COCONUT SEED GARDENS IN SRI LANKA

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The coconut tree yields well for about 60–70 years. It is therefore essential that good quality seedlings are used for planting to ensure satisfactory yields during the later years. As a coconut tree takes about 5 years to bear, it is not economical to replace plants often. Growers who plant unselected seedlings from unproven parent palms often repent later on because of the poor yields they get. Also, they are in a dilemma, unable to decide whether or not to replace such poor palms.

The necessity to plant good seedlings was shown several decades ago. Progeny from parent palms selected for such characteristics as high yield, ability to withstand drought etc. is the most suitable for planting. However, it is not possible to obtain the national requirement of 2.2 to 2.5 million seednuts by this method. Such material could only be produced commercially from elite palms grown in seed gardens. The Coconut Research Institute, having identified this need, is making every effort to provide the entire national requirement of seednuts from seed gardens. To this end, the Institute has undertaken a programme of improvements to the existing seed garden and to establish new seed gardens. Some details of these projects are given below:

1. Improvements to the Isolated Seed Garden, Ambakele

An account of this seed garden, established in 1955, is given elsewhere in this issue. At this seed garden, the improved varieties Tall X Tall (CRIC 60) and Dwarf X Tall (CRIC 65) are produced. Recurrent droughts during the past decade have often adversely affected the yield in this seed garden. The production of Tall X Tall seednuts in 1985 and 1986 has been about 800,000 and 600,000 respectively. This is only about 32% and 30% of the total annual requirements of Sri Lanka.

The following improvements have been carried out at this seed garden to increase the yield:–

(a) The area planted to Tall X Tall has been increased by nearly 100 ac. in the recent past.

A section of the Isolated seed garden grown with tall and dwarf palms.

(b) An irrigation system has been installed in the entire seed garden to irrigate palms during periods of drought and thereby increase the yield.

With these improvements, over 1 million Tall X Tall seednuts is expected annually from this seed garden.

2. Establishment of new seed gardens

The yield from the Isolated Seed Garden is inadequate to meet the demand. The following new seed gardens were established to obtain the balance requirements of improved planting material.

2.1 Makandura Seed Garden, Gonawila

This seed garden, 85 acres in extent, was established in 1983 with the financial assistance of the Asian Development Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The seed garden is planted to Tall X Tall material selected from the Isolated Seed Garden. When in full production, this seed garden is expected to give a minimum of 400,000 seednuts.

Arrangements have been made to install an irrigation system to improve production.

2.2 Maduruoya Seed Garden, Bogaswewa, Dimbulagala

This 212–acre seed garden was established in Mahaweli System 'B' in 1986 under the East Coast Rehabilitation Project, funded by the European Economic Community.

About 100 acres of the seed garden are planted to Tall X Tall material selected from the Isolated Seed Garden.

Makandura seed garden.

Maduruoya seed garden

Arrangements have been made to install an irrigation system at this seed garden. This is expected to produce about one million seed-nuts annually, when in full production.

2.3 Special Seed Garden, Kirimetiyana, Lunuwila.

Preliminary arrangements have been made to establish this 100–acre seed garden at the end of the year.

Material specially selected from the Isolated Seed Garden showing high yielding and drought tolerant characters will be used to plant this seed garden. In view of the limited availability of this elite material, planting of this seed garden is phased over the next five years.

This seed garden will produce planting material capable of high yields, and possibly, tolerant to drought conditions.