MULTIPLE CROPPING IN LITTORAL SAND

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In the discussions so far, the emphasis had been on adoption of multiple cropping in fertile and productive soils, mostly under conditions of assured water supply for summer irrigation and to a limited extent under rainfed conditions. The problems of soils like the littoral sands, however, have not been discussed. In fact, no serious attempt appears to have been made to exploit the vast potential for crop production, especially plantation crops in the extensive sandy soils along the coastal belt extending over 3000 km in length on the east and west coasts of peninsular India.

Where soil is fertile and irrigation facilities are adequate any crop and crop combination can be thought of. But, on sandy soils, only few crops can come up well. Fast growing fuel yielding trees like casuarina are usually raised in the coastal sandy soil tracts, which serve as a wind break also. Cashew is one of the few crops that come up well in sandy soils. In the coastal sandy soils of Kerala and Karnataka, coconut grows luxuriantly. Though these are the common plantation crops found growing along the coastal sandy soils, no systematic attempt appears to have been made to develop a suitable crop combination and management practices suitable for sandy tracts. In fact, very little information is available on this aspect. Whatever information we have at present, is based on field observation rather than on research results supported by experimental evidence. The only systematic trial on crop combination for sandy soil is the one now in progress in the sandy soils of Orissa. This involves a combination of cashew, coconut and casuarina. This system of cropping has an added advantage, in that, this crop combination acts as an effective wind break as well. With proper planning, 160 to 200 coconuts/ cashew and about 2000 casuarina can be planted per ha. Under

good management cashew and casuarina with or without coconut can be a remunerative and compatible combination in sandy soils.

As stated earlier, the suggestions are based on field observations and not on research results. Coastal sandy belts of peninsular India has plentiful supply of natural resources of crop production like sunshine and water; but also has problems peculiar to the tract namely the wind erosion. Taking into consideration the resources and the constraints, compatible crop combinations have to be planned and tested on priority basis. This aspect should receive due emphasis in our research programmes, since it could open up new vistas in crop production in the extensive coastal sandy soil belt along the east and west coasts of peninsular India and convert it into highly remunerative ever green plantations.