

BOOK REVIEWS

Coconuts. By R. Child, 2nd edition. Tropical Agricultural Series (Editor, D. Rhind). (Longmans, London). 1974. 335 pp. Price £ 10.00.

The first edition of this book was published in 1964 with the same title and by the same author. The author Dr. Reginald Child is a former Director of Coconut Research Institute, Sri Lanka. He was in charge of the Ceylon Coconut Research Schemes (since made into the Institute) for 18 years. Since his retirement, he has also had the opportunity of visiting a number of other coconut growing countries. He is thus well qualified to write this book. The first edition of the book contained 15 chapters and 209 pages of subject-matter. This has now been expanded into 20 chapters in 325 pages. The present edition comprehensively deals with the various aspects of coconut cultivation including the history and botany of the crop, its climatic and soil requirements, varieties and breeding techniques, nutritional requirements, pest and disease control, maintenance of plantations, processing and use of the different products. What makes this edition very welcome is that the author has taken note of the progress in research and technology since the appearance of the earlier edition.

The book begins with a very interesting account of the historical background of the crop and the several arguments regarding its place of origin and dissemination and the origin of the names 'coconut' and *Cocos nucifera*. The statistics in the second chapter has been revised and brought up to date. Table II (p. 30) shows that Philippines has the largest area under coconut (1.8 million ha) followed by Indonesia (1.2 mha), India (0.98 mha) and Sri Lanka (0.47 mha) out of a total of 5.9 million ha. Table III (p. 31) provides the FAO estimates of copra production of all the countries for 1965-70. The total world production is now estimated to be consistently above 3 million tonnes and shows little variation from 1965-1970. The estimate for 1952-55 (FAO) quoted in the earlier edition was 2.8 million tons and for 1934-38 the figure was 2.4 million tons. Thus, there

has been only a marginal increase in the total world copra production. A person who is not familiar with the coconut palm will find a lot of useful information which is not documented as comprehensively elsewhere as in Chapter 3 where the botany and special characteristics of the palm are discussed. The earlier edition (pp. 40-43) included only very little information on varieties but the new edition devotes a whole chapter (pp. 55-71) on it. In it is summarized all the available information on varieties, cultivars, the difficulties of identifying them and the propriety of these terms. The chapter on climate and soil remains largely unchanged. Chapter 6 on selection and breeding is entirely rewritten and contains new information on hybrids, replanting programmes, and international efforts for crop improvement. Chapters 7-10 in the present edition replace chapters 5-7 in the earlier edition. The earlier chapter on manuring and cultivation did not discuss nutritional requirements of the crop or foliar deficiency/diagnostic symptoms. The present edition includes a discussion of these topics and provides several new references. The chapter on cultivation and maintenance of adult plantations has been revised to include discussions on intercropping of coconut gardens with cacao, banana, and fodder crops, an aspect which is gaining importance in several other countries. Also, raising of cattle and other livestock on the farm has received the author's attention. These changes reflect the author's laudable attempt to keep up with modern trends in the requirement of the coconut farmer. It is refreshing to note that the revised version of "general note on control of insect pests" (Chapter 11, pp. 199-201) takes note of the shifting emphasis in science. In the earlier edition, the accent was on economy (of biological control of coconut pests). In the present edition, the author emphasizes the need for ecological considerations before extensive chemical sprays are used. In general, the chapters on pests and diseases, and products remain unchanged but the author has included several new references and has attempted to make the discussions current. Information on the so-called diseases of obscure reasons still continues to be sketchy and until research

chers provide more definite information, the situation cannot be expected to be any better. For example, the 'wilt (root) of Travancore' has been appropriately renamed as 'Kerala wilt' in the new edition, but no new information has been added and there are only two references on it cited at the end of the chapter.

The author has added several new references at the end of each chapter. In the new edition references are listed subject-wise. The references include several publications and reports, especially back volumes, which are not easily available in most of the libraries and with individuals. This adds to the value of the book.

This has, no doubt, been accomplished because of the author's long years of service in more than one tropical country and his personal visits to several coconut growing countries of the world. While this is, no doubt, very commendable, one is left with a feeling that the compilation shows to some extent an unevenness, in that information from some important regions as the tropical west Africa, the Philippines, and India is less than what has been given for Sri Lanka, West Indies, and the Pacific region. One would hope that this slight omission will be taken care of in the next edition of this book.

The publication contains 27 plates. These include practically all the 23 plates which

were included in the first edition. Since all the coconut growing countries have been, and are still, undergoing tremendous social and economic changes since the last 2-3 decades, one would have wished that the second edition would include in it more recent photographs from these regions. Many photographs would carry an impression that the various aspects of cultivation and processing are still being carried out in these countries on a more primitive and simpler level than what it actually is at present. Notwithstanding these minor omissions, the book will be highly valuable and even indispensable to all those interested in the culture, development, and research of coconut.

To sum up, the author has presented information on different topics in a comprehensive manner that reflects his long association with the crop and the coconut research community and his profound knowledge. In these days of over-specialization when, as a rule, no single author finds himself confident to write authoritatively on different aspects of a single crop, the author's success is commendable. In keeping up the tradition of the other books published in this series, this book is also attractively produced. However, the cost of £ 10.00 puts it beyond the reach of practically every individual in the developing countries of the world. (K. V. A. BAVAPPA, Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod 670 124, Kerala State, India.)