

## **STAFF RESEARCH CONFERENCE**

The first Staff Research Conference of the Coconut Research Institute for 1966 was held on 26th March at 2.30 p.m., in the C.R.I. Library, with Dr. W. R. N. Nathanael, Acting Director, in the Chair.

The others present at the Conference included:—

Mr. C. A. M. de Silva, Chairman, Coconut Research Board.

Heads of Divisions.

Research Assistants, Technical Assistants, Field Assistants and four estate trainees.

Dr. R. G. Lockard, F.A.O., Plant Nutrition Expert was present by invitation.

The date for the second quarterly Conference was tentatively fixed for the 27th of June and it was decided that Dr. D. A. Nethsinghe, Soil Chemist should lead a discussion.

### **General News**

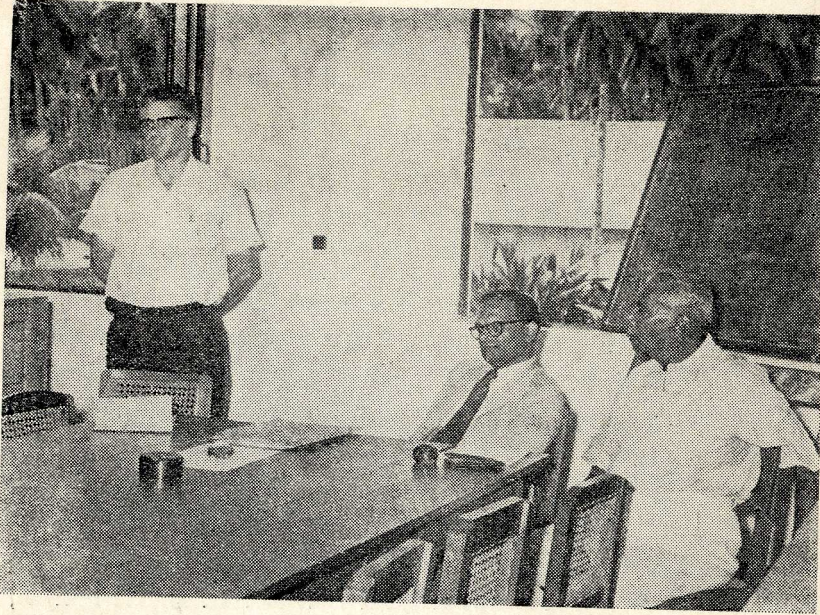
By way of general news the Acting Director reported:—

- (i) that the estimated production of coconut for the year 1965 was 2,836 million nuts as against 3,148 million nuts for 1964 which was an all-time record.
- (ii) regarding the recent staff discussion held on the proposed Expanded Scheme for the Rehabilitation of the Coconut Industry, a memorandum incorporating the views expressed was being prepared for the Coconut Research Board.

### **Research News**

By way of research news the Acting Director reported:—

- (i) that the Chemistry Division had intensified work on the Standard Ceylon Copra Kiln with beneficial results. On the basis of this work some recommendations were being made, and already a number of estates had effected the requisite improvements.
- (ii) that the Botany Division had received 798 applications asking for over 200,000 Hand-pollinated seedlings when actually only 10,000 were available for distribution. In recommending a scheme of distribution the Botanist has suggested that the



*Dr. Lockard speaking at the Staff Research Conference.*



*A section of the audience.*

Institute should cater for the requirements of small-holders only. He felt that the larger estates could very well produce their own requirements of Hand-pollinated seedlings.

- (iii) that the Soil Chemist had started new Observation Trials at Irranewila Estate, Chilaw on nitrogen quality.

#### **Address of the Chairman, Coconut Research Board**

The Chairman expressed his pleasure at being present at the Conference and said he was vitally interested in the coconut industry. He emphasised three matters. *Firstly*, the need to exploit the soil to the utmost with a view to getting maximum production. This would of course imply proper soil management and judicious fertilizer usage. *Secondly*, the importance of removing the old stand of palms when under-planting, and *thirdly*, the use of the best possible planting material. He said that sometimes the seedlings issued by the C.R.I. Nurseries were sub-standard. He felt that this should on no account be permitted. Regarding the hybrid seedlings produced by the Botanist his observations were that their performance is excellent.

#### **Address by Dr. Lockard**

Dr. Lockard expressed his thanks to the Acting Director and the Heads of Divisions for their courtesy in having discussed with him their work which he considered very valuable.

From the point of view of the Philippines, where he was working, the most important problem that confronted them was the Cadang-Cadang disease. In spite of intensive research he felt that much headway has not been made towards a solution of the problem. An Indian Pathologist engaged on this work has carried out a comprehensive survey of the affected areas and has submitted a report which has been published by F.A.O. The possibility of a virus contagium as a causal factor would appear to be the most plausible of the theories that have so far been adduced.

Regarding fertilizer research on coconut, Dr. Lockard mentioned that nothing had so far been organised on a large scale. He was hoping shortly to lay down some field fertilizer trials, as he felt that nutritional disorders (as evident in visual symptoms) were now cropping up in certain areas. It was his intention to extend the proposed studies to sulphur and micro-nutrients.

Dr. Lockard answered certain questions that were asked at the end of his talk and in this connection mentioned that in his opinion the

potentialities of the San Ramon variety for breeding purposes were good. An average nut of this variety contained about 450 grammes of kernel and a palm could produce as many as 90 nuts per year.

The Acting Director then presented in turn three problems for discussion that had been referred to him by the Chief Advisory Officer.

### **Problem I**

The possible causes and remedy for the non-setting (or very poor setting) of female buttons in healthy vigorously growing palms.

The Research Assistant to the Botanist outlined three possibilities to explain the phenomenon:—

- (i) The total non-production of female flowers;
- (ii) Infestation with pollen mites which could affect the viability of the pollen, and
- (iii) Adverse post-fertilization changes.

It was felt that a high percentage nut-set is in general a reflection of the satisfactory nutritional status of the palm.

### **Problem II—Coir Dust**

(a) Is there any harm in building coir dust bunds as a soil and moisture conservation practice?

(b) Is it disadvantageous to plough coir dust into the soil?

Mention was made that coir dust holds about eight times its weight of water and parts with it slowly. There was no question of its value as a soil mulch.

The Chairman, C.R.B., made out that fibre dust seldom gets washed away, and if grass is allowed to grow on it, would not disintegrate for a number of years. The O.I.C., Crop Protection Division stated in this connection that the only possible objection to the continued use of coir dust would be the fact that it is a good medium for the breeding of rhinoceros beetle.

### **Problem III**

Growing of Pasture and Rearing of Cattle under Coconut.

The Agrostologist mentioned that at the recent L.C.P.A., seminar he had dealt with the matter in detail. He summarised the position as follows:—

It has been demonstrated that pasture can be successfully grown under coconut in the wet zone with palms over 30 years of age. In this connection, *Brachiaria milliformis* has already been recommended. As for the type of animal, he thought it would be economical to maintain an animal that would yield at least 8 pints of milk per day. In this respect he favoured the (*Sinhala* × *Jersey*) crosses which had desirable features from the point of view of adaptability, small size, yield and richness of milk. This animal would be suitable from the points of view of both the small and large estate owner.

The Conference terminated at 4.00 p.m., with a few remarks from the Chairman.

### RESEARCH

“Research is a word that seems to frighten many people. It conjures up visions of long-bearded intellectuals working away in backrooms on problems of no conceivable practical significance. Many people discount the value of research and say they prefer to rely on their own judgement. In this connexion there is much truth in the story of the man who when given the results of research says: ‘It is not true’. When it has been proved beyond doubt that it is true, he says: ‘It has no practical value’. When it has been shown to have distinct practical possibilities, he says: ‘The research has only proved what was already known’ ”.

*Sam Black, Practical Public Relations, page 124.*

### LISTEN TO OUR RADIO PROGRAMMES

Regular programmes on coconut cultivation are now broadcast over the Sinhala National Service of Radio Ceylon (61 m, 428 m) on every other Friday at 7 p.m. Your comments and suggestions regarding our programmes would be most welcome.