

CEYLON'S PRODUCTION AND TRADE IN COCONUT CROPS—1

GENERAL

THE Coconut palm provides many essential items in the domestic economy of the peoples of the tropical belt. Particularly, throughout the South East Asian lands, Ceylon and the Philippines, the Coconut industry occupies a pre-eminent position both from the point of view of local self-sufficiency and as a major source of export income. The varying fortunes of the coconut industry have been a dominant factor in their economic progress and development. From time immemorial it has furnished them food and drink, shelter and clothing, weapons and utensils. Every part of the tree is utilised. To-day, copra and oil, which are the chief commercial products of the coconut palm figure prominently in international trade in fats, oils and oil seeds. Essential raw materials for innumerable industries are supplied by these and other varied products of the palm. Both the dried and fresh kernel of the nuts are used for food; the oil extracted from it for food, as well as in the manufacture of soap and in other industrial applications; the residue or cake for cattle food; the fibre of the husk for matting, ropes, and upholstery purposes; the leaf in weaving and the wood in building construction.

From the point of view of export earnings the coconut industry in Ceylon ranks third in importance. The first two places are assigned to the Tea and Rubber industries. This is correct when judged in terms of the export value of the products concerned. But in another sense, this method of evaluation presents a distorted picture and fails to bring out the real significance of the coconut industry in the island's economy. If the industry is considered with reference to—

- (a) the place it occupies in the rural economy,
- (b) in the numbers engaged in its various industries,
- (c) as the source of the largest group of export product, and
- (d) as providing an indispensable item,

it should be given precedence over all other agricultural industries in the island.

Nature and Scope of the Industry

In Ceylon the numerous uses of the coconut palm have given rise to over a dozen industries which produce articles of food and other manufactured goods for domestic and export markets. It is significant that the majority of these products are semi-finished and are not exported in a form ready for the final consumer, but form raw materials for other industries. The Coconut industry in Ceylon includes the three major industries of copra, oil production and desiccated coconut manufacture. To this may be added the poonac or coconut cake industry, which is a by-product of the oil mills. The remaining industries, which are not dependent on the kernel of the nut, form a large and varied group. They comprise the relatively smaller industries of coir bristle and mattress fibre, coir yarn, ropes, mats, and matting and coconut shell charcoal. There are also

several cottage industries which utilise the shell, yarn, fibre and leaf as raw materials. Finally there are the industries engaged in manufacture of vinegar and the alcoholic liquors, toddy and arrack, which are entirely for local consumption. These industries are distributed widely over the maritime areas of the island, particularly in the N.W. Province and the South-West region. Different areas specialise in one or more of these industries.

TABLE I
ESTIMATED TOTAL PRODUCTION OF NUTS IN CEYLON (1927-1951).
ANNUAL PRODUCTION IN AVERAGES FOR FOUR-YEAR PERIODS

Year	Average Population (Approx.)	Annual Local Consumption (1,000's)	% of Total production	Annual Exports as nuts (1,000's)	% of Total production	Annual Total production (1,000 nuts)
1927-1930	5,045,000	655,850	37.7	1,085,739	62.3	1,741,589
1931-1934	5,472,000	711,360	39.4	1,095,980	60.6	1,807,340
1935-1938	5,700,000	741,000	42.4	1,007,233	57.6	1,748,233
1939-1942	6,100,000	793,000	48.4	846,417	51.6	1,639,417
1943-1946	6,390,000	830,700	47.8	906,501	52.2	1,737,201
1947-1950	7,200,000	936,000	51.3	887,660	48.7	1,823,660
1951	7,743,000	1,006,590	44.6	1,249,864	43.4	2,256,454
	—	900,000*	42.3	—	47.7	2,149,864

*Estimate of local consumption based on family budget studies for 1950 plus 40 million nuts for local soap industries, etc.

Extent Under Cultivation and Nut Production

Ceylon is one of the world's leading producers of coconuts.

The extent under coconut cultivation in Ceylon is 1,075,000 acres and is the largest among the plantation crops. It forms 32 per cent. of the cultivated area, exceeding even that under paddy cultivation. Although the export earnings from Tea or Rubber exceed that of coconut products, the extent under their cultivation is considerably less. The average annual yield generally taken for coconut land in Ceylon is 1,800 nuts per acre and on an extent of 1,075,000 acres, the estimated yield for a year would be about 1,900 million nuts.

Table I below shows estimates of average annual production of coconuts between 1927 and 1951. The figures are grouped in four-yearly periods to average out in the effects of abnormal trade conditions and variations in climate. In order to convert the export figures of copra, oil and desiccated coconut to a common unit in terms of nuts, the following conversion factors are used:—

1 ton of oil...	...	...	...	...	8,125 nuts
1 ton of copra	...	...	...	...	5,000 nuts
1 ton of D.C.	...	...	...	...	6,900 nuts

Local consumption is estimated at 130 nuts for each person per annum.

