

Maximisation and Development of Selected Seedlings Production in Government Coconut Nurseries *

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Introduction: Madras accounts for nearly fifty per cent of the total acreage under coconut in the whole of Indian Union. About 1,500 millions coconuts are produced annually from the coconut growing tracts in the State. Coconut is considered as one of the world's principal sources of food both for the peoples of the tropics and those of the heavily populated temperate regions. In addition it is an important industrial crop. There is growing demand for coconuts and coconut oil resulting chiefly from the increase in population and the rising tempo of industrialisation within the country. Therefore it has, become very necessary to step up production of coconuts in order to bridge the wide gulf between the supply and demand.

To attain self sufficiency, the production of coconuts has to be almost doubled in the State. The short-term method of increasing the production in the existing gardens by adopting improved methods of cultivation and manuring alone may not be sufficient to achieve this end. Side by side with the short term programme, the long-range method of increasing the area under coconut has also to be adopted. In addition many of the existing coconut gardens have become too old and unremunerative. Underplanting in such gardens has to be immediately taken up. The programme of undertaking fresh planting naturally involves the demand for sufficient planting material of good quality.

Requirements of Coconut Seedlings of Madras state: Considering the area under the crop in the State and assuming that all the existing coconut gardens were grouped according to their age, nearly 1/70 of the total area, about 9,000 acres would become due for under planting every year, allowing a useful bearing age of 70 years for the palm. Calculating at the rate of 60 trees per acre the annual total requirements of coconut seedlings for underplanting would therefore be about 5 lakhs. The total number of coconut trees in the State has been estimated to be 4,34,26,740 and of these 2 per cent of the trees may be taken as casualties every year either due to incidence of pests or diseases or damage caused by natural forces. This would, therefore, require about 8 lakhs seedlings every year to fill up the gaps. Also provision has to be made for supply

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of seedlings to raise fresh plantations. But it was observed that during the past four years there has been a steady demand for supply of nearly 2 lakhs seedlings every year and about 70 percent of this demand was being met by supplies from coconut nurseries. However there is no denying the fact that a large number of coconut seedlings are being bought every year by the growers from the private nursery men and big garden owners who raise coconut seedlings for sale.

Government Coconut Nurseries and Distribution of Seedlings: In order to supply the coconut growers in the State with selected coconut seedlings of reliable quality, small coconut nurseries were started by the State Government at the Coconut Research Station, Nileschwar in 1944 and at the Agricultural Research Stations, Pattukottai, Samalkot and Pattambi in 1946. While running these nurseries, it was observed that as the seedlings produced at the Government nurseries were considered superior to those obtained from other sources, the demand for them was rapidly increasing from all quarters. Therefore, with a view to produce selected coconut seedlings on a large scale eight coconut nurseries with a total target of 1,60,000 selected seedlings per year were started in the important coconut growing districts of the State in 1949 with the financial aid of the Indian Central Coconut Committee. During the past three planting seasons a total of 3,61,357 seedlings have been distributed among the coconut growers in the State. The large scale production of selected seedlings at the Government nurseries has to a great extent eliminated the possibility of the growers obtaining and planting coconut seedlings of unknown pedigree bought from local nursery men.

Suggestions for Improving Coconut Nursery Work and Maximising Production of Coconut Seedlings: In the running of the nurseries under the Comprehensive Coconut Nursery Scheme certain practical difficulties were experienced. These were carefully considered and the following suggestions are put forward for improving the work and maximising production.

(a) *Survey:* Periodical survey of the important coconut growing tracts of the State is absolutely essential with a view to fix up localities where the production of coconut seedlings can be concentrated considering the following aspects.

- (i) Area under the coconut in the locality.
- (ii) Possibilities of increasing the area under the crop.
- (iii) Area that requires to be under-planted.

Increase in production can be achieved by the following two ways.

- (i) By starting new nurseries in the coconut growing tracts.

- (ii) By training and encouraging big garden owners and private nursery men to produce selected seedlings on the lines advocated by the Department.

More nurseries have to be started at selected centres in the coconut growing districts according to the demand for seedlings. The location of these nurseries has to be done on a regional basis, each catering preferably to the needs of a particular region. The big garden owners and private nursery men who are not producing and selling coconut seedlings to the public should be given adequate training on scientific lines. Only those who have undergone the training at the Government nurseries should be licensed and allowed to sell seedlings. The nurseries should be inspected by the Departmental staff at each stage. A start in this direction is desirable at the present juncture.

(b) *Target*: The target of production of selected seedlings at each nursery centre should be fixed at what could be efficiently managed and with the best attention paid to each stage of production. It should be a figure that can be conveniently distributed during the planting season in the tract itself. The maximum limit of production can be fixed at 20,000 seedlings per year while the minimum may be 10,000 seedlings.

(c) *Facilities*: The nursery should be located as near the seednut centres as possible, preferably on sandy soils and should have adequate irrigation facilities. Centres selected for seednut collection should be easily accessible to facilitate easy and quick transport and also reduce the cost of production. It would be a great advantage if the gardens are concentrated in blocks.

(d) *System of distribution*: In order to speed up the distribution of seedlings during planting season, other agencies like the Co-operative Sales Societies, Panchayat Boards, Firka Development Centres, Colonisation Scheme Societies etc., are to be contacted in time and supplies arranged to the growers through them. This would help the small growers to obtain their requirements conveniently.

For successful running of the Government Coconut Nurseries in the State, the above mentioned suggestions deserve careful and serious consideration by the Department.

Summary: (i) There is urgent need to step up the production of coconuts in the State by almost 100 per cent in order to reach self sufficiency in coconuts and its products.

(ii) The demand for selected coconut seedlings is rapidly increasing.

(iii) Two ways of increasing the production of seedlings have been suggested viz., starting more nurseries by the Government and giving adequate training to private nursery men to raise seedlings on scientific lines.

(iv) The importance of periodical surveys, the nearness of production centres to seed-nut centres and of availability of adequate facilities has been brought out.

(v) The target of production of seedlings at each centre should be fixed at an easily manageable figure, say, 10,000 to 20,000.

(vi) The help of other agencies like Co-operative Sales Societies, Panchayat Boards etc., should be requisitioned to effect the distribution.

Development of Cane Varieties in Madras State and Maximisation of Sugar Production *

By

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The sugar industry in the State is under expansion and is reaching a stage of self sufficiency. Under the present level of per capita consumption and with further expansion of the factories, the State will be in a position to export sugar to other countries. For steady progress of the industry, scientific planning of varietal and cultural schedules, and controlled harvest are essential. The industry in general, shows a tendency for achieving quick profits to the detriment of continued progress in Development. This led to clash of interests between the factory occupiers and the cane suppliers. In this clash, price of jaggery holds the balance of power; with low price for gur the factory occupier can dictate to the cane supplier; with high price for gur, the cane

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