

PADDY PRODUCTION TRENDS

Three decades ago, in the mid 1950s, Sri Lanka's paddy production was around 1,650,000 tons. At that time about 50 percent of the country's total rice requirements were met through imports.

Every successive government, since independence in 1948, formulated policies and implemented programmes with a view to increasing paddy production. As a result of these measures, over the last three decades, Sri Lanka's paddy production has recorded a three fold increase and reached the figure of 2,484,000 metric tons or close to self sufficiency by 1983.

This increase in paddy production has resulted from both an increase of average yield per hectare as well as in the increase of total extent cultivated. The average yield increased by about 85 percent, while extent harvested increased by about 75 percent over this period.

The increase in average yield was mainly the result of the cultivation of both old and new improved varieties which commenced in the late 1950's and late 1960's respectively. For instance, although almost all the area under cultivation in the mid 1950's was under traditional varieties, at present 85 percent of the cultivated area is under new improved varieties (NIV) while 10 percent is under old improved varieties.

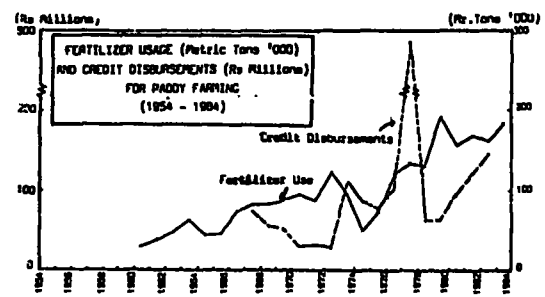
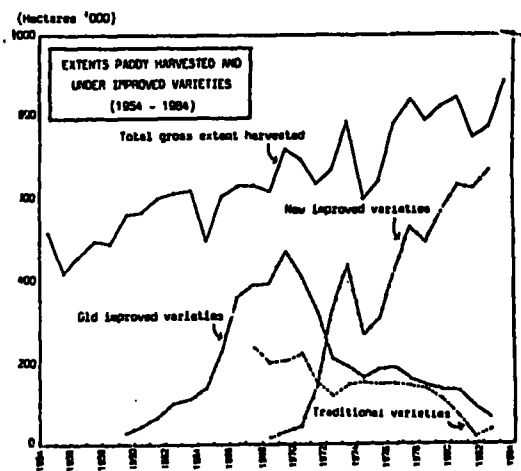
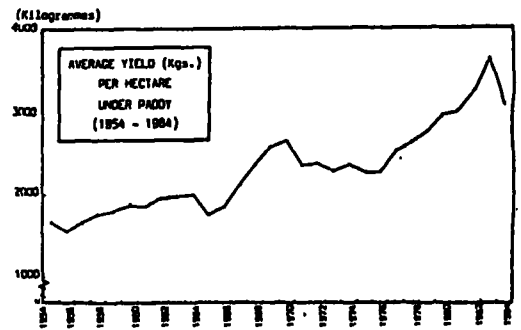
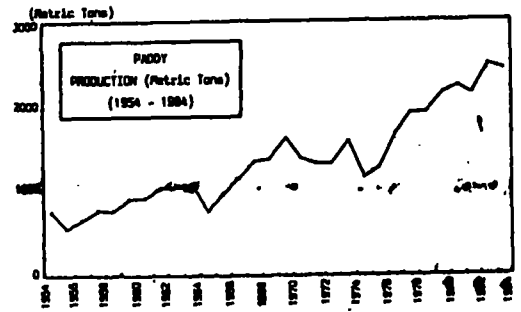
The second major factor influencing the increase of average yield was the increased use of chemical fertilizer, coupled with the use of high yielding varieties of paddy and an increase in the cultivated area brought under irrigation facilities. Use of chemical

fertilizer in the paddy sector, which began in the late 1950's, has now reached a total figure of 198,000 metric tons.

The increase in cultivated area has been mainly the result of the increase of area brought under the irrigation schemes. In addition to these factors the improvement in extension services, water management practices, transplanting methods, and use of agro chemicals have contributed to a large extent towards the increase of total paddy production.

However paddy production in 1984, estimated at 2,420,000 metric tons, was about 64,000 tons less than that of the 1983 production which amounted to 2,484,000 tons. This drop in production illustrates how dependent Sri Lanka's paddy production is on the vagaries of weather. In the Maha season of 1983/84 production was estimated at 1.4 million metric tons, a decrease of 24 percent over that of the previous year's Maha harvest. On the other hand, production in the 1984 Yala season increased by 52 percent from 0.7 million metric tons in 1983 to 1.1 million metric tons in 1984, recording the highest ever production in a Yala season.

The factors responsible for this rise in production were the favourable weather conditions during this season and the expansion in area under cultivation in the major paddy producing districts in the country. Why there was so big an increase in the gross extent under paddy cultivation during the 1984 Yala (383,000 hectares as against 241,000 in 1983) was because of the poor Maha paddy harvest which compelled farmers to make up for the loss and cultivate paddy in lands



that would normally have been used for growing subsidiary food crops during this time of the year.

The average yield per hectare is also estimated to have fallen by 15 percent from 3,606 kgs in 1983 to 3,076 kgs in 1984 largely as a result of the adverse weather conditions which effected the 1984 Maha crop. This drop in average yield occurred in both seasons mainly due to the adverse weather conditions prevailing during the seasons and the decrease in average amount of fertilizer used per cultivated hectare. While the average amount of fertilizer used per hectare decreased by 9 percent in the Maha 1983/84 it decreased by 11 percent in the Yala 1984. The decrease in average yield in Yala 1984 was also the result of damage caused by pests and disease and by bringing lands less suitable for paddy under cultivation.

The total use of fertilizer in the paddy sector increased by 11,000 metric tons: from 160,000 metric in 1983 to 171,000 metric tons in 1984. The increase was mainly due to an increase in the use of fertilizer in Yala 1984 by 17,000 metric tons compared to that of the previous Maha season. However due to the increase of gross extent brought under cultivation in both Maha 1983/84 and Yala 1984 the average amount of fertilizer used per hectare came down more than that of the previous cultivation season.

Accordingly despite the increase in the area cultivated and harvested total paddy production in 1984 had fallen marginally by about 2.6 percent mainly because of the decrease in average yield resulting from bad weather conditions and a generally low level of use of fertilizer per hectare.

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