

DEVELOPMENT OF TEA ESTATES

D.H. KARUNATILAKE

Superintendent, Miyanawita Estate, Deraniyagala.

I believe that, in the interest of the estate, it is better to have a policy, well thought out and decided, so that in the long run the phased out implementation of it will progressively generate income which will make it viable under any type of fluctuating trading conditions, that will contribute much needed revenue to the organization.

There has been a marked growth of interest within the last few years in the quality of environment and the depletion of natural resources. Therefore, to begin with, it is of paramount importance or necessity to protect the natural resources of the estate.

Since this will be the case, not only for the agricultural development of the estate, but also for the preservation of natural topography of the property. The natural springs that provide water need protection and steps have been taken towards this end. It must be mentioned that one protected area did have a continuous flow of water during the severe drought in 1980.

In my view, all natural springs must be well protected and all greeny in its natural state. In other words, these areas well demarcated, will be minor protected reserves and establish fast growing plants, such as Bamboos, *Albizias*, etc. This serves another important purpose where the natural fauna and flora could be protected. Particular mention must be made of birds which need this sort of environment to live their natural life. In return, the birds destroy caterpillars and many other pests that are harmful to the plantation.

The planting of Giant Bamboo (large variety), Bamboosa (small variety) along large ravines and water courses prevents soil erosion and the embankment remains well protected, as this is an erosion-resistant vegetation. This could be established easily as it is the fastest growing plant in the world. The bamboo so planted could also

be wind-belts, checking the velocity of the wind. There is a great utility for Giant Bamboo (*Sinhala: 'Uma'*) and Bamboosa (*Sin: 'Bata-lee'*). The latter could be used for plucking baskets, weighing tats, etc. It must be mentioned that a permit is required to cut Bamboos, this itself shows the value and demand and the scarcity of this versatile plant. I have undertaken to fill large ravines with these plants, keeping the distance from the tea. It is my opinion that this could be done on an estate as a matter of policy and benefits stated here will automatically follow thereafter. Preservation of water sources is of prime importance to rubber estates, without which manufacture could not be done.

FERTILIZER

With the escalating price of fertilizers, serious consideration should be given for the application of fertilizers on a quantitative basis (*ie.* from bush to bush), where the number of grammes per plant will have to be determined at each application and put out accordingly. This will, I am sure, give beneficial results on a property, such as Miyanawita, where the stand/acre is so poor in the seedling area which amounts to 66.15% of the total extent in bearing.

FORWARD REPLANTING PROGRAMME

The present policy adopted is to plant the uneconomic tea lands that are suitable for VP tea and the balance area to be diversified into timber. It is my view that an uneconomic tea land is a moot point as far as estates are concerned. Therefore, I have undertaken an infilling programme in two Divisions. It is pertinent to point out here that, since extreme dry conditions are experienced from time to time, it is prudent, as a matter of policy that steps should be taken to plant a certain percentage of the area in seedling tea. The initial steps should be to assign an area for seed bearers. Towards this end, the senior Agricultural Advisers, with the services of the TRI, could help the estate Superintendents to establish suitable seed bearers.

FUEL RESERVES

Certain areas in the estate have been identified for growing timber. 29.63 hectares have already been planted with fuel wood, *viz.* Eucalyptus Toralian and Eucalyptus Grandis and Saligna. I have kept the planting distance closer (8' x 8' and 8' x 6') in order to obtain a reasonable girth and height, so that felling, unloading and splitting of these trees will not consume much labour. In my view, with closer planting 6' x 8', about 2,200 trees could be planted in a hectare. Assuming that about 1.50 cubic metres or two years could be obtained from a tree. This estate would require about 1,900 cu.m. per annum, or three-fourths ha. of timber. On this basis, 11½ hectares will have to be planted in timber, in order to make the estate self-sufficient in fuel. These areas could be replanted every 10-15 years, so that the estate will remain self-sufficient in fuel.

TIMBER RESERVES

You have suggested the growing of *Albizias* in a separate block, which is in demand for making chests for packing rubber. This is being implemented. I have planted 10 acres of Lunumidella about three years ago. These have attained a height of 15-20 ft now, which will come in very useful for future building construction. Few ravines have been planted with the fast growing *Alstonia* (*Sin: 'Havarinuga'*). This could be used for estate building work in about 15 years. I hope to try out a few other fast-growing timber species, in consultation with the Forest Department, in order to make the estate self-sufficient in timber requirements for the future.

A special variety of 700 plants of Jak have been planted along the sides of the cart-road and I am happy to say that some of them are now in bearing. More seeds will be put out to expand this programme. In the course of time, this will bring in a useful income to the estate. I am of the opinion that it is worth considering to farm timber and treat it as a crop, in an area not suitable for tea, rubber or any other crop.

INCENTIVES

I have introduced the undernoted incentives to all those who are involved in the plucking field:

- KPs and Asst KPs: Rs 4/- for increase of every over kilo/plucker; and,
Rs 3/- for increase of every kilo/hectare
compared to the corresponding month last year
- Supervisors: Rs 3/- for increase of every over kilo/plucker; and,
Rs 2/- for increase of every kilo/ha.
compared to the corresponding month last year
- Plucking Kanganies: Rs 2/- for increase of every over kilo/plucker; and,
Rs 1/- for increase of every kilo/ha.
compared to the corresponding month last year.

The output has improved to a fair degree. But a more attractive incentive by work study could improve the output further. Taking note of the present potential of Asamanakande, the incentive scheme presently in operation is giving some benefit. But not 100%. Therefore, a work study, I consider, is a healthy exercise.

In my view, it is unfair that only a certain section of the employees should get any extra remuneration for the work they do. It must be realised that it is the sum total of all employees in the estate that gives the income or profit to the estate. Hence, it is imperative that a formula be worked out to pay commission to the factory staff and an incentive to factory workers, as they do not get any extra remuneration, except the yearly attendance bonus. Their contribution and efforts must be duly recognized and encouraged to make greater efforts. In other words, *'have the carrot dangling in front of them'*, if best results are to be obtained, as it is this department that generates profits.

WELFARE SOCIETIES

Separate Societies have been formed for the staff and the workers. These societies are solely undertaken by the staff and the workers themselves. The societies are functioned strictly according to the constitution and funds are deposited in the Bank,

The assistance given by the Welfare Societies are;

Staff:	Funerals - member ...	Rs 1,000/-
	" - dependants	Rs 500/-
	Farewells & Excursions	
Labour:	Funerals - member ...	Rs 500/-
	" dependants	Rs 500/-
	Sick leave payment over	
	14 days ...	Rs 150/-
	Partial disablement - According to the decisions of the members of the committee.	

GENERAL

Recognizing the fact that our predecessors had in their generous and kind way given thought to their successors in planting very useful fruit trees, which we now enjoy in our bungalow gardens, I have also encouraged and insist in this task for the sake of prosperity. Towards this end, I have raised useful plants, such as *Rambuttan*, *Durian*, *Thembili*, etc. These will be planted around all staff bungalows and gardens. Thereafter it is their responsibility to nurse and look after the plants, and the staff have co-operated well in this task. During the last *Rambuttan* season, a *Rambuttan* was sold at Re 1/- in Colombo. Therefore, this gives us an indication how much a fruit will cost in the years to come.

In my view, certain aspects I have mentioned here are worth considering for all the estates as a matter of policy.