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CHALLENGES TO FOOD PRODUCTION IN THE MAHAWELI AREA 'H'

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The primary objective of the Mahaweli Diversion Project is to provide additional irrigation requirements to practice double cropping in the region and to use water as a source of power to generate hydro electricity. Originally it was planned to provide water for irrigation for an estimated extent of 1,500,000 acres under cultivation, but a feasibility study (FAO–UNDP 1969) shows that the possible extent to be brought under cultivation is only 60% of the estimated extent, namely 900,000 acres. This alone illustrates the importance of water management in the Mahaweli Project in the dry zone.

In order to increase production in this area, one has to exploit the 2 1/2 acre allotment given to each farmer under irrigation with an assortment of crops. The crops should be carefully selected to give him enough food and also to generate sufficient income for his welfare.

Two turn out areas in the H area (304) along the Dl channel were selected to conduct on-farm cropping system research with farmer participation.

It would be concluded from the result emerging from the project that the 3–3 1/2 month varieties of rice (new improved) could give high yields, either identical or more than the 4–4 1/2 months varieties of rice. The short age variety stays one month less in the field which means a substantial amount of water could be saved from the rice crop.

Furthermore, the subsidiary food crops in the well drained and imperfectly drained member of the catena demostrate the possibility of getting very high incomes. With respect to constraints to production, apart from the input problems, the main challenge seem to be the mismanagement of water by farmers themselves within the farm gates and the distributory system outside the farm gate.