

Is the Motavian Model Outmoded?

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The history of Motavian terraforming is the history of strong willed pioneers struggling to tame the hostile environment. That it is a success story is beyond doubt, but can this model survive the increasing demands for Motavian produce?

When walking the boulevards of central Paseo, it is hard to imagine that just four generations ago, the capital of Motavia was little more than a precious man-made oasis in the midst of the planet wide desert. Even from *Central Tower* – the impressive colossus of modern architecture in glass and ceramic steel, rising forty-six stories above street level, that will be the seat of the Motavian government as of the upcoming elections – the desert is nothing more than a distant haze of tan at the horizon.

This is thanks to the enormous success of Motavia's decentralised terraforming scheme. Instead of on central climate control facility, the early settlers preferred to build with their hands, bringing change with them to their new homesteads. Each community shaped their own surroundings, and with an abundance of lands for the farms to grow into, the economic incentives alone were enough to ensure a quick pace for the process.

Economical figures also speak plainly of the success story: most of the Motavian produce – 85% last financial year – is exported. This includes everything from raw vegetables, to highly processed goods such as fine wines from the calciferous re-

gions around Uzo.

Off-world demands seem to be insatiable, and with more than two thirds of the planet left to terraform it is no wonder that the process is continuing uninterrupted today, in the hands and minds of landowners great and small.

One such landowner is *Rudger Ashleigh*, 36. He currently divides his time between the farm in the municipality of *New Camineet* and his job with the Motavian law enforcement agency.

New Motavian Gazette: HOW IS IT COMBINING FARMING AND POLICE WORK?

Rudger Ashleigh: Well, it can be taxing, as you've guessed. Motavia isn't densely populated, except for Paseo, you know, so we have to do a lot of moving about.

I travel regularly all over the planet on police business, but wherever I go, what I look forward to is coming back here, to the farm. That's what keeps you going at the end of the day. That's the case for me at least. You want to know how the apples are coming along, or the flowerbeds, or whatever is in season, so you want to crack the cases quick.

NMG: YOU GROW MANY DIFFERENT CROPS HERE?

RA: Yeah, but it's all small scale: fruit and vegetables for me and my relatives. Just a little excess for the local market. Since it isn't my main income, I don't need to specialise.

I like that, I like attempting to get different things to grow. It's like a puzzle, and a really challenging one sometimes.

Oh, and I keep a flower garden as well. Flowers aren't produced this far from the space ports, usually. But since it's for my own pleasure mainly. . .

NMG: ANY NATIVE PLANTS?

RA: Some, desert flowers and cacti for decoration mainly. There's not a great market for desert plants, but many of the succulents are perfectly edible.

The native Motavians, insofar as they had farms, used natural caves for their agriculture. That sounds almost like our dome farms and I'd like to look into it when I have the time. Plenty of time.

NMG: YOU MENTIONED RELATIVES?

RA: Yeah, my grand folks were among the early settlers here in New Camineet. I've got a brother and a couple of cousins here. When I'm away, my niece Shilka usually takes care of the farm for me - she's got nearly as much of an interest in it as I do!

NMG: NO MRS. ASHLEIGH-TO-BE IN THE STORY?

RA: Ha ha! I think I prefer not to comment on that!

NMG: WHAT ABOUT THE COMMUNITY SPIRIT HERE IN NEW CAMINEET?

RA: Ah, yes. If I need a hand - or Shilka does, when I'm away - the other villagers always lend a hand, of course. That's the Motavian way, or spirit of you will. Has been like that since the beginning. Even the natives, nowadays.

NMG: THE NATIVES HELP AT THE FARMS?

RA: Yes, quite often. In the early days of settlement there were conflicts, but now they've realised that terraforming and farming makes their lives easier too. They happily volunteer when there's a new community pump to install or what have you.

They make lousy farmhands, though, at least if you expect that you can hire them. They don't seem to get the concept of a permanent job. Or maybe they do, but just don't like it. I guess it's to do with their nomadic ways from before we came here. But if you barter for their ser-

vices, or hire them for short term work, they do good work. Many of them are actually highly skilled mechanics.

NMG: SO THE *Motavian model* WORKS WELL?

RA: Oh, yes! Very! There's never a shortage of hands when it comes to opening a new plantation of expanding irrigation, and when a neighbour's land is threatened with draught you help. Everyone knows that the more land is bound up by plant life, the easier it is keeping the sands at bay.

Also, the desert critters don't care about farm borders. You know that we still get the giant desert bugs out here from time to time? Just last season we torched an ant-lion burrow three clicks to the south.

Anyway, it's everyone's problems, and that binds the community together.

NMG: ANY THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE?

RA: I know there's an increasing pressure on implementing a centralised, large scale climate control concept. We can't expand quickly enough to meet the demands this way, they say. That might be true, but they don't see what we've built here. And that it's good. Once we've claimed an area, it stays claimed.

They're also proposing a more fully industrialised dome-farming. Sure, we use bio-domes too, but on a smaller scale. It's still a science, perhaps even an art, with us. What they propose is more engineering than agriculture, that's the way it seems to me at least.

NMG: IS THIS DISCUSSED WITHIN THE COMMUNITIES?

RA: Of course! Especially now, with the elections coming up, you hear it every day in every canteen all over the frontier. And let me tell you, it's mostly off-world interests that want [the change]. I travel a lot, as you know, and nowhere do you hear anyone saying anything positive about those ideas. Well, in Paseo I guess the story is a bit different, but out here, where the work is done, out here no-one

wants that.

NRG: SO YOU REMAIN HOPEFUL?

RA: Well, I'm glad farming isn't my main income, that's for sure, but I think we can argue our case. And we're a stubborn breed out here! We won't yield easily.

I'm mostly worried that their scare tactics will keep people from trying their luck out here. With the current practice, anyone can start a new farm out here – they're more than welcome! – but if there's a fear that small places like this will be shoved

aside, that there won't be room for them in the central plan, then who will dare it? Then the Motavian model would break down. Who dares to start a farm if the governmental waterways might run your land dry in fifteen years? ■

• Joins us again tomorrow, as our series on the focal questions of the upcoming election continues with Huey Mahlay's in-depth look at *dome farming!*