

BRINGING VEGETATIVELY PROPAGATED TEA INTO PRODUCTION: OBSERVATIONS IN THE LOW-COUNTRY

R. U. Price*

The following observations on the practice adopted on Yataderia Estate (elevation 1,000 ft) with satisfactory results may be of interest.

In 1960 a small block ($1\frac{1}{2}$ acres) was planted with clones TRI 2026 (1 a) & 2024 ($\frac{1}{2}$ a). The clearing was planted in May and manured in accordance with the TRI recommendation plus 25%, using initially Sterameal and thereafter T200 Mixture. Plants were approximately 15 months of age at time of planting and were in the form of "Bed" plants. Shortly after planting, Toor Dhall was planted in alternate rows and allowed to grow freely until the end of the dry weather, by which time it had formed a complete canopy over the tea at a height of about 6 feet. It was then cut back to ground level and allowed to die. Leaf fall from the Toor Dhall was considerable and this no doubt helped to conserve moisture during the drought periods.

Plants were bent in October/November of that year and thereafter allowed to grow freely, being cut back to 12" in May 1961 and subsequently in October and May of the succeeding year to heights varying between 12" to 15" depending on growth. At each cut back only the centres were removed and all side branches left untouched. The first real prune given in October 1962, by which time there were many vigorous low side branches, was at 18". Everything except green sappy shoots above that height was removed, but *nothing* below, and Dieldrin was sprayed on the pruned frames. Despite regular drought conditions each February and March, deaths did not exceed 2%.

This clearing was first plucked in December 1962 and yield for 1963 was 1671 lb per acre and for 1964 will approximate 2,800 lb per acre.

Subsequent Clearings, which were polythene-sleeve plants of about 15 months were given identical treatment except that they were sprayed with Dieldrin after cutting back at approximately 14 months and again after the first prune in October (approx 15 months later). The 1961 planting (Clone TRI 2024 & 2026) will give approximately 2600 lb per acre for 1964, (its first year of plucking). A monoclonal block of 2 acres on very steep land was planted with Clone TRI 2024 in 1962, given identical treatment and will be brought into plucking at the end of December this year. No deaths have occurred subsequent to the October 1964 prune.

All these clearings were planted on old Rubber land which is probably higher in humus than re-conditioned tea land, but in 1963 a 16 acre block which included 4 acres of old tea land was planted and at present there appears to be little difference in growth between the old tea and rubber lands.

It is my opinion that too many Estates are deceived by the vigor of V.P. material and try to crop too soon. It is far better to be patient and allow the plants, and particularly the root system to develop fully before cropping.

* Present address. Yataderia Estate, Undugoda. The Institute does not necessarily endorse the views expressed in papers contributed by persons other than members of the Staff.