural sector, the country is reorganising the Agricultural Ministry and its local offices and enterprises, in order to give more freedom to production entities. Two of the sectors that are intended to benefit the most from these changes are the cooperative sector and individual smallholders, as markets are opened up for the first and new land is allocated to the second. In light of these changes and the scarce published information on the rural sector of Cuba, a study with 30 cattle cooperatives and their members was carried out in the eastern part of the country. The study included a survey of household welfare of cooperative members, combined with an analysis of aspects such as production, economic success and resource use at cooperative level. Qualitative and quantitative methods were combined in order to get a picture of the production problems at cooperative level, and the impact that their economic success has on the poverty levels of their members. The possible impacts that the changes in policy could have on this sector are analysed as well. It was found that households in general spend more than half of their income on food, and food availability, diversity and quality were their most pressing needs. Other aspects that negatively affect the perception of life quality for the interviewed households are related to the dwellings and access to hard currency. Contrary to expected, there was little relationship between the economic success of the cooperative and the welfare of the members, suggesting that policy changes geared towards agricultural productivity would not necessarily have an important impact on the households.

Keywords: Cooperatives, Cuba, economic reforms, rural poverty