

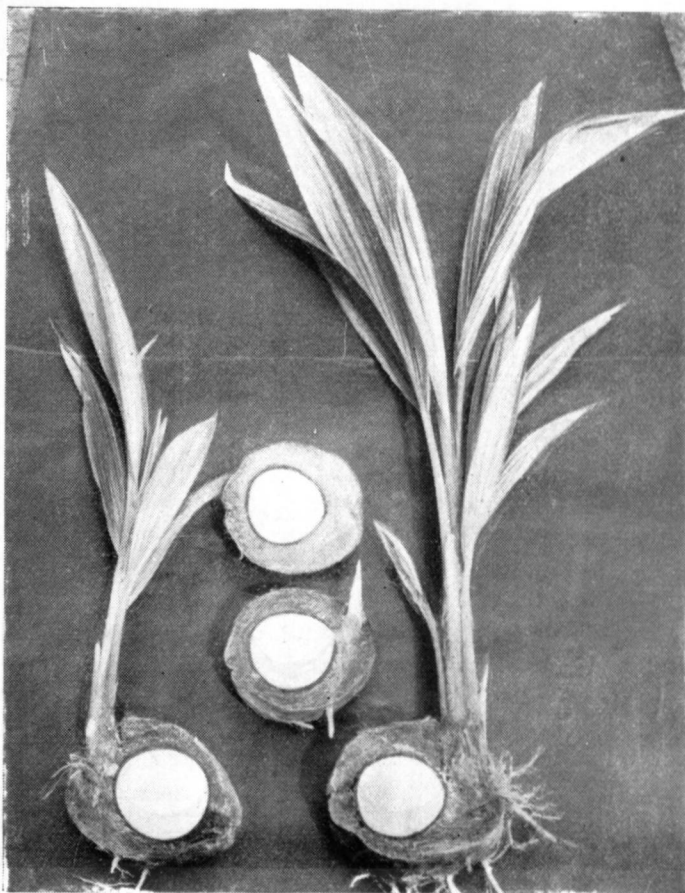
# PLANTING PROGRESS, 1949-1950

## The Replanting Project is Gathering Momentum

**P**ERHAPS the most important recommendation of the Ceylon Coconut Commission in its Report, published in 1949, was that 420,000 acres of coconuts were over 60 years of age and needed to be replanted (Chapter VII, paragraph 13). The proposal then made was that the work should be carried out, on a ten-year plan, at a rate of 42,000 acres a year—a stupendous and probably impossible undertaking, if the work is done conscientiously.

Actually the work of replacing old, neglected and low-yielding palms and the opening-up of new areas to replace areas which have been found to be unsuitable for coconuts will from now on have to be a continuous and never-ending task, because as fast as young seedlings are planted, older palms are continuously becoming less productive, and overage.

It is better, therefore, that the work should progress continuously at a rate which will ensure that the work is done properly and not rushed or scamped, so that only the best planting material will be issued to the public. Rehabilitation will have to be regarded as a permanent feature of the industry and the funds provided will be in the nature of a recurrent depreciation charge, which, after all, is only normal business practice.



### WHAT HAPPENS IN A NURSERY

A selected block nut, and the same 4, 6 and 8 months later.

The correct rate of depreciation on the basis of a "life" of 70 years is obtained by dividing the total acreage under coconuts by 70, and this gives a replacement rate of 15,000 acres per annum. Of this, it can be assumed that a large part will continue to be replanted by private enterprise as many owners prefer to use their own planting material. The balance is being replanted with selected seedlings, produced in the nurseries laid down by the newly-created Planting Division of the Coconut Research Institute.

This work is being financed by an annual allocation from the vote of the Department of Agriculture and the funds, so allotted, are being steadily increased each year as the organisation develops. The wisdom of this method is obvious when it is considered that the work has to be properly planned and staff has to be carefully selected, trained and expanded, as required.



SELECTED SEEDLINGS READY FOR DELIVERY

It would have been fatally easy to recruit unsuitable men and to waste large sums of public money by hurriedly laying down nurseries in the wrong places and of the wrong size and by producing large quantities of seedlings in excess of local demand. As it is, demand in all areas, has been equal to or greater than the supply, but as the work develops it will, of course, be necessary to do more to create public interest and enthusiasm, particularly when the price of copra begins to recede when, of course, less money will be available for replanting.

Starting from scratch, the work has been gradually developed and extended on sound lines, and in 24 months since the inception of the Scheme in March, 1949, no less than 22 nurseries have been established. In this same period 1,077,835 seednuts have been laid down in these nurseries, of which the equivalent replanted acreage\* is approximately 11,000 acres, *i.e.*, 1 per cent. of the total acreage, has been replaced.

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\* 100 block nuts yield 60 selected seedlings = 1 acre.

These nurseries are well distributed over the coconut areas of Ceylon and the location of the existing Coconut Research Scheme nurseries is as follows :—

1. Ratmalagara Estate, Madampe
2. Walpita Farm, Kotadeniyawa
3. Carmel Nursery, Kurunegala
4. Labuduwa Farm, Galle
5. St. Anne's Nursery, Puttalam
6. Hettipola
7. Palugaswewa Estate, Rajakadalawa
8. Tharakundu, and
9. Pappamodai, both near Mannar.

In addition, nurseries have been established on behalf of Coconut Producers' Co-operative Societies at :—

10. Chenkaladi in Batticaloa
11. Mundel
12. Nattandiya
13. Madampe
14. Dunagaha
15. Nittambuwa in Veyangoda
16. Madempella, Katana
17. Kurunegala
18. Gokarella
19. Horambawa, Mutugala
20. Alubomulla, Bolgoda
21. Puttalam, and
22. Sandalankawa.

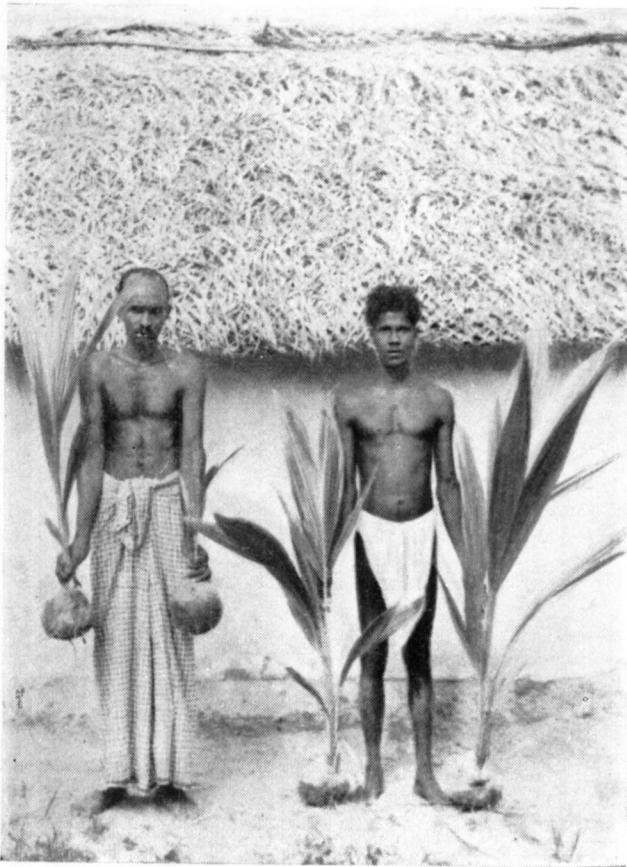
The gradual development of the work is indicated by the following figures :—

		Total Vote	Nurseries	Staff
		Rs.		
March-October, 1949	... ..	137,468	6	18
Oct., 1949-Oct., 1950	... ..	179,300	15	21
Oct., 1950-Oct., 1951	... ..	410,000	22	24

Eight nurseries, additional to the 22 above, will be laid down during the current financial year, if and when the increased vote recommended for the 1951/52 season is approved. This is because there is a time-lag of eight months between the laying down of a selected block nut in the nursery and its selection prior to sale, and it is this fact which holds up progress because it makes it impossible to prepare new nurseries until the succeeding estimates are finally confirmed.

The work has also been continuously hampered and curtailed by the soaring prices of coconuts which has made it difficult to obtain sufficient selected block nuts of the approved quality at reasonable prices. Growers have been most reluctant to sell even at the high price of Rs. 15 per thousand nuts, below the ruling price of copra per candy.

In consequence the present cost of producing a selected block nut seedling is now about Re. 1, depending on the locality, due partly to the high price of seednuts and partly to the high standard of selection which ensures that only the very best planting material is supplied to the public, so that the existing areas of coconuts in Ceylon will in time become more productive. It is a fact which is not sufficiently appreciated that on most properties three-quarters of the crop is obtained from a quarter of the palms because in the early days of the industry there was no proper selection, and on some estates nuts rejected for copra making were even used as seednuts. Another bad practice was to use nuts which had germinated in the heaps at the mills. It would be fatally easy to follow this bad example today and lower the standard in order to produce large quantities of cheap seedlings and so rapidly plant up a very much larger acreage with inferior stock.



**SEEDLING SELECTION**  
Bad and Good Seedlings.

At the present time, when private nurserymen are advertising seedlings at 75 cents each and over, these carefully selected block nut seedlings are being sold to the public at the subsidised price of 50 cents each which, with the present high price of coconuts and copra, should be within the reach of all growers except those whose properties have been adversely affected by the recent long succession of droughts.

It is obvious that the present demand for seedlings is due to the present period of prosperity and it is quite apparent that additional demand could be created by publicity and propanganda, if and when increased funds are made available. Up to now, the money allotted for replanting has been fully spent ; if the prices of coconut products were to decline, demand for seedlings may have to be artificially fostered by reducing the price of seedlings and by active propaganda in the vernaculars in order to maintain the correct rate of replacement of this key industry in the economy of Ceylon.

In order to know exactly what is required and not to be working in the dark, it will shortly be necessary for Government to call for annual returns of replanting and new planting, otherwise it will not be possible to determine the acreage replanted by private enterprise. When this is done, it will then be possible to assess correctly the financial provision necessary to maintain the present acreage under coconuts.

In conclusion, a tribute should be paid to the work of the Officers of the Planting Division. The very best use has been made of the limited funds provided, there have been no abuses and scarcely any complaints from individual members of the public. In view of the multiplicity of small orders, the task is one requiring great attention to detail, and careful organisation and planning. It is necessary also to refer to the willing assistance and co-operation of the research and advisory officers of the Coconut Research Institute and also of the Department of Co-operative Undertakings, in this work. The results of scientific research and the organised application of those results, otherwise known as extension or advisory work, is the sound foundation on which the Coconut Replanting Project of Ceylon is being built up and developed.

F. C. C.