

CACAO AS AN INTERCROP IN COCONUT LANDS

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Cacao as an intercrop was recently introduced to coconut growing areas. But in other coconut growing countries such as Malaysia, Papua, New Guinea and India, cacao is grown on a large scale as an intercrop with coconut. In Sri Lanka, traditional cacao growing areas in the central region are Gampola, Wattegama, Katugastota and Matale. Cacao could be grown easily and profitably in coconut lands in the wet zone. Intercropping with cacao increases coconut yields through the accumulation of organic matter in the soil, conservation of soil moisture, weed control and better soil microbial activity.

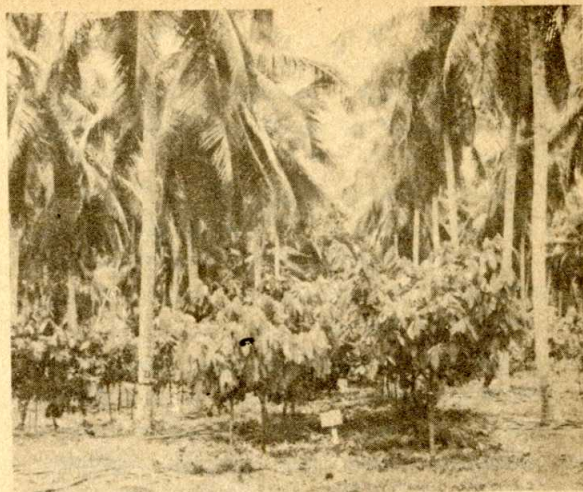
From an adult cacao plant grown as an intercrop about one kilogram of processed cacao beans could be obtained. An acre of coconut can accommodate 300 cacao plants, which would bring in an income of Rs. 15,000/- per annum.

Subsidy for growing cacao

For growing cacao in an acre of coconut land, Rs. 2,250/- is given as a subsidy by the Coconut Cultivation Board. This is paid in three instalments after planting cacao. In order to get the subsidy, Coconut Development Officer of your area should be consulted. If the number of cacao plants is less than 250 per acre, then the subsidy is paid at the rate of Rs. 9.90 per plant.

Coconut growing areas suitable for cacao

Coconut lands in the districts of Colombo, Gampaha, Kegalle, Kalutara, Galle and Matara in wet zone as well as in areas such as Giriulla, Polgahawela, Potuhera, Ibbagamuwa and Mel-



siripura in Kurunegala District are suitable for growing cacao.

Selection of suitable coconut lands

Soil

Entirely sandy or clayey lands are not suitable. Loamy soil with organic matter is very suitable. The soil should be able to hold moisture. Lands with poor drainage during rainy season are not suitable. Since cacao is deep rooted, the depth of soil should be 1.3 m. (3-4 ft.) without cabook or any other hard soil layer.

Slope of the Land

Slopy coconut lands are suitable for growing cacao as soil erosion could be reduced with this crop. If the drainage is poor in the lower most section and if the upper most section is subject to drought, both these sections should be avoided.

Condition of the coconut plantation

Coconut should be 15-45 years of age. Young coconut plantations and senile coconut plantations are not suitable.

Suitable varieties and planting material

Criollo varieties with red or violet coloured pods are susceptible to drought. Hence these are not suitable for the coconut triangle.

Forestaro varieties with green coloured spherical pods are drought tolerant. This is more suitable for coconut growing areas.

N.A. 32 variety of Forestaro group is suitable for coconut lands with better soil moisture level and fertile soil.

