

Book Review

Soils of Ceylon and Fertilizer Use

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This handbook written for the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science Popularization of Science Programme by the Head of the National Soil Survey Project is an outstanding contribution. It forms part of the series sponsored by the C.A.A.S., Committee for the Popularization of Science with the express object of acquainting the non-scientist with the basic principles on which the application of science to the field of agricultural production rests. Its release is indeed timely because food production is at present not only a major pre-occupation but also a crucial national problem.

The best description of this book is its title and it maintains the high standard of presentation that one would expect in this series. Apart from popularizing a science in a way that is just right for the non-scientist, it cannot fail in its interest to the general reader, the student of soil science and even the budding specialist who is involved in this area of agriculture. The work could also be a useful accompaniment to a course of lectures covering the points which the book does not deal with in sufficient detail. However, it is tightly packed with informative material, and in spite of the great simplifications that have been made, the facts are stated in a surprisingly accurate fashion.

The book comprises 10 chapters which are divided into three sections, with a useful appendix that describes some simple experiments that are relevant to the text. A bibliography suggesting supplementary reading material for those who wish to follow the science of soil and fertilizer use further, is a useful additional feature. A subject index and a soil map in colour complete the volume.

Six out of the ten chapters are devoted to the first part of the book giving an integrated account of the scientific basis of the nature and behaviour of our soils. The material is developed in a clear, concise and logical manner and is well illustrated with figures and relevant data, in a form that is easily appreciated. From the descriptive point of view a fair balance has been struck between the theoretical side of the subject and the practical aspects. The coverage is wide rather than deep embracing the origin and formation of soils, their physical properties, the chemistry of

soil, the living organisms of the soil, soil organic matter and the identification, classification and survey of soils. The quality of this section whets the appetite for the remaining parts, which match this, if not in scope at least in interest.

Part two of the book deals mainly with the soils of Ceylon, their identification, classification, distribution patterns, fertility characteristics and their suitability for different crops. This section is written with an authority resulting from much experience of soil surveys, and though short (comprising 2 chapters) serves as a popular practical guide for the identification of our soils. It also gives an indication of their agricultural potential.

The final section of the book deals with the science of fertilizers covering their composition, manufacture and usage. Though this is written in a language best suited for those with a minimum background knowledge of chemistry, yet comprehension is not difficult, as the chemistry is kept within bounds. The subject matter is indeed useful for all agriculturists engaged in the production of both plantation and field crops.

The author is to be congratulated in producing such a splendid manual which has a wider interest than one would expect. It is admirably well-balanced and stimulating and in many respects makes absorbing reading. The treatment is clear and provides adequate information and enlightenment for an overall appreciation of the subject. It is considered that the author has achieved his declared objective of "popularizing a science which is of immediate relevance to a nation, whose way of life as well as its economy yet predominantly derives from the soil." To sum up, the book is a complete justification of the vision of all those who conceived the idea of the C.A.A.S.'s series of Science Books on Agriculture.

Except for a few minor blemishes in printing, the book is relatively free from errors. It is reasonably well bound and handles well. It can be unreservedly recommended both to the experienced and inexperienced in scientific methods of soil management, and to all those, whose interests are connected with—'our soils' and our land!

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