

PASTURES UNDER COCONUTS

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THE planting of pastures has hitherto been done in most places by hand. It hardly needs saying that this method of planting pastures is a definite waste of time, as only about a quarter of an acre can be planted in a day. This method is suitable only when small areas have to be brought under pasture grasses for mere multiplication purposes. When one is faced with the problem of bringing a large area under pasture, it is advisable to resort to mechanical means in order to get the grass planted in the shortest possible time, and at the lowest cost and also in order to catch the rains.

Method of Planting

If the land you intend to put under grass happens to be already infested with a dense cover of weeds and other vegetation, it is advisable that this land be disc-harrowed either by a bullock-drawn or tractor-mounted disc-harrow, two or three times during the dry season. The amount of disc harrowing will depend on the density of the vegetation. This dry season disc-harrowing will, to a great extent, help in the eradication of weeds, and thereby cut down weeding costs later on.

No sooner you have one or two showers, the land must be ploughed. This will further help in suppressing the weed seedlings that may have germinated with the on-set of the rains. The grass that you intend planting must be cut into about 6 ins. cuttings and then broadcasted by hand over the ploughed land. If manure is to be applied to the land this should also be broadcast and after these two operations the land must be disc-harrowed so that the grass cuttings get covered or partially covered. By using a tractor-drawn disc-harrow, you can put under grass an extent of about 4-5 acres a day which, when compared to hand planting, is definitely a big saving in time, cost, and labour. Out of the local grasses the *Brachiarias* and *Stenotaphorum* respond to this method very well, while *Stylosanthes* and *Asswenna* among the legumes have also been found to do satisfactorily.

After-care and Cultivation

If the planting has been done during the rainy season the grass will commence rooting in a matter of days, but you will also find that, no matter how carefully the eradication of weeds has been done, a crop of weed seedlings will also show themselves in a very short time, especially so if compost or farm yard manure has been used at the time of planting. These weed seedlings should be eradicated at the first opportunity but to do this immediately they appear is not advocated for two reasons. The first is that the weed seedlings are far too small to facilitate easy and complete removal and, secondly, the pulling out of these seedlings before the grass is properly established will also tend to kill some of the grass. Therefore your first selective weeding should be done not earlier than a fortnight or a month after the grass is planted. The most persistent weeds that are found in most coconut estates are *Mimosa Pudica*, *Synadrella Modiflora*, *Amaranthus Viridis*, *Sida Acuta* (Vide *C.C.Q.*, Vol. 1, Jan.-March, 1953, No. 1, pp. 9-12).

Selective weeding must be done by hand in the first instance. This method though expensive and slow, will ensure efficient weeding. Care should be taken to see that during this operation useful herbs and legumes like Asswenna, Desmodiums, *Ayustacia gangetica* (s) Puruk, *Comalina bengalensis* (s) Diya-Meneriya are not weeded out as these form a very important item in the correct nutrition of the stock.

The grass can be grazed for the first time about a month and half after planting, but care needs to be taken to see that the grazing is not too severe. Earlier grazing is not recommended because, if animals are allowed into a newly-established pasture, they will tend to pull out the young grass by the roots. After the first grazing, a dressing of Ammonium Sulphate at the rate of 1-1½ cwt. per acre is very beneficial. This fertiliser will give the grass a sort of "Pick me up" and thereafter the pasture can be grazed every two weeks in rotation.

If rotational grazing is adopted, care must be taken to see that the pasture is neither grazed too heavily nor that it is undergrazed. (Vide *C.C.Q.*, Vol. IV, Jan.-March, 1953, No. 1, pp. 9-12). It is advisable to disc-harrow the pastures at least once a year just before or at the tail end of the rains. This disc-harrowing has two advantages. One is that it opens out and aerates the soil, which is very beneficial if the grass has formed a dense matting on the surface. Secondly, disc-harrowing will help to control any weeds that may have established themselves, and if manures are broadcast previously this operation will incorporate the fertilizer into the soil.

With regard to this application of fertilizer to pastures by broadcasting and then disc-harrowing, a good practice is to overgraze the areas marked out for manuring just before the area is fertilized as this saves a lot of fertilizer from going waste and ensures an even spread over the ground.