

Methods of Increasing Production in Coconut

By

S. G. AIYADURAI, B. sc. (Ag).,

Assistant Oilseeds Specialist,

Agricultural Research Institute, Coimbatore.

Coconut is an important industrial crop of India and is intimately connected with the economic and domestic life of the inhabitants of the coconut tracts of the country, India ranks third in world acreage and production accounting for about 3,000 million coconuts or 2 lakhs tons of copra from about 1.5 million acres under the coconut. Of India's 1.5 million acres more than a million acres are in Kerala, the remaining being distributed over South Kanara, East Godavari and Tanjore Districts of the Madras State and the States of Mysore, Orissa, Bombay and Bengal.

India has, now become from being an exported of coconut oil 25 years ago, a net importer of coconut oil and copra. This is due to the fall in the production of coconuts and the growing demand for the coconut oil resulting chiefly from the increase in population and improvement in the industrialisation of the country. Unfortunately, the production of coconut has remained more or less static and the imports of copra and coconut oil have been falling steadily. Prolonged prevalence of uneconomic prices for coconut and its products has resulted in neglect of plantations and abandoning of cultural and manurial treatments and consequent deterioration of the condition and yield of trees. These have helped to widen the gulf between the supply and demand for coconuts from year to year. If the coconut industry is to thrive and establish itself as a paying concern and withstand outside competition, maximum production of coconuts at minimum cost and creation of an assured market for them should be aimed at.

There are two important ways of meeting the deficit; one is to obtain, if possible, larger imports and the other is to increase the internal production. The possibility of obtaining increased quantities from foreign sources has to be ruled out as there is a growing world shortage of fats and oils and the small surplus of coconut oil in some of the Eastern countries is hardly sufficient to go round. The need for increasing the production of coconuts in the country is therefore imperative. The coconut is a perennial crop which takes 7 to 10 years to yield nuts. Therefore the possibility of increasing the production by additional land under coconut is a long-term problem. But it should be possible to step up production to some extent immediately by giving the existing trees sufficient care and adopting scientific methods of cultivation.

It may be of interest to note that as much as 95% of the area under coconut in India is located in South India. In South India, Madras State leads in coconut cultivation and therefore it is her duty to increase production of coconuts during times of deficit of this commodity.

Research work connected with coconut improvement was started in Madras in 1916 with the opening of four Research Stations in the South Kanara District. In Madras the coconut crop has been studied more extensively than in the other coconut-growing States in India and many useful results of economic importance have been obtained for the benefit of the coconut grower. The results of Research carried out on the different aspects of coconut cultivation such as soils suitable for growing coconut, selection of planting material, depth of planting, manuring, intercultivation, harvesting of coconuts, and control of diseases and pests, and improved methods of coconut cultivation have not become sufficiently popular among the coconut growers, probably due to want of publicity. There is, therefore, urgent necessity for the dissemination of correct information in coconut culture to the grower as it will greatly help better cultivation and production of coconuts.
