

A NEW APPROACH TO IMPROVE COCONUT AND PERENNIAL CROP CULTIVATION

Presently the coconut cultivation is faced with two problems. Firstly the sharp annual decline of the coconut planted extent. Secondly the continuous drop in the yield due to frequent droughts. This necessitates maximising profits from such lands by intercropping. On the other hand although various subsidy schemes were in operation to intensify intercropping in coconut lands, their success was not all that satisfactory due to various factors, major reasons being the time taken (about 3-4 years) to achieve a satisfactory production in intercrops, and the inadequacy of the subsidies provided for their maintenance. The growers are compelled to incur extra expenditure besides the subsidies available. In order to meet these needs, the Ministry of Agriculture, Development and Research, with a grant from the Asian Development Bank operating in conjunction with the Central Bank of Sri Lanka has extended the Perennial Crops Project activities to Kurunegala, Gampaha, Puttalam districts as well. This project was in operation from a few years back in Matale, Kandy, Badulla, Monaragala and Kegalle districts with emphasis on perennial crops such as cocoa, pepper etc. But with the expansion of the project activities in the major coconut growing districts namely Kurunegala, Gampaha and Puttalam, it is envisaged to rehabilitate the low yielding coconut lands and further develop the present lands by introducing farming systems geared to cultivation of perennial intercrops.

They are

- Increase Perennial crop production
- Develop coconut and intercrop based agro patterns
- Develop harvesting and processing of yield
- Improve wholesale marketing facilities

The crops considered suitable under this project are:

Semi perennials-	Pineapple, Banana, Passionfruit Papaw and Betel
Perennials	Cocoa, Coffee, Pepper,

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Cinnamon, Rambuttan, Avocado, Lemunime, Arecanut- Wet and Wet Intermediate Zones.

Cashew, lime, orange and mango

Dry intermediate and the Dry zones.

Although the crops have been identified in accordance with the Agro Climatic Zone, the grower may choose the crop that is more appropriate. For example even in the wet zone, lands that are subjected with hand pan and are unsuitable for coconut growing could be recommended for planting to cashew or mango. Again in Kurunegala, Puttalam, and Gampaha districts slopy lands which are either unsuitable for coconut, or coconut lands that are less productive are included in this project for assistance in cultivation of perennials or subsidiaries. Planting of rambuttan in slopy lands in the Attanagalla region, cashew as the main crop and Banana as its subsidiary in the Vanathavillu region could be cited as examples. Rubber lands which are being replanted and mix cropped with perennials in the Gampaha district too are included in this project. A special feature in this project is the facility offered to cultivation of short term crops such as Ginger, Turmeric, Chillies, Vegetables etc. It must be emphasised that assistance will not be granted only for the cultivation of short term crops. But these could be mixed cropped with any of the above named perennials, and growers are then entitled to receive assistance. For example the popular crop patterns around Nattandiya, Kuliypitiya could be cited, which is the successful mixedcropping pattern in lands between 5 and 40 year old coconut stands, with Pineapple, Banana and ginger. Assistance will

not be provided for intercropping coconut, with Ginger only. But if Ginger is cultivated with another perennial the entire system will be entitled to receive assistance. In addition to the above the project grants financial and technical assistance for the establishment of integrated farms with cattle or goats combined with the cultivation of perennials. Accordingly the grower could cultivate a crop of his choice suited to the region to an appropriate pattern.

The Farm Planning Officer so appointed to a region under this project could be contacted for detail information.

Loan-subsidy availability

Loans and subsidies will be granted only if the proposed investment is sufficiently viable to repay the loans and subsidies from profits earned. These are given for

- crop production and improvement to farms
- establishment of nurseries or for their expansion
- establishment of small/large scale processing for crop yields like fruits, and spices, or for their expansion.

A maximum of nearly 40,000.00 per acre, could be obtained as loans and subsidy for improvement of coconut lands and for cultivation of perennials in such lands. This may differ with the various types of crops and the pattern of cultivation. The loan and subsidy systems operate through Bank of Ceylon, People's Bank, Hatton National Bank, Commercial Bank, and Regional Development Banks.

Those entitled to apply:

The applicant should be

- * land owner, investor, nursery owner or processor
- * possesses the capacity to invest 20 percent of the total expenditure budget in cash, labour or in any other form.
- * should be free from Bank debt.
- * should be able to provide sufficient security acceptable to the Bank.
- * land to be cultivated should have the survey plan and a deed.

Farm planning and advisory services

Farm planning and advisory service units have been set up under this project in the respective district. These services will be managed by an Asst. Director (Farm Planning) and his subordinates, a subject matter officer, and farm planning officers. The advice and the technical information required for successful implementation will be provided from the beginning, and shall continue thereafter.

Information on the project services

For details on the services rendered by this project kindly contact either the Farm Planning Officer of your area or the nearest Bank. In Kurunegala, Puttalam, and Gampaha districts, the respective Coconut Development Officer will assist you with this information.

For further details please write to the **Director, Perennial Crops Development Project, 1094, Peradeniya Road, Peradeniya.**