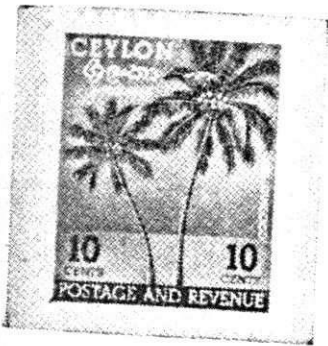


# THE CEYLON COCONUT QUARTERLY

## EDITORIAL

### The Consols of the East



IT has become the custom to speak of "tea, rubber and coconuts" in that order simply because, at the present time, this represents the relative commercial importance of these, the three leading industries of Ceylon. In his "Review of the Plantation Industries in 1950," Senator R. Singleton Salmon, C.B.E., has pointed out that these three crops together brought in a gross income of Rs. 1,494,318,847—a stupendous total. Of this tea accounted for Rs. 751,650,000 or 50.3 per cent.; rubber for Rs. 405,451,000 or 27.3 per cent.; and coconuts and coconut products Rs. 280,906,000 or 18.8 per cent. Tea, therefore, he concluded, remained the backbone of the Island's economy.

This is misleading because money values are fluctuating and impermanent. While tea and natural rubber are in possible danger of one day being either overproduced or replaced, the production of oils and fats (the leading energy foods) is unable to catch up with the increase in world population. Thus even though world production is increasing from 21,570,000 tons pre-war to an estimated figure of 23,170,000 tons for this year, the amount of oils and fats available per head of the world's population has actually declined from 22.3 lbs. to 21.1 lbs., according to a leading authority.

Whatever may happen to tea or rubber in the rather indefinite future that lies before us, there seems little reason to doubt that prices for copra and coconut oil will be well maintained as also the reputation of Coconuts as the "Consols of the East."

The following figures may come as a surprise to our readers:—

Crop	Total Acreage	Tonnage of Exports
Coconuts ... ..	1,075,000	218,000
Tea ... ..	556,000	130,000
Rubber ... ..	657,000	119,000

The domestic consumption of coconuts and coconut products in Ceylon is at least equal to and probably greater than the total exports, so that it may be concluded that financial considerations apart, the production of coconuts is the leading Industry of Ceylon and the most fundamental in its economy.

## Livestock and Coconut Cultivation

The present issue contains three articles with reference to the maintenance of cattle on coconut plantations. It is a common practice in Ceylon, though not pursued widely enough, to tether cattle and buffaloes under coconut palms with the object of manuring the palms and improving the fertility of the land. There does not appear to be much idea of developing the practice to other ends such as the breeding of better stock or producing milk on an appreciable scale to allow the organised marketing of this important food.

The Coconut Research Institute has not been unmindful of its duty in dealing with this problem as a part of its activities and following the recent increase in the cess, the Board has now approved the establishment of an Animal Husbandry Division with a number of objects in view—the better utilization of the waste products of animals, systematic grazing to ensure the maintenance of suitable pastures, the increased production of milk, and the raising of goats, pigs and poultry as subsidiary sources of income; all this to secure not only better cultivation of coconut lands, but also an improvement in the financial position of the growers by reducing their almost sole dependence on the coconut crop.

The subject of raising livestock and dairy cattle under coconuts in Ceylon is not a new one; records show that it has been discussed and written about on many occasions in past years, but apparently little or no action has resulted. The problem of keeping stock on small holdings, farms and estates is dependent in the first instance upon the nature of the soil and the quality of herbage it provides for grazing and one of the first investigations to be undertaken is the improvement of pastures. Then there is the question of the correct cattle population.

In the current issue we publish three articles which merit consideration by our readers. Mr. R. Spencer-Schrader who has consistently drawn attention to the importance of this subject and has offered many suggestions based on practical experience, provides a memorandum on animal husbandry which will be considered by the Board in formulating its programme of work. The Specialist in Animal Husbandry (Diseases) of the Department of Agriculture writes on the production of milk, especially on estates. The Animal Husbandry officer of the C.R.I. gives an account of a livestock show recently held at Marawila and draws attention to the results of the work of the Agricultural Department in connection with the improvement of local cattle.

We would also draw attention to a particularly interesting and useful article which appeared in the "Tropical Agriculturist" (Vol. LXXV, 1930) entitled "A Plea for Pastures and their Improvement," by Emil J. Livera, late of the Department of Agriculture, and to more recent results published by Dr. W. R. C. Paul (Trop. Agric., Vol. CIV, 1948). The present Director of Agriculture, Dr. A. W. R. Joachim, also in the Tropical Agriculturist (Vol. LXVIII, 1927) has discussed the merits of Ceylon cultivated pasture grasses. Abstracts of these articles will appear in a future issue of the Quarterly.

## Cover Crop and Coconuts

One method of combating soil erosion is the establishment of ground cover. While this practice answers to best effect in the wet zone areas with heavy rainfall, there is a serious danger of competition between cover crops and the coconut palms for moisture in dry areas under conditions of low rainfall. The value of suitable cover crops in adding to the fertility of the soil

undisputed; yet a most important consideration in the dry zone is the availability of adequate moisture for the coconut palms. The results of experimental work at Bandirippuwa Estate have revealed interesting facts, which together with notes on the establishment, cultivation and behaviour of several better known cover crops, have been set out in a paper of practical value by the Soil Chemist, Dr. M. L. M. Salgado.

### The Cost of Planting

Most of our plantations are old and, as a result of senility, yields are becoming less. Not only is it necessary to replant existing plantations and replace old palms with selected seedlings so that yields from the existing acreage can be increased, it is essential also to increase the acreage under coconuts to meet the increasing needs of our ever-increasing population.

This problem is receiving the active consideration of Government. An inter-departmental committee, under the Chairmanship of the Land Commissioner has been appointed to consider the question of the alienation of Crown lands for the development of economic crops, among which are included coconuts, and an Island-wide survey is now being carried out.

In this connection it is necessary to provide some idea of the present cost of opening-up a small coconut plantation. The Planting Sub-Committee of the Coconut Research Scheme has made an estimate which is published in this issue. The figures against individual items will vary according to circumstances and it is possible that economies can be effected but the estimate offers a valuable guide, even though hardly an infallible one, to those who are planting up for the first time.

The Planting Division of the C.R.I. is producing high-grade selected planting material in some 25 nurseries situated in various parts of the country and orders for seedlings should be placed eight months ahead; leaflets describing the correct method of planting and the maintenance of the young palms may be obtained free on application.

### Copra Manufacture

There is no reason why bad copra should be produced anywhere in Ceylon. Apart from very slight differences in oil content, the quality of the meat of ripe coconuts from healthy palms is the same. Differences in quality are due only to differences in care in the preparation of copra and its subsequent handling. It calls for no special technical knowledge and no great expense to prepare good copra. With the system of bulk buying, the quality of Ceylon copra has deteriorated from its former high quality. With falling prices, buyers will become more discriminating and it will certainly pay to make good copra, otherwise it will not be so easy to sell at the best price on the day of sale.

In a series of articles Mr. Cooke, who is an expert on the subject, will explain the causes of copra deterioration and it is hoped that his advice will be translated into practice by producers. In subsequent issues he will also give an account of different kinds of copra kilns and in particular will describe an inexpensive small kiln suitable for small-holders owning only a few acres of coconuts.

## **Bissa**

It has been already suspected that "bissa" formation, the surface matting of coconut roots, may be due to unfavourable sub-soil conditions (see Vol. I, No. 4, page 36). In an article in this issue, Mr. C. Ambrose, Research Assistant in the Botanical Division, expresses the view that the presence of "bissa" is a useful indication of an imperfectly drained soil. The adverse factors in an undrained sub-soil might be lack of oxygen, intense salinity or acidity; these will require investigation. In Malaya, matted surface rooting has been noted in clay soils where there is a sulphurous black ooze in the sub-soil which cannot be satisfactorily drained away because the land is low-lying.

## **Electricity on the Estate**

The urgent need of today is for food, more food and still more food, and the drift of population from the country to the towns must be arrested by improving the amenities of the rural areas, if more food is to be produced.

In bringing this subject to the notice of our readers, we are breaking new ground but we hope it will result in inducing more proprietors of coconut estates to become resident proprietors so that the productive efficiency of the industry will be raised.