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September 21, 1964

Mr. Peter T. Coleman
District Administrator
Trust Territory of the Pacific
Masshalls District
Majuro, Marshall Islands

REPOSITORY DOE/PASO
COLLECTION DOE/NV
BOX No. 1228, ERDA #3
BIO-MED, DR. CONARD
FOLDER 01 thru 12/1967

Dear Pete,

I am taking the liberty of writing to you on a personal, informal basis regarding the possibility of the agricultural rehabilitation of Bikini.

It is doubtful that it would be worth starting such a project unless the Trust Territory has interest in a long-term project and would provide the necessary continuity. Since you did express some interest in our conversation in March 1963, I wonder what your opinion and ideas about the subject are at present.

As you may remember, several of us have been thinking for some time that this would be a worthwhile project from different points of view. First, it would probably demonstrate the feasibility of the rehabilitation of such an area, which would be of value to some of the "Plowshare" programs for peaceful uses of nuclear explosions. Second, replanting and management of areas that have been stripped of their topsoil would provide information of value in determining practical agricultural practices on what are now marginal or agriculturally sterile islets at any atoll. Thirdly, established productive groves would be present if the day should come that Bikini can be reoccupied. And, finally, radiometric analyses of the coconuts and other products would provide direct evidence when and if the time comes to assess whether or not Bikini Atoll, or parts of it, have become safe to reoccupy. As to the last point, I don't think it matters whether we are talking in terms of years or tens of years.

There is another possibility that may or may not be significant. Since the levels of radioactivity in copra are among the lowest of any plant material, it is likely that copra could be harvested even before the area could be permanently reoccupied.

(Pete, I have no idea whether or not any real thought has been given to the reoccupation of Bikini. It seems to me that with the population expanding rapidly in the Pacific it is only a matter of time before pressure develops to do so. What is your opinion?)

As I see it, the project should be primarily under the direction of the Trust Territory Agriculturalists working with Marshallese as much as possible, but with the cooperation of groups such as ours and with the financial support of another agency such as the AEC. As you are no doubt well aware, funds for new projects are very difficult to come by in these days of cutbacks of established projects. It is therefore important that all possible ammunition for justification be assembled before seriously exploring possible avenues of support and that the planning be such that the potential results would serve as broadly as possible.

I want to make it clear that this is still just at the "thinking about it" stage. Our participation, if desirable, would have to be very limited. If you have a strong feeling that it should be done I would be glad to take up the matter in detail with our Director, Dr. Donaldson. He has given some thought to the idea and I feel sure that if a strong enough case can be made he would be most helpful in advising on the draft of a proposal and in getting the proposal into the most receptive channels.

Mr. Allen has probably told you that the test plots at Rongelap are showing positive differences between treated and untreated plots in the growth and condition of coconut seedlings. The most spectacular differences continue to be in the sand near the shore at Kabelle Islet, but are also very definite at the Rongelap Islet plantation.

The levels of radiocesium and radiostrontium in the land organisms continue to decline slowly in most areas at Rongelap. However, the radionuclides in fish have declined much more rapidly and are now so low in some fish as to be undetectable by methods we have used in the past.

Best regards,

Edward E. Held
Research Professor

EEH:jhp