

SUBSIDY SCHEME FOR PLANTING OF COCONUT ON CITRONELLA LANDS

By C.A. WICKRAMASURIYA,
Chief Advisory Officer, Coconut Research Institute.

At a meeting held on 16th December, 1958, the Cabinet considered a Memorandum on the above subject submitted by the then Acting Minister of Commerce and Trade. In this Memorandum it was suggested that the Government should subsidise the planting of coconut on citronella lands in the Matara and Hambantota Districts, because the cultivation of citronella had become uneconomic owing to the sharp fall in the price of citronella oil in the world market.

Originally planting up of 30,000 acres of citronella land was envisaged. But later, on a soil survey conducted by the Department of Agriculture, it was considered that only approximately 24,000 acres of land under 20 acres in extent were suitable for planting in coconut. It was therefore decided to replant this extent, over a period of 3 years at a rate of 8,000 acres, per year, commencing from 1960. Under the scheme the complete removal of citronella is optional and not obligatory and owners of land under 20 acres in extent are entitled to receive the following assistance:

Cash Subsidy and Fertiliser

- (a) Free coconut seedlings at a rate of 75 seedlings per acre of land.
- (b) Free fertilizer at a rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. per acre during the first year of planting. Thereafter fertilizer at half price at the rate of 1 cwt. per acre in the 2nd and 3rd years; 2 cwts. per acre in the 4th, 5th and 6th years and 3 cwts. per acre in the 7th and 8th years.
- (c) A cash subsidy of -/50 cts. annually for a period of 8 years will be paid for every seedling that is planted provided the plants are satisfactorily maintained.

The Scheme is being administered by the Coconut Rehabilitation Department and the Coconut Research Institute.

The Coconut Rehabilitation Department will supply the fertilizer as an extension of the Coconut Fertilizer Subsidy Scheme. The difference will be, that, while at present the Department meets only half the cost of the fertilizer applied on coconut small-holdings, in the case of the citronella lands the Department will meet the full cost of fertiliser during the first

year. In addition to this, the Department will pay eight annual cash subsidies beginning from the 1st year of planting viz. from May/June 1960, direct to the applicant on the basis of the report, of the Inspecting Officer of the Coconut Research Institute, that the seedlings have been satisfactorily planted and maintained.

Seedlings and Advisory Service

The Coconut Research Institute, on the other hand will be responsible for all other work under the Scheme, through the Planting and Advisory Divisions. The Planting Division will through a Central nursery produce the seedlings required for distribution to applicants during the three years of planting. The Advisory Division will be in charge of allocations, advice and demonstrations on correct method of planting, distribution of seedlings and fertilizer, follow up service and inspections for the payment of cash subsidies and recommendations. As additional staff was necessary to carry out this work, one District Coconut Instructor, 3 Coconut Instructors, 3 Typist/Clerks, 8 Field Attendants and one Office Attendant were recruited.

Work on this Scheme was initiated during the latter part of 1959. In the first instance applications for assistance to plant coconuts on citronella land during 1960 were called and a coconut nursery at Mapalana Government Farm in the Southern Province opened, to produce the necessary requirements of planting material.

The Field Staff have already been posted at Hakmana — Range I, Walasmulla — Range II, and Vitharandeniya — Range III, in the Matara and Hambantota Districts in charge of planting ranges. According to the present set up the Field Staff are immediately responsible to the District Coconut Instructor and through him to the Chief Advisory Officer for carrying into effect the above work.

Progress of the Scheme

Allocations of planting material and fertilizer for planting up 2,023 acres of citronella land up to one acre in extent during May/June 1960, have already been made. A manure store at Mapalana Coconut Nursery has been constructed for the storage of fertilizer which will be issued to applicants in 14, 28 and 56 lb. bags.

The Field Staff have personally visited a large majority of these lands and given owners of land advice and demonstrations on the correct method of lining and planting. Arrangements for the transport of seedlings too have been made and it is expected that the full quota of seedlings and fertilizer for planting 2,023 acres will be issued before the end of the South West Monsoon.