

THE COCONUT REHABILITATION SCHEME


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The Three Plantation Industries

Of the three major plantation industries of Ceylon, the Coconut Industry covers the largest acreage and is the one in which the indigenous people of this country have the largest interest. It is unfortunate therefore that, of the three, it is the one which is in the most depressed condition.

The Island's Tea Industry has gone from strength to strength in recent years. I doubt whether many persons in this country, even among those who are closely connected with the plantation industries, fully realise the extent of the progress which the Tea Industry has made in recent years. The



Island's total annual production of tea has increased from approximately 240 million pounds just before the outbreak of the Second World War (1939) to nearly 380 million pounds last year (1955), i.e. an increase of over 50 per cent in a period of just over fifteen years. This truly spectacular increase has been achieved by the adoption of intensive cultivation methods and the most modern agricultural techniques. A report recently published by an International Organisation stated that the Ceylon tea industry used more fertiliser per acre than any other agricultural industry in the world. This is an index of the efficiency with which the tea industry in this country is run—an efficiency which is reflected by the steadily increasing yield per acre which has been recorded by the industry in recent years.

In dismal contrast, the yields of the Island's Rubber and Coconut Industries have been falling rapidly. In the case of rubber, this fall in yield has been due partly to the great age of rubber trees on the majority of the Island's rubber estates and smallholdings, and partly to the intensive slaughter-tapping to which these trees were subject during and after the Second World War. To arrest this decline in the Island's rubber industry, the Government, in 1953, launched a comprehensive Rubber Rehabilitation Scheme, under which the owners of worn-out rubber lands are paid generous subsidies for replanting their lands with high-yielding varieties of rubber. This Scheme has been a great success. Over 50,000 acres of old rubber were replanted under this Scheme in the first three years of its operation (1953-56) and it is hoped to replant a further 100,000 acres in the next five years, making the total acreage of old rubber replanted under the Scheme 150,000 acres (or nearly three-fourths of the total area of uneconomic rubber in Ceylon) by the end of 1960.

In the case of the Coconut Industry, the fall in yield has been due partly to the advanced age of the coconut palms on the Island's estates and smallholdings and partly to the absence of proper manuring and other important cultivation practices. Most of the Island's coconut palms are over fifty years of age and only a very few estate-owners and smallholders have been

replanting their worn-out coconut lands with young palms. On the majority of coconut lands, too, especially those owned by smallholders, manuring is rarely done, and if it is done at all is not done intensively; small and inadequate doses of manure are applied spasmodically at irregular intervals.

The Coconut Rehabilitation Scheme

To arrest the decline in the Island's Coconut Industry and to improve the condition of the Island's estates and smallholdings, the Government decided to launch a Coconut Rehabilitation Scheme early this year. This Scheme is divided into two parts. The first part of the Scheme aims at stepping-up the pace of replanting on worn-out coconut lands by supplying select high-yielding coconut seedlings at subsidised rates. The second part of the Scheme aims at improving the yields of coconut estates and smallholdings by supplying fertiliser to owners of estates and smallholdings at subsidised prices.

Replanting with High-Yielding Seedlings

The first part of the Rehabilitation Scheme, i.e. the Scheme for supplying subsidised seedlings for replanting worn-out areas, is operated by the Coconut Research Institute. To produce the necessary seedlings, the Institute has set down a number of large Coconut Nurseries in the principal coconut growing districts of the Island. These nurseries are situated at Rathmalagar, Labuduwa, Walpita, Ibbagamuwa, Hettipola, Wilpotha, Dematawala, Kalawewa, Killinochchi, St. Anne's, Dunagaha and Wennappuwa. In addition, the Institute has recently opened-up an Isolated Seed Garden in the heart of Ambakelle Forest in the Chilaw district to supply high yielding seed-nuts for planting in these nurseries. The Institute will be distributing approximately 900,000 high-grade seedlings during 1956 and hopes to increase this number to approximately 1,200,000 seedlings in 1957. The seedlings distributed in 1956 will be sufficient for the new-planting or replanting of approximately 15,000 acres while the seedlings distributed in 1957 will be sufficient for the new-planting or replanting of approximately 20,000 acres. The seedlings which cost the Institute about 70 cts. each to produce are sold to estate-owners and smallholders at the subsidised rate of 30 cts. each. The resulting loss is met by an annual grant from Parliament, which now runs at over Rs. 800,000/- a year.

The Coconut Fertilizer Subsidy Scheme

The second part of the Rehabilitation Scheme, i.e. the Scheme for supplying subsidised fertilizer for use on coconut estates and smallholdings, is operated by the Coconut Rehabilitation Department which was set up in February this year. One-third of the cost of fertilizer is met as a subsidy from the Government in the case of estates (i.e. coconut lands over 20 acres in extent) and one-half of the cost of fertilizer in the case of smallholdings (i.e. coconut lands 20 acres or less in extent). The subsidy is an outright grant from Government and not a repayable loan.

Estates make their applications for fertilizer permits under this Scheme direct to the Coconut Rehabilitation Department. In the case of smallholdings, they are given the choice of either applying direct to the Department or applying through the nearest C.A.P. and S. Society or Coconut Co-operative Society. Smallholders are encouraged to apply through a co-operative society, but if any smallholder is able to make his own transport arrangements and prefers to deal direct with the Department he is completely at liberty to do so.

There are nine standard fertilizer mixtures approved for use under the Scheme. Estates and smallholdings which apply direct to the Department for their fertilizer permits can choose

one of these nine fertilizer mixtures. In special cases, however, an estate or smallholding which desires to use a fertilizer mixture other than one of the nine standard mixtures can do so. The maximum subsidy payable in such a case is limited to one-third of the cost of the highest-priced of the nine standard fertilizer mixtures. As a general rule, estates and smallholdings are allowed a maximum of 3½ cwt. of fertilizer per acre if the land is manured once every year or 2 cwt. of fertilizer per acre if the manuring is done once in two years. In exceptional cases, however (where the stand of coconut palms per acre is very high or where in addition to the mature palms on the estate or smallholding there are also a large number of young plants interplanted between the rows), fertilizer permits are issued for larger quantities of fertilizer. So far, permits have been issued to over 2,000 estates covering just over 200,000 acres and to nearly 10,000 smallholdings covering nearly 100,000 acres. The total extent of estates and smallholdings participating in this Scheme in 1956 is therefore approximately 300,000 acres, or little less than one-third of the total coconut area of Ceylon. Considering that the Scheme has been in operation for only eight months, this response is extremely encouraging. The total quantity of fertilizer for which permits have been issued to estates and smallholdings in 1956 is approximately 40,000 tons and the total subsidy payable if the full quantity of fertiliser authorised on the permits is actually purchased, will be approximately 5 million rupees. It is expected that in 1957 the subsidy payable on fertilizer purchased under the Scheme will increase to about 6 million rupees, and that when the Scheme is in full operation the annual subsidy will be in the region of 7 or 8 million rupees.

