

NEW EXTENSION APPROACH TO INCREASE INCOME FROM COCONUT ESTATES

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All research and extension efforts in the coconut sector are geared to increase the income generation from coconut lands. Improved estate management practices based on new recommendations, financing, inputs and advisory assistance contribute very much to the present state of the sector.

However, the circumstances under which coconut growers manage their lands are very much different from as they were in the past. Very high cost of labour and material inputs, depleted soils and adverse weather conditions necessitate efficient decision making in estate management for economically viable cultivation. Most coconut growers do not have opportunities to exploit the full potential of their lands due to lack of knowledge, guidance and encouragement. Although various technologies are available, most growers are unable to obtain the expected benefits due to various economic, personal, technical and locational problems. As a result, the level of productivity achieved by them are far below the actual potential of their lands.

In order to develop the sector, it is essential to intervene and change the activities and attitudes of coconut growers. The success of this intervention depends on how one can understand the socio economic situation and circumstances under which growers manage their lands at the present level.

Most coconut estates at present are in the hands of so called "fresh growers" who have had not much experience and interest in coconut cultivation. Such growers seem to be satisfied with low returns from their estates with the least expenditure in the light of escalating land prices. This situation is very common in ancestral properties. At present, people have a variety of ventures to invest their money for short term as well as long term revenue. Whatever investment, the major factor to be considered is the rate of return for the investment, in a particular period of time. Because of the wide time gap between investment and return, uncertainty and risk, the grow-



Why growers neglect their estates in this manner?

ers are reluctant to invest for the development of their lands. However, interested or progressive growers struggle to make use of technologies available in order to develop their plantations. Are they really achieving this objective? Our regular involvements with coconut growers has revealed many constraints faced by them.

Lack of knowledge to identify the potential and needs of their plantations on the basis of soil, climate and locational conditions, appears to be one of the main constraints. A thorough understanding on the potential of coconut estates is essential in the preparation of proper plans for short and long term investments. The knowledge required to identify the potential of a coconut land is not only confined to new cultivation technologies, but also farming experiences and marketing strategies. Nobody wants to invest on a project which would lead to a loss. Therefore, investment requires assurance of gaining a reasonable return whatever the business venture it may be. Business involving plantation agriculture suffers a high rate of risk and uncertainty due to factors beyond the control of the growers. High risk leads to poor assurance in gaining the expected returns for the investment. Adoption of appropriate technologies could reduce uncertainties involved in coconut cultivation.

A wide range of technologies has been introduced by the research institute considering the needs and constraints on the sector. The generation of these technologies is based on certain

laboratory and field experiments and the experience gained from very limited field applications. Social as well as economic impact of most technologies available have not been fully assessed under a variety of soils and climatic conditions existing in the coconut growing areas.

At the growers level, most of the recommended practices are to be adopted together as a package. The combined effect of these practices should exceed the sum of their individual effect, which has not been fully assessed under different physical environments.

The exploitation of full potential of coconut lands depends on the synergy of different technologies, which has to be assessed under growers conditions. Participatory activities with growers appear to be the most effective and economical method in obtaining the required information in bridging the technology gaps in the sector. Although growers have the interest and motivation they need outside assistance to develop their lands. With this objective the CRI has implemented a highly participatory programme with some selected progressive coconut growers.

This Persuasive Extension Programme has specific features over other conventional extension methods. Major elements in this programme are persuasive effects to adopt new technology and to exploit the full potential of estates. A higher level of grower participation is another feature of this programme. Identification and selection of in-

How many Coconut growers exploit the full potential of their lands?



terested or progressive growers is the first step in the implementation of this programme.

Subsequently their coconut lands are inspected by a team of specialists to assess the present level of production and productivity. The team will also identify the exact potential of lands. Collating all information gathered and along with comments from land owners, a comprehensive development plan is prepared for the development of their estates.

Using this report, coconut growers would be able to identify existing problems and limitations in relation to each estate, along with appropriate corrective measures. Necessary guidance in the implementation of different proposed programmes will be included in this report.

The striking feature of this report is the inclusion of details on costs and benefits for a period of six years. This will enable growers to decide on further investments for the development of their lands.

Although a small number of growers are initially benefitted from this service, their neighbouring land owners will also be motivated to adopt systematic estate development techniques adding multiple effects to this programme. As these extension efforts have been designed to assist growers to find solutions for their situation specific problems, the growing interest among these coconut land owners is encouraging. I have no doubt that the programme will bring about a high impact on the development of the coconut sector in Sri Lanka.

ONE DAY TRAINING PROGRAMMES

In addition to the various training programmes organized and conducted by the CRI, it was felt necessary to conduct a series of one day training programmes to serve the specific needs of those who are directly engaged in coconut cultivation. The first series commenced in 1993 and the series for 1994 and 1995 were successfully completed.

The scope of this endeavor is to cover the most important disciplines in coconut cultivation, such as replanting, soil moisture conservation, fertilizer, intercropping, pests and diseases and rehabilitation. Wider emphasis has been placed so as to enable the participants to devote a full day per subject, and also to participate only in subjects of their choice or where such knowledge is wanting. These programmes are conducted as appropriate at the CRIHQ, Ratmalagara Estate Madampe, CRI Walpita Estate, Walpita and consist of lectures in the morning session, demonstrations, field visits and group discussion in the afternoon session. The medium of instruction is Sinhala.

Those interested in this one day training programme series are kindly requested to contact the **Director, Coconut Research Institute, Lunuwila.**