

DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS OF THE CITRONELLA INDUSTRY OF SRI LANKA

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The declining export of Ceylon citronella oil from 350 m.tons in 1960s to about 200 m.tons per year currently, has been attributed mainly to poor cultural practices and distillation. Ponnuchamy (1972).

Iruthayathas etal (1975) evaluated local strains, which indicated a need for field work. Lever Brothers commissioned an experimental farm at Katuwana in 1974/75, to study the important aspects of the industry.

In addition to these local strains, Java citronella was obtained from India. Trials in Katuwana were unsuccessful as the plants did not survive the drought, but trials at Hewaheta in the mid country have given results comparable to true Java citronella.

Another strain, LB 76, from India was grown in Katuwana yielding double the oil and Geraniol compared to that of Ceylon citronella. Fernando and Rajakaruna (1978). But the 'perfumery' character of this oil is different to that of Ceylon citronella and cannot be considered as a replacement.

Further evaluation of 10 local strains Iruthayathas etal (1978) indicated a potentially valuable strain LV 9. Field trials in Katuwana gave a geraniol content comparable to Java, but only 1/3rd the more valuable citronellal. It has the same 'perfumery' character as Ceylon citronella and is highly fertiliser responsive, compared to the local strains.

Conclusions :

1. Short term — extension of LV 9 offers the most for improving yield and oil quality.
2. Long term — to evolve a 'Java' type suited for the citronella areas.
3. Further trials with Java variety on marginal lands in the mid country.