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Agriculture: In Poor Countries, Experts Set Up Shop to Help Farmers Handle Plants and Insects

By **DONALD G. McNEIL Jr.**

Many poor countries offer no agricultural services to subsistence farmers and have little or no money for cars and fuel that would let agents journey to rural areas to offer help. Now a development organization based in Britain wants to step into the breach by expanding a program of plant-health clinics in many more countries.

The program dispatches experts to set up shop in villages on market day and invite farmers to bring in diseased plants and local insects. Diagnoses are made on the spot, or samples may be sent to overseas laboratories. Local people are trained to eventually take over and support the clinics by charging small fees.

The organization, **CABI**, based in Wallingford, England, now runs clinics in **Bangladesh, Bolivia, Congo, India, Nepal, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Vietnam**; it hopes to expand to 40 countries. A CABI spokeswoman said a study had shown that farmers who used its Bolivian clinics were earning an extra \$4 a day.

CABI turned 100 this year. The first three initials stand for its former name, the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux, which succeeded the Imperial Institute of Entomology. (The I stands for International.)

The organization was founded by Sir Guy Marshall, a British sheep farmer in Africa who collected weevils as a hobby; its first mission was to send entomologists to Africa to collect pests

for the **British Museum**.

It has done pioneering work in a host of areas, among them fighting locusts; using ladybugs as predators to protect sugar cane; tracing the collapse of Soviet science under Stalin; and cataloging fungi.