

RESEARCH AND THE COCONUT INDUSTRY

By
The Hon'ble
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IN his address the Hon'ble Mr. J. R. Jayawardena said that the first meeting of the Board of Management of this Institute was held in the Legislative Council Chambers in Colombo on April 27, 1929. This was the culmination of almost 17 years of agitation for the establishment of an institution to carry out a programme of research for the coconut industry. It is not possible for me to mention the names of all those who took a leading part in this agitation, but it would not be unfair to single out the Low-Country Products' Association as an institution which worked whole-heartedly towards the accomplishment of this ideal. Since then, during these two and a half decades, the Institute has studied the industry on scientific lines, giving the industry valuable advice as to how to increase yields and to reduce the cost of production.

Today, the Institute is split up into several divisions, and I have recently been able to persuade the Government to increase the cess which would enable the financial difficulties of the Institute to be surmounted. It has today sufficient money not only to carry on its work, but also to venture out into new fields, and with extra State aid to embark on a large programme of replanting.

The coconut industry, together with the tea and rubber industries, is one of the three major commercial industries of Ceylon. Of these three industries, the coconut industry is mainly a smallholders' industry while it caters to a competitive world market and cannot control world prices of coconut products. In order to survive and to compete, the industry must reduce its cost of production and increase its productive capacity. This Institute carries on its experiments and

gives advice on all factors that go into the increased production of coconuts, such as, soil conditions, and cultural operations that will improve the yielding capacity of the soil, the cultivation of high-yielding palms, the destruction of pests and diseases, and further industrial uses coconut products can be put to.

An important new division is the Animal Husbandry Division which studies the inter-relationship between livestock and coconut. This division assumes an added importance after the establishment of the Milk Board and the efforts being made by Government to popularize the consumption of milk. The development of secondary livestock industries would provide an additional source of income to the coconut small-holder. It can be imagined what a source of income over a million head of cattle now straying in coconut-growing areas, properly cared for, could produce.

I wish to emphasise that this Board has been entrusted with the task of seeing that 10,000 to 15,000 acres of coconuts are replanted annually with high-yielding nuts. The necessary funds have been made available, not only by the increased cess but also by the grant of Rs. 5 lakhs in the new Budget, for this scheme of replanting, and I trust there would be no further delay in its implementation. We are also releasing 200 acres from a forest reserve for the purpose of establishing an isolated seed garden and for establishing 18 nurseries throughout the Island to supply high-yielding seedlings. At the end of 10 years from today, I hope that 150,000 acres will be replanted with nine million high-yielding seedlings. Replanting does not only mean work in connection with replanting coconuts already growing, but also new planting on land to be opened up. These two aspects therefore form one part of the Government programme for the rehabilitation of the coconut industry. The other part includes the granting of direct subsidies to coconut growers, either by way of cash to help them in reconditioning their estates or special concessions with regard to the purchase of goods necessary for the production of coconuts, such as manure and barbed wire. I have already addressed the Finance Minister about the reduction of import duties on goods that are essential to the coconut industry, and I will be discussing with associations of coconut producers that portion of the rehabilitation scheme which involves the grant of further State subsidies.

I would like to conclude by saying that there is no need for alarm on account of a recession in coconut exports. In the year 1953 these exports were 5.9 per cent. higher than the average for the past five years, while exports of coconut products from other coconut-producing countries are declining. For example, India, the second largest producer had ceased to export copra and coconut products. In India the production of coconuts had declined to such an extent that the internal consumption is eight nuts per person per year. In Ceylon it is 300 nuts per-person per year. There is, however, no room for complacency. The good work done by this Institute has borne fruit in the past; it must continue to carry on the noble work of research and give its advice to the coconut producer. The State has given you backing in the past, and since I took office you have been provided with every cent of the funds you asked for. We cannot allow the coconut industry to become a declining asset in our economy. It is with that purpose that I look to your Institute to achieve in the next 25 years what we have been striving to do; that is, to make the Ceylon coconut industry a high watermark of efficient production.