

4000 HECTARES OF COCONUT LOST EVERY YEAR BUT THE PRODUCTION PER HECTARE IS INCREASING

A commercial crop, that is of considerable importance in Sri Lanka, where the area under cultivation is decreasing yearly is coconut. According to the Census of Agriculture reports, the land under coconut cultivation decreased from 466 000 ha in 1962 to 419 500 ha in 1981.

That is a loss of 46 500 ha. The drop from 1962 to 1973 averaged 1300 ha per year, and 1973 to 1981, 4000 ha per year as indicated below. The loss in coconut acreage is largely attributed to the development work that has taken place: construction of buildings, electricity transmission lines, roads and playgrounds in the rural areas.

1800	57 500 ha
1893	263 000 ha
1921	332 000 ha
1962	466 000 ha
1973	451 500 ha
1981	419 500 ha

If we assume that a similar decline in the acreage to continue after 1981, the area coconut cultivation in 1993 would be about 371 500 ha. This trend of events, is bound to have far reaching consequences on domestic consumption of coconuts and the surplus available for processing into export products.

The requirement of coconut by the year 1993 is estimated to be 3001 million nuts: 2093 for domestic consumption and 908 million for export purposes (CDA).

During the last six years, the national production has averaged 2502 million nuts per year,

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equivalent to 6120 nuts per ha per year. On that basis, the total production in 1993 would be about 2274 million nuts, ie 76% of the requirements.

One redeeming feature, when coconut statistics are studied critically, is that coconut production per unit area has increased after 1978. A production of 4800 nuts per ha in 1978 has increased to 5900 in 1984, on a basis of moving averages. That represents an increase of 23% over the 6 years: an average growth rate of 3.8% per year.



Production is largely related to the total rainfall and its distribution. In order to minimise these effects, four-years moving averages are presented in the figure. They even out the

peaks and depressions in production and indicate the trend of progress.

It is remarkable achievement of the Ministry of Coconut Industries and the affiliated Boards. The development work undertaken by the Ministry to increase coconut production per unit area has been successful. The rapid decline from 1970 to 1978 has been arrested and the upward trend created is still on the move.

The Coconut Cultivation Board has provided subsidies for rehabilitation of the coconut holdings, eg. for moisture conservation, controlling soil erosion and fertilizer application.

The Coconut Research Institute at Lunuwila has developed simple technology to produce 9500 nuts per ha per year under rain-fed conditions from most of the existing coconut holdings in the wet and intermediate climatic zones. Further, if the improved variety CRIC 65 is planted in new clearings or as replanting, production could reach 18 000 nuts per ha per year in the same climatic zones.

National development work has to be continued. Therefore, the loss in coconut acreage is likely to continue. New areas for planting coconut are scarce, except under irrigation in the Mahaweli Development Scheme and elsewhere in the dry zone. Under these circumstances, production per unit area has to be increased considerably, making use of the known technology.

In order to attain the production target of 1993, an accelerated development plan on the following lines should be carried out:

(a) Increase production to 9500 nuts per ha/yr in 60% of the acreage under coconut cultivation in the wet and intermediate zones, ie about 178 500 ha in 1993.

- (b) Increase production to 15 000 nuts per ha/yr in 20% of the area under coconut cultivation (14 800 ha) in the dry zone by providing irrigation facilities.
- (c) Decrease domestic consumption of fresh nuts by 25%, by promoting use of coconut milk powder and coconut paste.
- (d) Promote cultivation of about 100 000 CRIC 65 seedlings in home gardens.
- (e) Use only CRIC 60 seedlings in replanting and new clearings.

About 50% of the total area under coconut cultivation is in the intermediate zone, 30% in the wet zone and 20% in the dry zone (CDA).

The (a) programme will provide 1696 million nuts per year, (b) 222 million nuts, (c) a surplus of 394 million nuts and (d) 8 million nuts. The remaining area of 178 200 ha at 4500 nuts per ha/yr would provide 802 million nuts. The total amounts to 3122 million nuts in 1993.

There are certain pre-requisites that should be adopted, if a development plan to increase coconut production is to be more successful. Concentrate on areas that will give a quick response to improved management practices. Promote usage of fertilizer on a larger scale. Develop holdings on an area basis. And give a guaranteed price for coconuts at the farm gate level.