

SUBSIDY FOR REMOVAL AND REJUVENATION OF ROOT - WILT AFFECTED PALMS IN KERALA

N. John Kurian

Assistant Director, Coconut Development Board, Cochin - 11

The root-wilt disease of coconut in Kerala is nearly a century old. This is a debilitating disease causing reduction in yield and vigour of the palms. The root-wilt disease appears in all soil types, varieties and age groups. Under neglected condition, and when superimposed by leaf-rot disease, the palm succumbs to the disease soon. However, under good management conditions the palm continues to yield for some more years. There is no effective remedy for the disease. The present strategy to combat the disease is to contain the disease within the peripheral belts, rehabilitation of the affected plantations by a set of package of practices, gradual elimination of the disease by selective eradication and replanting programme, intensification of multi-disciplinary research, etc.

The root-wilt disease is rampant in the seven districts of the State, viz. Trivandrum, Alleppey, Quilon, Kottayam, Idukki, Erna-

kulam and Trichur. About 10 to 12 million palms are affected by this disease causing an estimated annual loss of about 340 million nuts.

The coconut cultivators as a class are small and marginal growers. More than 90 per cent of the coconut holdings are less than 0.5 ha in size. The widespread prevalence of the disease and the consequent decline in the productivity of coconut is a matter of great concern to the State whose entire fabric of rural economy is closely woven around the crop. Considering the urgent need for rehabilitating the disease affected coconut gardens, in order to save the crop from destruction, it was suggested that the cultivators would be adequately subsidised as an incentive to undertake the rehabilitation of coconut garden in the State.

Subsidy under Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Coconut

The Government of India sanctioned the scheme for rehabilitation and rejuvenation of the disease affected coconut plantations in Kerala during 1977-78. The technical content of the programme is to contain the disease within the two belts, one in the north (Trichur Dist.) and the other in the south (Trivandrum Dist.) and to rejuvenate the diseased plantations within the area by replanting, under planting and better management practices. The scheme is continued during the Sixth Five Year Plan with a target of coverage of 11,000 ha by replanting and under planting with about 2.2 lakh seedlings annually. Fifty per cent subsidy is granted on the cost of seedlings and fertilizers. The fertilizer schedule for the programme is one kg. coconut mixture (10:5:20:1.5) in the first year of planting, 1.5 kg in the second year, 3 kg in the third

year and 4.25 kg from the fourth year onwards. The cost per seedling is Rs. 6.25. The amount of subsidy for planting and maintenance for 3 years may come to Rs. 7 of which the Government of India's share is about Rs. 3.50 per palm. The Sixth Plan outlay of the scheme is Rs. 102.93 lakhs of which Rs. 88.888 lakhs are meant for subsidies. The scheme is implemented in all the root - wilt affected districts of the State by distributing about 2.2 lakhs seedlings annually. Though the achievements of the scheme is satisfactory in respect of the targets envisaged, the removal of diseased palms by the cultivators to destroy the foci of infection has not attained much progress. Hence the Coconut Development Board has envisaged a scheme to give incentive to remove these palms. The details of the scheme are given elsewhere

Subsidy under State Government

The State Government started giving financial assistance for removal of diseased palms from 1977-78 onwards. At first it was restricted to the diseased palms in the belt areas of the State with a view to destroy the foci of infection. The extent of subsidy was Rs. 75/- per palm in addition to the subsidies available under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for planting material and fertilizers. But later, spurred by the hue and cry raised by the coconut cultivators of disease affected areas, the State Government decided to extend the subsidy to selected diseased areas of the State. The comprehensive coconut development scheme launched recently by the Department of Agriculture, Kerala with the objective

to rehabilitate the diseased coconut plantations in the State provides the following financial assistance in the form of subsidies

- (1) Compensation of Rs. 75/- per palm for cutting and removing uneconomic palms.
- (2) Subsidy at 50 per cent of the cost of fertilizers for 10 per cent of the trees owned by the cultivators with holding size less than one hectare under coconut.
- (3) Subsidy at 50 per cent for application of lime and magnesium sulphate or dolomite to coconut palms to all coconut growers in the scheme area.
- (4) Subsidy at 33½ per cent for supply of green manure seeds.
- (5) Transport subsidy of Rs. 0.75 per palm for transportation and application of silt from backwater area.
- (6) Subsidy at 25 per cent of the cost of construction or Rs. 1500 per unit whichever is less for providing irrigation facilities for coconut garden.
- (7) Subsidy at 50 per cent of the cost of quality seedlings used for replanting in place of palms that are removed.
- (8) Subsidy at 50 per cent of the cost of fertilizers used for the newly planted seedlings for the first three years.

(Item Nos. 7&8 are the subsidies provided under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme.)

In addition to this, a comprehensive spraying scheme imple-

mented by the State Government through local bodies provided 100 per cent subsidy on spraying chemicals.

Subsidy under the World Bank Aided Project

The objective of the scheme is to subsidise all inputs in selected diseased belts. The scheme is to be implemented in 13 selected panchayats where the Department of Agriculture will implement a comprehensive Coconut Development Programme. The scheme provides financial assistance to coconut growers in the form of subsidies and credit facilities from financial institutions on the following pattern.

- (1) Subsidy for removal of severely diseased palms at the rate of Rs. 75/- per palm.
- (2) Input subsidy on cost of inputs ranging from 10 to 50 per cent according to holding size.
- (3) Subsidy at the rate of 33½ per cent on cost of renovation or construction of wells/ filterpoint tube wells, installation of irrigation units, construction of cattle shed and purchase of cows.
- (4) Short term credit facilities to coconut holdings of all categories, medium term loans to growers of holdings of 0.10 ha to 0.40 ha and long term loans to growers of holdings above 0.40 ha.

The targets of the scheme are given below.

1. To rehabilitate 28,600 holdings below 0.10 ha covering a total area of 1375 ha.

2. To rehabilitate 10,200 holdings of 0.10 ha to 0.40 ha covering a total area of 1975 ha.
3. To rehabilitate 2,210 holdings of 0.40 ha to 1 ha covering a total area of 1275 ha.
4. To rehabilitate 565 holdings of 1 ha and above covering 575 ha.
5. To provide irrigation facilities in 140 holdings covering 90 ha.
6. To support 650 families to undertake mixed farming by assisting them to establish fodder grass in 0.1 ha and to purchase one cow each and to construct one cowshed each.

The total area proposed to be rehabilitated is about 5200 ha covering 41575 holdings in

13 panchayats. The above programme will be completed within a period of two years.

Subsidy under the Coconut Development Board Project

The project envisaged by the Coconut Development Board and sanctioned by the Government of India recently provides subsidy at the rate of Rs. 75/- per palm for every diseased palm removed. The project is proposed to be implemented in areas where the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for rejuvenation of diseased plantation is in operation. The financial assistance proposed in the project is an incentive aimed at enlisting the full participation of the growers to eradicate the foci of infection and the successful implementation of the rejuvenation scheme. The Plan target is to

cover 66,000 ha at the rate of 22,000 ha every year. The Sixth Plan outlay is Rs. 49.50 lakhs to be shared equally by the State Government and the Coconut Development Board.

Subsidy by Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod (ICAR)

The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute through its field station at Trichur is identifying new pockets of infection beyond the periphery of the already demarcated root-wilt belts in the north and south and removing the diseased palms by paying compensation at the rate of Rs. 75/- per palm. Along with this, quality seedlings are supplied free of cost for replanting and the surrounding palms within 15 sq. metres are treated with Timik and Bevistin.