

FOOD PRODUCTION ON ESTATES*

PRELIMINARY REPORT

ROLAND V. NORRIS

The areas allotted to the Tea Research Institute have been distributed, for purposes of supervision, as follows:—

Uva
Balangoda } Director.

Dimbula
Dickoya
Dolosbage and Kotmale } Dr. Eden.

Nuwara Eliya
Pussellawa } Dr. Bond

Statistics generally — Dr. Gadd.

The information so far available is of a rather general and incomplete nature and the issue of the contemplated Food Production Returns is urgently required if anything like a complete picture is to be obtained.

ST. COOMBS

On St. Coombs, root crops, e.g., manioc and sweet potatoes, have been planted up in various areas. Both of these crops seem

to do well but they are not yet mature and no yield figures are yet available. Yams have also been planted in a small block (laboratory compound). These have grown well, particularly *Colocasias*, but are not yet mature.

Trials of other crops — Maize, Cumbu, Cowpea, Sorghum — have been made in pruned areas of mature tea and/or in young tea clearings (1938).

The difference between these two areas is striking. In the young clearings, where perhaps better results might have been expected, the crops are stunted and have made little growth and the experiment must be considered a failure. Artificial manures have not been available and this no doubt partly accounts for the unfavourable result, but the main reason is probably the ques-

* This report refers only to the areas mentioned above which are allocated to the Tea Research Institute for supervision.

tion of cultivation. This land before planting in tea was patna and it is clear that in the few years that have elapsed since opening, the amount of cultivation and green manuring has been insufficient to bring the land into the state of fertility which exists in mature tea areas which have for a much longer period received normal cultivation and manures (artificial and green manures).

In the pruned areas of mature tea, Cumbu and Maize both initially grew reasonably well; Cowpea must be considered a failure, the main cause being no doubt excessive rain leading to disease. It has also been heavily attacked by eelworms. Very little crop will however be obtained from the Cumbu as heavy rain at the time of flowering has prevented setting of grain. The yield from the Maize is also likely to be very moderate as the number of cobs is small.

Rainfall Figures

		Inches	Wet days
April	...	7.83	21
May	...	6.57	14
June	...	15.15	27
July	...	22.22	26

DIMBULA, DICKOYA DOŁOSBAGE-KOTMALE

Preliminary results from estates confirm generally the impression gained at St. Coombs and indicate that for the wet season root crops are the only ones likely

to give results. (Groundnut is perhaps worthy of trial). They also confirm the opinion previously expressed by the Institute in regard to the unsuitability of the local patnas for food production.

The general inference from the above, subject to final results, is that in the wet areas most of the crops tried, except roots, are not likely to give material results in the Yala season though better results are likely to be obtained in the North East. In any season the availability of manures is likely to have a determining influence and tilth is obviously also of importance.

UVA

The data so far available refers chiefly to the Bandarawela-Haputale side, reports from the Badulla area being few in number to date. Though a few individual estates have had some success, the general result may be summed up in the following report received recently from the Chairman of the Bandarawela-Haputale Food Committee: "There is no doubt that most experiments have been complete failures or very disappointing for the past season. A few of us, like myself and Macaldeniya, who are more favourably situated, have been fairly successful with some crops. There is very little doubt in my mind that, except for, possibly, vegetables and dairy cattle, Haputale is not a suitable district for food production."

The weather has of course been unfavourable owing to severe drought in June and July. The manure question, here as elsewhere, has also had a marked influence on results.

With regard to individual crops, the following provisional comments are made: One estate which has generally speaking been the most successful gives the following yields obtained in jungle clearings:—

Meneri	...	11½-12	bushels	per acre	
Kurakkan	...	8-12	"	"	"
Cumbu	...	16	"	"	(Interplanted in tea 3 bushels per acre)
Maize	...	19	"	"	"
Kollu	...	4	"	"	"

Generally, however, results have been far less successful.

Kollu has been fairly widely grown and seems one of the most promising for the dry season in Uva as it does not require a particularly fertile soil.

Dwarf Bean (*Gas bonchi*) which at one time looked promising has proved disappointing. Severe damage has been caused by "Cutworms."

Cumbu has given promising results on several estates but is badly attacked by birds. Heads are smaller than normal, possibly due to the variety of seed.

Sorghum started well but has generally failed to mature.

Maize has done well on estates where rainfall has been favourable.

Kurakkan.—Similar results to *Maize*.

Of minor grains *Meneri* seems to have done best. Complaints are wide-spread of damage by pests, e.g., rats, squirrels, monkeys, etc.

Root Crops have been fairly widely tried. A crop of 700 lb. per acre of sweet potatoes is reported from one estate.

I am indebted to Mr. Harbord, the Agricultural Officer, E.D., for his co-operation in obtaining information about results in his area.

BALANGODA AREA

The results generally are similar to those in the Haputale area.

Much damage has been caused to food crops by excessive winds.

NUWARA ELIYA

Horse Gram and Cowpea have done better than other crops but the yield even from the best of these trials is unlikely to be very satisfactory.

At the higher elevation it is proving very difficult to find crops that will grow at all well. One estate in Kandapola reports that even Sweet Potato was a failure. It has been suggested an experimental plot might be opened at Nuwara Eliya or Kandapola to try out different varieties.

PUSSELLAWA

All estates are reported to be co-operating and progress has been made. In the present season root crops have been the basis of work on most estates and these are believed to be doing well. On certain estates deniyas are being converted into paddy land and groundnuts have been successfully grown.

On a Government experimental area at New Peacock, *Kurakkan* was unsuccessful and Cowpea has now been planted.

GENERAL

There is a general impression in the areas under discussion that food production on tea estates is most unlikely to yield results in any way comparable with the labour and expenditure involved.

The opinion is widely held that food will be produced in the required amounts only by the utilisation of land outside estates where conditions of elevation and climate are more suitable.

The effort to promote such cultivation by means of syndicates has however not

made material progress, largely due to uncertainties which still prevail as to the legal and financial obligations of estates combining to form such syndicates. It would seem most desirable that a clear statement should be issued by Government at the earliest possible date defining such obligations.
