

HOW AND WHY THE INTAKE OF A TAPPER SHOULD BE INCREASED

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Tapping cost is a major component in the cost of production of rubber, *i.e.* 50-60%. The intake of a tapper (IPT) has a direct influence on this and it has to be increased to lower the tapping cost. In most plantations, the average intake per tapper for a given year is ca. 4.75 kg. How the tapping cost will decline, if the IPT of a plantation is increased from 4.75 to 6.5 kg is illustrated below.

IPT (kg)	Tapping Cost (Rs/kg)
4.75	20.00 (100)
6.50	15.77 (79)

Assumptions:

1. Daily wage = Rs.95.00
2. Norm = 5 kg/tapper
3. Incentive for over kilos, Rs.4 for the 6th and Rs.7.00 for the 7th kilo.

The above illustration shows a 21% decline in Tapping Cost when IPT is increased from 4.75 to 6.5 kg.

In order to increase the IPT, both the Management and the Tapper have to play a significant role.

Role of management

The management should ensure that the yield potential of trees in every tapping task of the plantation is high. This could be achieved by adhering into the following:

- a). Use of high yielding clones
- b). Use of quality planting material
- c). Proper upkeep *i.e.* weeding, manuring, panel dressing
- d). Correct tapping practices
- e). Optimum task size
- f). Incentive payment for field staff and tappers
- g). Providing necessary tapping utensils

Under correct tapping practices it is vital that the management ensures that recommendations on a). girth at opening b). tappability of a clearing c). tapping systems for different clones d). recovery tapping and e). controlling of bark consumption rates and tapping angle are adopted. Basically, there is an urgent need to improve the adoption rate of correct tapping practices at field level. The management may organise training programmes for the supervisory staff, tappers and ensure strict supervision at field level to improve adoption rate.

The management should consider the following when determining the task size of a tapper.

- a). Tapping intensity
- b). Terrain
- c). Tappable stand

If the task size is too large, a corresponding increase in IPT will not result due to.

- a). some trees been tapped late
- b). tendency to commence collecting early
- c). being more vulnerable for rain interference
- d). poor quality tapping
- e). some trees been not tapped

These will result in a decline in the yield per tree per tapping (g/t/t) and yield per hectare (YPH). The management should also introduce an incentive scheme for both tappers and field staff in order to reward those who have the commitment. This could change the attitude towards work of other workers as well.

The intake per tapper could decline significantly due to lack of tapping utensils such as:

- a). spouts
- b). cup hangers
- c). collecting cups

Also, good quality tapping knives should be provided and the management should introduce a system to sharpen the tapping knives when required. A well sharpened, quality tapping knife is essential to harvest high yields whilst controlling rate of bark consumption. Without this basic requirement, desired results cannot be achieved.

Role of tappers

The management can contribute to enhance the IPT by planting high yielding clones, good upkeep of clearings, correct tapping policies, providing necessary tapping utensils and by rewarding the committed workers. Nevertheless, the tapper too has an important role in achieving this objective. The following has to be adopted by a tapper to to improve the intake.

- a. Correct tapping
- b. Early tapping
- c. Tapping all trees
- d. Collecting at correct time
- e. To have all tapping utensils and to use them correctly
- f. Cleanliness of tapping utensils
- g. Regular sharpening of tapping knife
- h. The commitment to the job

a). *Correct tapping*

The guide lines (fig. 1) are drawn on the tree to control the tapping angle, length of cut and rate of bark consumption. It is important that, tappers tap the bark accordingly to harvest high yields. Tapping depth should also be correct to obtain sustainable high yield levels.

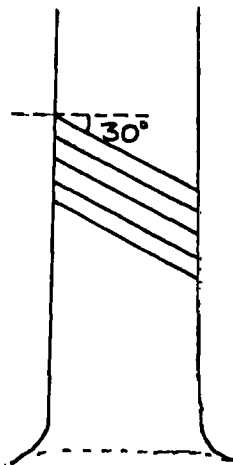


Fig. 1. Guide lines to control tapping angle and rate of bark consumption

b). *Early tapping*

If panels are not wet, tapping should be commenced early in the morning. Tapping late, results in poor yields due to reduced latex flow rate and time. Reduced flow rate is due to poor turgidity of the plant caused by transpirational water loss.

c). *Tapping all trees*

All yielding trees in the tapping block should be tapped.

d). *Collecting time*

Collecting early will result in a higher scrap percentage and also scrap is more vulnerable for thevining. Further, it is of less money value than latex.

e). *Tapping utensils and using them correctly*

Spouts, cup-hangers and cups should be present in all tappable trees. Also, it is important to fix them correctly on to the tree inorder to prevent latex losses (Fig. 2).

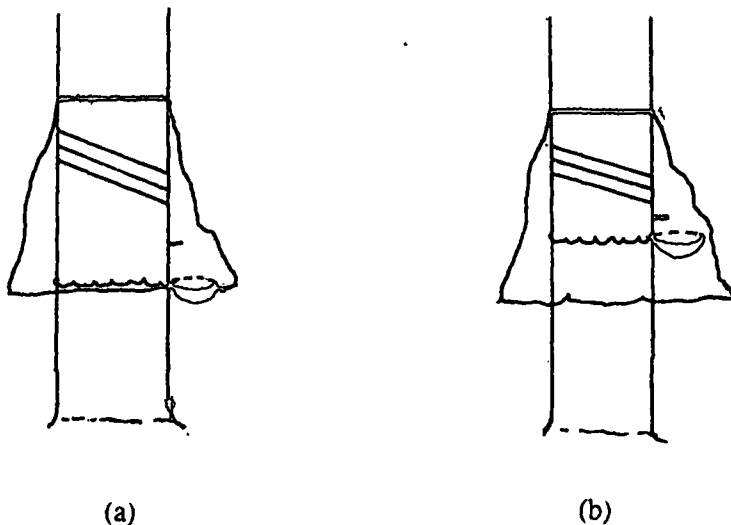


Fig. 2. The tapping utensils are incorrectly arranged in 2a, resulting in crop losses and rain interference

The spout and the cup should be close to the tapping cut and also they should be adequately covered by the rainguard.

f). *Cleanliness of tapping utensils*

Collecting cups and buckets should be clean to avoid pre-coagulation of latex.

g). *Sharpening of tapping knives*

Tapping knives should be renewed using quality knives when necessary. Also, it is important that the tapping knife is sharpened regularly by a black smith. Further, the tapper should sharpen the knife daily by using a piece of ceramic tile. A sharpened knife will result in good latex flow and less bark consumption.

h). *Commitment to the job*

To obtain high yields the tapper should ensure that all trees in the block are tapped correctly. Every tapper should be responsible for the tapping standards in his/her tapping block. Maintaining a good out-turn and thereby preventing employing of unskilled tappers is important for this.

As discussed above both the management and the tappers have to play an important role in increasing the intake of a tapper. If the average intake per tapper in a Plantation is improved it will improve the performance of the plantation, *i.e.* higher productivity and profitability whilst enhancing the earnings of the tappers.