

COCONUT CULTIVATION IN KEGALLE DISTRICT

By Mr. L.D. THAMBUGALA

Advisory Field Officer, Kegalle

From the lay-out of the three major plantation crops, i.e. Tea, Rubber and Coconuts, Kegalle District may be defined as an 'Intermediate Zone' Coconut lands along the Maha Oya bank gradually give way as one travels southwards, to rubber and tea in Deraniyagala and Ruwanwella areas.

The best coconut lands of the Kegalle District are found along the Maha Oya. It is actually here that the landowners cultivate their lands, because coconuts are their main crop. The small number of estates belonging to the Kegalle District are located in this area. As we proceed southwards, the size of the plantations diminish until we see only a few palms in the home gardens.

Soil Conservation Essential

As the Kegalle District is mostly a hilly area, *the main problem here is soil conservation*. Land owners are beginning to realise the importance of an efficient system of catch water drains and stone terraces. Demonstrations in marking of soil conservation drains are done on lands. Most of the small holders are prevented from opening of drains etc. mainly due to poor income.

The average land owner here does not depend solely on the coconut crop for his livelihood. Therefore, he has to find employment elsewhere to meet his daily needs. As such, he has very little time to devote to the improvement of his coconut lands. At the same time, he is not able to employ paid labour for the cultivation of his land. Therefore, the only remedy is to give these small holders financial aid, at least for their soil conservation work as it is a must in the hill country. With efficient soil conservation methods, better results, similar to those achieved on lands where such practices are in operation, can be expected.

Manuring

With the implementation of the Government Manure Subsidy Scheme, more and more cultivators are getting accustomed to the systematic manuring of their lands. The practice of manuring in the Kegalle District is yet in its infancy. Except for the lands along the Maha Oya little or no manuring had been done on other lands in the past. Here again, it is the lack of funds rather than the ignorance of the benefit of manuring

that was responsible for this state of affairs. Free advice and the Subsidy Scheme have helped them to overcome the difficulty at least to some extent. Demonstration on the opening of manure circles etc. are given wherever required. The common method of manuring is to place the manure in trenches around the base of the palms. Broadcasting and turning over of the soil is rare, as the lands are steep and much loss is liable to occur with soil wash.

Husk Burying — A New Development

Husk burying which was not a practice in the past is being done on most lands now. Husks are readily available here because they are not sold to fibre mills as in the Negombo-Kurunegala Districts. While the general practice is to bury the husks in the manure circle itself people are being encouraged by demonstrations etc. to bury them in trenches. Good results have been obtained where husk burying is done with regular manuring.

Pests and Diseases Rare

Pests and diseases, though present are not found at epidemic level as in other coconut growing districts. One reason that could be given for this is that the coconut lands are spread out and even if a pest or a disease breaks out, it is confined to that land. The chief pest of the area is the Black Beetle, and Termite comes second. Red Weevil attack is scarce. Necessary advice is given to land owners on pest and disease control methods wherever necessary.

Apart from this, advice is given on the opening up of new lands and replanting old lands. Demonstrations are held regarding lining for planting holes and cutting and preparing them. Attention is paid for the planting of seedlings and their after care.