

# FOOD SECURITY SITUATION IN SRI LANKA

By

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Every human being needs adequate food for its up keep of life and maintenance of health. "Food for all" for the well being of a society is vital in building up of a healthy, intelligent workforce for the nation. Food security, can be defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. The two essential elements needs to be fulfilled are the availability of food and the people's ability to acquire it.

Food availability is achieved when sufficient quantities of the necessary types of food are consistently available to the individuals within the country. Access to food and people's ability to acquire it is ensured when households have adequate resources within them to obtain appropriate food for a nutritious, satisfying diet enabling them to lead an economically productive, healthy life. Food security has many facets and dimensions. In order to ensure food security, the food system within a country needs to,

- (a) ensure adequate food production, maximum stability of supplies & prices.
- (b) secure access to available supplies especially to the low income sectors of the population.

Many factors interact to create food insecurity namely poverty, low agricultural productivity, high rate of population growth, insufficient infrastructure for food production, flow of supplies and distribution, ecological and geological constraints, natural disasters, civil disturbances, in appropriate policies etc.

## Population Growth

The population of Sri Lanka is recorded as 18.3 million in 1996. (Dept. of Census and Statistics) and

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has recorded an expansion of 11 million persons since independence (1948). The rate of increase has been 22% in the first decenium and then shot up to 31% in the second and stood below 20% thereafter. Nearly 250,000 persons are added per annum to the

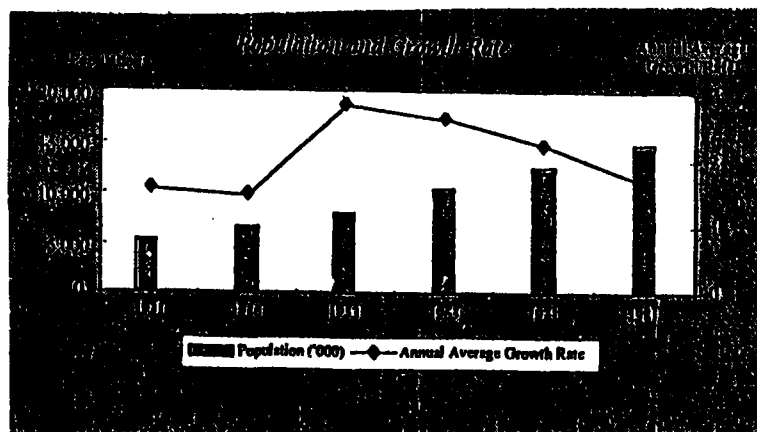
population at present. The average annual growth rate, which fluctuated in the range of 1.4- 2.8, was around 1.5%, rose sharply in the post independent era and remained above 2% until mid seventies. Since then it showed a downward trend and reached 1.4% in 1994. (Figure 01).

Figure 02 shows the population growth rate of Sri Lanka relative to the other countries in the SAARC region.

## Food Production

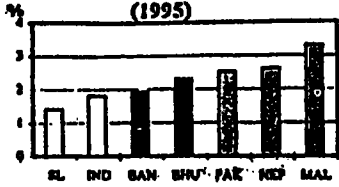
In Sri Lanka, successive governments have given priority to increase food production. With respect to the production of rice, which is the staple food, a remarkable progress have been achieved. In 1950 nearly 71% of the total rice consumed in the country was imported but the country was self sufficient in rice in 1995. (Figure 03).

Figure 1



Source - Department of Census & Statistics

**Figure 2 Population Growth Rate (1995)**



Source - Department of Census & Statistics

In 1996, however, 18.5% of the total supply has been imported. (Food Balance Sheet - 1992-1996).

The next highest consumed cereal, which is wheat, is imported as Sri Lanka is a non-wheat growing country. The wheat grain is imported and milled at the wheat milling complex in Trincomalee and distributed throughout the country through the

co-operative network, which has more than 8,000 outlets. Wheat flour has become the second staple food next to rice, due to its easy availability, convenience in preparation and lower price, as it is sold at a subsidised price by the Government. Figure 3 shows the wheat flour supply during the last few decades, millet and maize form the second largest cereals produced in the country. However, the millet production over the years has come down by 66% whilst maize production has increased by 50% and other cereals have increased marginally.

Vegetables form an important part of the daily diet of Sri Lankans. The prices of vegetables have been increasing, which has led to low consumption levels resulting in low dietary intake of vegetables. Over the last few years vegetable production has decreased and as a result the prices have

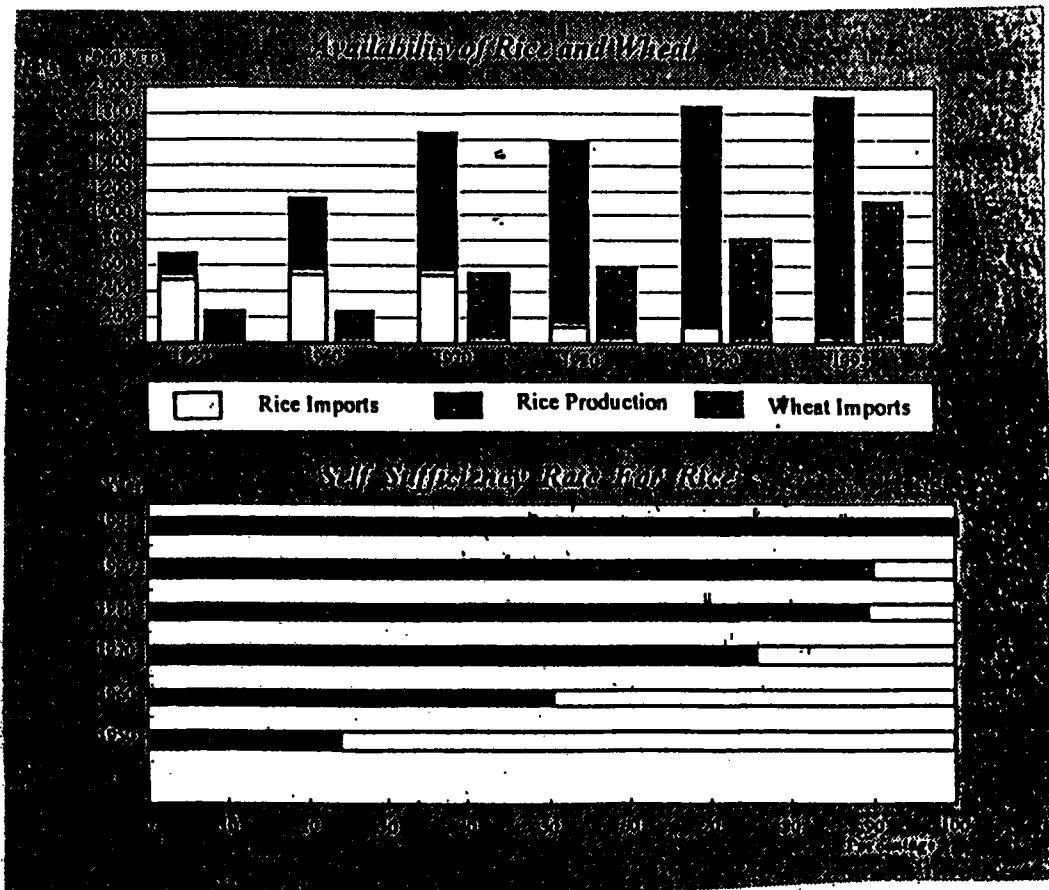
**Table 1 - Vegetable Production in Sri Lanka**

Year	Production (MT)
1990	558,840
1991	567,190
1992	572,390
1993	879,430
1994	587,520

increased. The production which was 1,048 million MT in 1988 has decreased to 587 million MT in 1994 and the Government had to import vegetables to stabilise the prices. Table 1 Shows the vegetable production in Sri Lanka. (Source Dept. of Census & Statistics).

Approximately 15% of the total sugar requirement of the country is produced locally and to balance is imported by the private sector under

**Figure 3**



Source - Department of Census & Statistics

the Bonded ware house scheme, and distributed through the co-operative network.

Milk occupies an important place in the human diet. The annual milk production of the country is about 324.0 million litres. (Figure 04), which accounts for about 20% of the national milk requirement, at a very low level of consumption of about 32ml of milk per person per day. The balance 80% of the country's requirements are met by imports (Figure 5). Figure 06 shows that there had been no significant increase the population of cattle and buffaloes in the country during the period 1960 to 1994.

The fish production in the country in 1996 is recorded as 238,000 MT. accounting for 78 percent of the total fish supplies. The balance requirement is met by imports. The main products imported are dried and salted fish, canned fish and small quantities of fresh fish. The meat production is relatively a small section in the Sri Lankan food scenario. The total production recorded in 1996 is 67,500 MT and accounts for 98% of available supplies. Egg requirements are met locally.

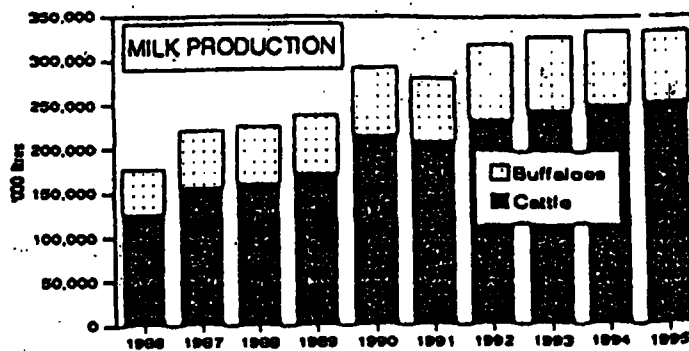
Coconut forms a major constituent in the local diet. The coconut milk provides the medium for cooking. The entire coconut requirements are met by local production. Coconut oil serves as the main cooking oil, about 7.5% of cooking oil and margarines are imported.

Figure 07 shows the production, imports and availability of food supplies over the last two decades. The index of agricultural production is shown in Table 02.

#### PER CAPITA SUPPLIES

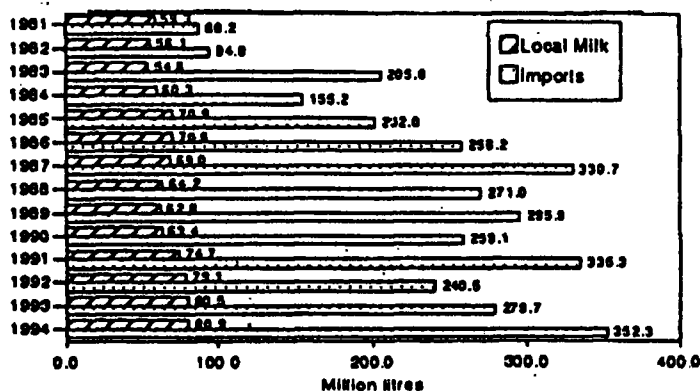
The annual per capita availability of rice has fluctuated from 80.3kgs and 113.0kgs, while per capita availability of wheat flour has fluctuated between 21.2kgs and 42.8kgs (at present) during the period 1950 and 1995. Neither the per capita availability of rice nor wheat shows a

Figure 04 - The annual milk production of Sri Lanka.



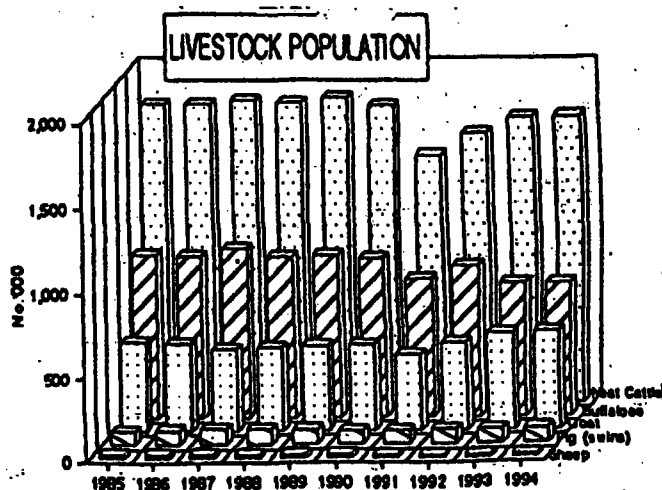
Source - Central Bank of Sri Lanka & Department of Census & Statistics

Figure 05- Milk Imports



Source - Central Bank of Sri Lanka & Department of Census & Statistics & ADB

Figure 06- Livestock Population



Source - Central Bank of Sri Lanka & Department of Census & Statistics & ADB report 1996

Table 2- Volume of Agricultural Production

Year	Tea	Rubber	Coconut	Paddy	HighLand Crops	Live Stock	Minor Exports Crops	Over all Index
(1934-1938=100)								
1959	180.4	150.8	106.8	217.8	66.7	--	--	158.9
1961	198.8	157.9	121.0	258.2	127.2	--	--	178.9
(1962=100)								
1963	103.7	101.1	105.3	112.2	120.7	114.1	104.2	104.2
1965	107.7	113.8	96.5	75.6	114.9	109.0	78.5	99.6
1967	104.2	137.7	83.4	114.4	132.4	125.9	70.1	109.4
1969	103.7	145.0	83.6	137.2	141.6	163.1	111.6	120.6
1971	102.7	135.9	104.3	139.4	153.4	182.1	104.5	126.0
1973	99.7	148.7	76.1	131.0	226.6	162.4	162.8	120.3
1975	100.9	143.0	100.6	115.2	280.9	146.8	104.3	121.2
1977	98.4	140.5	70.9	167.5	244.5	156.3	115.8	125.8
1979	98.4	146.8	93.1	183.4	264.3	156.9	129.7	134.9
(1977-1979=100)								
1981	102.4	81.8	105.5	129.0	105.1	115.1	96.8	108.8
1983	87.3	92.4	108.0	135.8	129.1	115.9	117.1	116.4
1985	104.3	90.7	138.2	145.5	174.9	118.4	120.9	131.8
1987	103.9	80.4	107.1	116.4	141.7	114.5	102.0	113.7
1989	100.6	73.1	116.0	112.9	137.6	140.7	101.2	115.4
1991	117.3	68.5	102.0	130.6	170.8	143.5	123.1	130.0
1993	112.9	68.8	102.8	140.6	151.2	147.8	157.7	132.1
1995	119.8	69.3	123.7	153.7	141.0	148.7	168.1	137.4

Source: Department of Census & Statistics

specific trend pattern, but appear to be well correlated, (Figure 08) with periods of low availability of since coinciding with periods of higher availability of wheat flour and vice versa. With the development of the fisheries industry, availability of fish shows a marked increase from 7.2kgs per year in 1980 to 11.4kg in 1995. while meat has marginally increased from 2.6 kgs per year in 1950 to 4 kgs per year in 1995. Per capita availability of milk and milk products has increased from 13.3kgs per year in 1950 to 15.3kgs per year in 1995, on account of the developments in the dairy industry and also liberalized due to imports of milk and milk products. Per capita distribution of calories by source is shown in Figure 09 where 57 percent is met by cereals, 15 percent by oils & fats, 12 percent by sugar and the balance 16 percent by milk, pulses, fish, eggs, roots & tubers fruits & vegetable.

#### FOOD IMPORTS

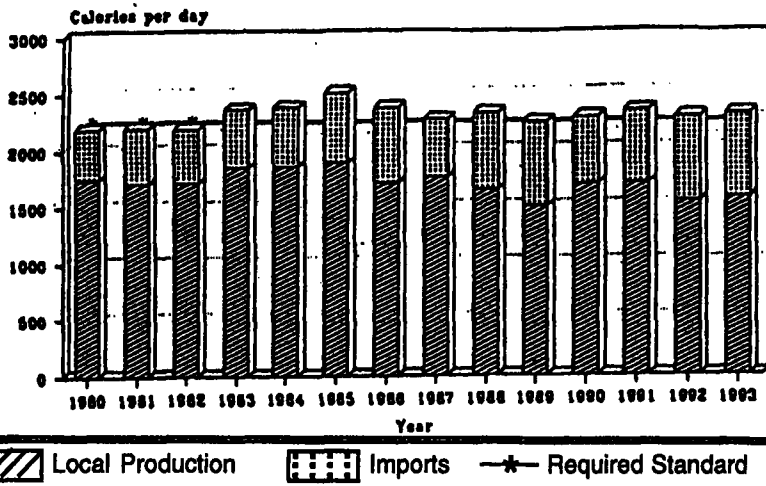
The main food imports are wheat, sugar, milk powder, dried and salted fish, canned fish, cooking oil, onions and other minor food ingredients, such as dried chillies, dhal etc. The total imports during the year 1996 are given in Table 03. There has been an increase in the imports of wheat and sugar. The value of food imports are given in Fig 8a, where 32.6 percent is accounted for the import of sugar, 32.9 percent for miscellaneous food items, 21 percent for milk and milk products and 12.9 percent for fish products. Daily per capita availability of calories through local food production and imports are shown in (Fig 10).

#### FOOD SUFFICIENCY LEVELS & HOW INADEQUACIES ARE MET.

During the last few decades, achieving self sufficiency in rice has been the key goal of the agriculture sector. Increase in rice production, as shown in Figure 03, has been the result of both increased productivity in existing lands and the expansion over

Figure 07 - Production, Imports & Availability of Food Supplies

Per Capita Availability of Calories (Local Production & Imports)



1990/91 has shown that the nutritional adequacies have been improving. Households deficient in energy and protein have declined from 35.6% in 1980/81 to 27.4% in 1990/91.

In spite of improvements in social welfare indices over the decades, a substantial degree of infant, child and maternal under nutrition prevails. Incidence of stunting (chronic under nutrition) which remained around 36% in 1981/82 declined over the years to 21% in 1993/94 while wasting (acute under nutrition) stabilized at 13% which is unsatisfactory compared to 6% in the mid seventies (1975/76). (Department of Census & Statistics).

to new paddy lands. Increased productivity was also due to high yielding seed varieties, increased application of subsidised inputs, irrigation land reform policies, land settlement, land alienation and guaranteed price for paddy etc. The country is now at the threshold of achieving self sufficiency in rice. The required deficit is imported by the private sector under the customs bonded warehouse scheme which has been operating successfully since 1991. The private bondsmen are contractually obliged to the government to import the total requirement of rice and to maintain a required buffer at all times for the food security in the country.

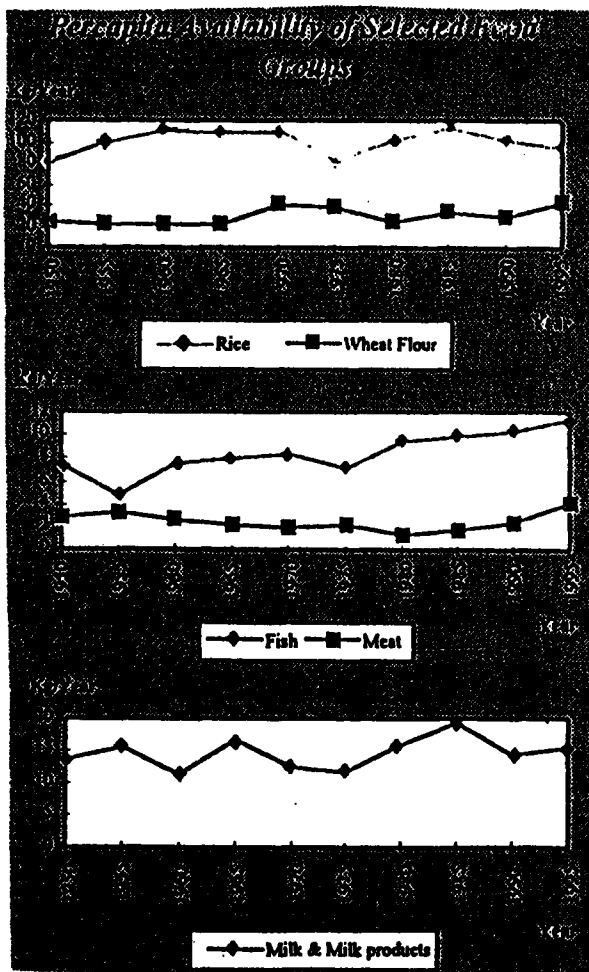
### INCIDENCE OF CHRONIC UNDER NUTRITION

Although the average per capita availability of calories exceeds the minimum level, 45% of the households in 1990/91 and 49% of the households in 1985/86, have been found to be energy deficient, thus indicating a heavily skewed food distribution, implying that nearly half of the households consume food than is needed, while the other half less than what is needed, mainly due to the lack of adequate resources to acquire the food. The people who are below the poverty line have no purchasing power to acquire their daily requirement of food.

The surveys conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics in 1980/81, 1985/86 and

In Sri Lanka a high percentage (17.5%) of low birth weights are recorded due to nutritional deficiencies.

Figure 8



Source - Department of Census & Statistics

They are permitted to keep any quantity of rice in bond and to reexport if necessary. In order to protect the farmer, they are not permitted to sell their rice below the guaranteed price paid to the farmers by the Government. With duty adjustment, the Government stabilises the price in the market by supplying the imported rice to the market during lean months and when wheat & rice prices are high.

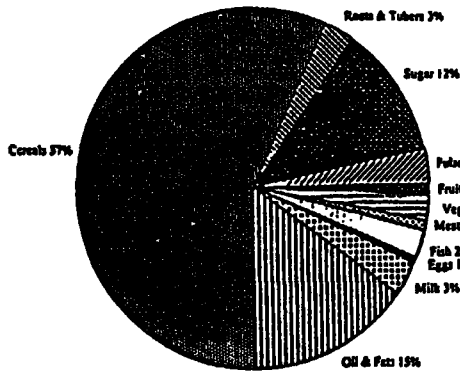
Total requirements of wheat flour are imported to the country under PL-480 Food aid assistance scheme. Local production of roots & tubers, vegetables and eggs meet the country's consumption requirements. Main food imports are wheat (100 percent), sugar (85 percent), pulses (approx 89 percent) onion, milk products (approx.80 percent), fish (approx.22 percent) and cooking oils (approx.7.5 percent).

Figure 9

Per Capita Availability of Calories by Source 1996

Figure 9

Per Capita Availability of Calories by Source 1996



Source: Department of Census & Statistics

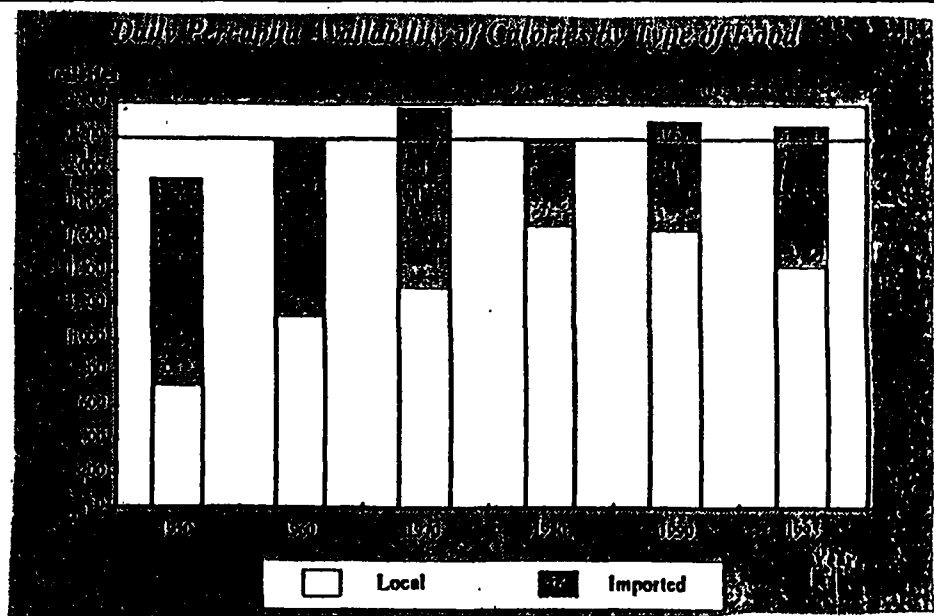
Table 3 - Food production, Availability & Imports (1996)

	Production ('000MT)	As a percentage of country's requirements	Imports ('000 MT)
A. Cereals			
Rice	2683.7	97.3	3.1
Other	38.8	27.8	73.2
Wheat	—	—	100
B. Roots & tubers	440.0	99.9	0.1
C. Sugar	73.6	13.4	89.3
D. Pulses & nuts	47.2	32.6	68.4
E. Vegetables	637.7	100.0	—
Onion	82.9	62.3	37.7
F. Fruits	132.9	93.3	8.7
G. Meat	66.2	98.2	1.4
H. Eggs	48.9	100.0	—
I. Fish	240.1	79.8	20.4
J. Milk-fresh	286.7	83.6	0.23
Whole dried	8.9	19.9	80.3
K. Oil & Fats	125.4	*175.0	6.6
Coconut	894.0	*101.0	—

Source: Food balance Sheet 1992-1996-  
Department of Census & Statistics

\*Surplus is exported

Figure 10



Source: Department of Census & Statistics

These offspring are more susceptible to be undernourished and intellectually impaired. An associated problem relevant to low birth weight is mother's weight gain during pregnancy which is less than 7.5 kg as against 10-12 kg, indicating low calorie intake. Nutritional anaemia (haemoglobin levels < 11 g/dl) is recorded as 45% in children under 5 years and 40% in pregnant women and about the same in non pregnant women too. (Ministry

of Policy Planning and Implementation)

#### FUTURE PROSPECTS WITH REGARD TO MEETING THE FOOD REQUIREMENTS

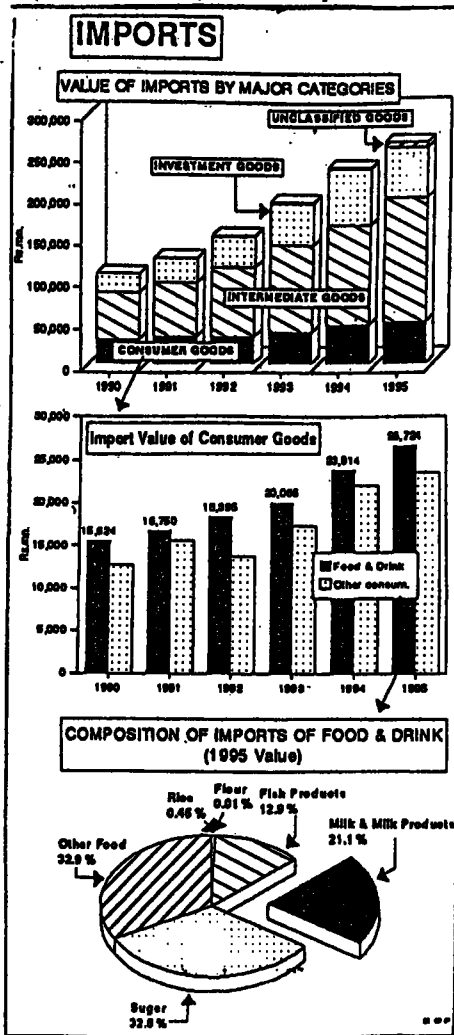
With the growth in population, the food requirements are increasing and the land area available in Sri Lanka for food production is almost stagnant or in fact is decreasing due to take

over of the land for various other development projects even though, there was an increase of cultivable land due to the development of irrigation by the opening of "Mahaweli" river.

In this context, in order to keep pace with the increasing demands for food, it is very essential to increase the production per unit area of land. The cost of production of local agricultural produce is much higher than that

Figure 8a

Value of Food Imports

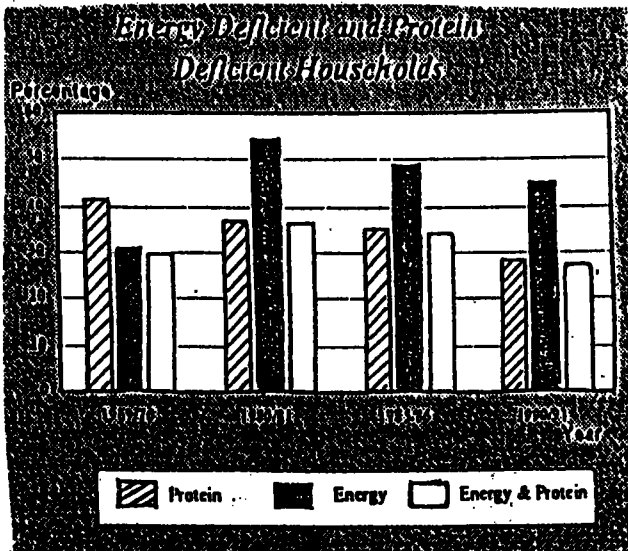


Source: Economic Review Sept/Oct. 1996

During the last few decades it has been observed that the number of youth taking up farming as their profession is fast dwindling. This is attributed to the very low profit margins they could realise from farming as a profession.

The statistics on food imports and percapita consumption levels show that the consumption of wheat flour has been increasing mainly due to the convenience and low price. The wheat flour imported under a food aid programme is sold in the market at a subsidized price and hence its price is lower than that of rice from the market. Therefore it is pertinent to make available more rice flour convenient products, suitable for preparation of traditional foods, in order to be less dependant on wheat.

Figure 11



Source: Department of Census & Statistics

of our neighboring countries. This situation promotes food imports, depriving farmers of their own rights to produce for the nation. Therefore it is important to address the issue in order to find out the real causes for higher cost of production of food

commodities in Sri Lanka. Investments on agriculture needs to be promoted and farming should be made a profitable venture. There is a great potential for development of commercial agriculture in Sri Lanka.