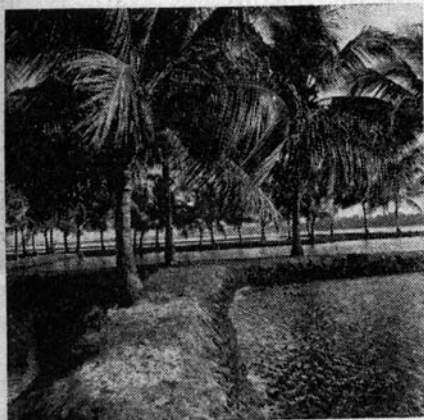


1505 million extra nuts from field bunds

BY

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THE seven coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh right from Srikakulam to Nellore can increase the coconut production by 1505 million nuts per annum. This is possible if the strong, wide strips of field bunds making up a large area of 4.35 lakh hectares are put under coconut cultivation.



Luxuriant growth of coconuts planted on field bunds

These districts grow mainly paddy, sugarcane and banana. There are adequate irrigation facilities round the year where paddy is rotated with either

paddy, sugarcane or banana. In places where irrigation is not possible round the year, the fields are either left fallow after a crop of paddy or a catch crop like a pulse or a green manure is raised.

A common feature of all these lands is that they have strong, wide bunds which invariably are left unutilised whatever may be the type of cropping pattern followed in the fields. A few enterprising farmers in East and West Godavari Districts do raise coconuts or mangoes on these bunds but majority have them bare.

Being on the coastal belt and having an annual rainfall of 100 to 130 cm., these seven districts are ideally suited to grow coconuts. In fact, about 50 to 65 kilometres wide belt all along the coastal area of over 965 kilometres affords all natural conditions congenial for taking up intensive cultivation of coconut. The coconut gardens now existing in this belt, though sparsely located, are proof positive of the suitability of the soil and climate for coconut cultivation.

In a few taluks in Godavari and Srikakulam Districts one does find large-scale plantations of coconuts, but in almost all other villages only isolated gardens are found.

Though all factors for growing coconut are favourable in these seven districts, the present cropping pattern does not permit further expansion of the area under coconut on a garden scale. Therefore, the only alternative is to grow it on field bunds.

The seven districts of coastal Andhra Pradesh have 17.40 lakh hectares under paddy and other irrigated crops like banana and sugarcane. Of these, it may be said that the bunds comprise about 25 per cent area i. e., 4.35 lakh hectares which will be available for coconut planting. At the rate of about 49 or 50 palms per hectare of bund, a total of 21.75 million palms can be planted on the entire bund area.

Given sufficient care and attention, at a modest estimate the palms can be expected to yield on an average 70 nuts per palm per year which works out to over

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1505 million nuts from the entire area of bunds. At the current rate of Rs. 350 per 1000 nuts the increased production will bring in about Rs. 525 million.

The additional income of over Rs. 1200 per hectare of field bunds also compares favourably with the income a farmer can normally expect from one hectare of paddy crop.

It is also observed that these coconut palms do not exert any ill-effects on the crops cultivated in the fields.

At present the practice of growing coconut palms on field bunds is in vogue in East and West Godavari Districts. Coconut crops are successfully raised where the field bunds are not less than a metre wide. To popularise this practice in paddy growing areas of other districts, large-scale demonstration plots of 100 acres each are laid out on paddy

field bunds in Krishna, Guntur, Nizamabad and Warangal districts of the State.

As a measure of incentive, these demonstration plots are fully subsidised. The subsidy includes cost of planting material at the rate of 50 seedlings per hectare, transport charges, initial cost of formation of mounds and a watchman's salary. This works out to Rs. 4000 per 100-acre plot.

At the Regional Coconut Research Station, Ambajipet, an experiment with three treatments is laid out to study the economics of paddy-cum-coconut cultivation. In one of the treatments coconut palms are planted on bunds of paddy fields at a distance of four and a half metres. The paddy field bunds are formed 18 metres apart. This maintains the usual 50-60 population per acre of the coconut palms.

In another treatment the paddy

crop is grown in the field the bunds of which are left bare.

The third treatment is of coconut palms cultivated on raised land conforming to conventional method.

So far the indications are that the root and shade effects of coconut palms have only negligible effect on paddy yield and that the minor loss, if any, will be compensated by the additional revenue from the coconut palms.

Since the coconut cultivation on bunds does not demand encroachment on cultivated areas and as there are no adverse effects on the usual field the cultivation of coconuts on field bunds can safely be adopted by the growers as a profitable proposition. With a view to instil confidence in the minds of growers large-scale demonstrations and intensive propaganda are to be organised at different levels.

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