

SOME SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF COCONUT
BASED FARMING SYSTEMS

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Eighty seven percent of the Sri Lankan coconut area is owned and operated by smallholders. Majority of the coconut growers are multi-crop farmers with less than four ha. planted to coconut. Considerable state interest has been generated over the recent past to develop the smallholder sector of the coconut industry. However, most of these programmes have failed to realize their objectives. Apart from the inadequacies of research and extension, the physical structure of the smallholdings, their socio-economic setup, priorities and perception of ideas, and the objectives of farming have often been overlooked by both research and extension personnel and policy makers alike.

In this study, an attempt was made to investigate the present structure of the coconut based farming systems, and their socio-economic characteristics through a sample survey conducted in the major coconut growing areas of Sri Lanka. Rice and coconut were the two main crops grown on these farms averaging 2.63 ha. in extent. The average size of the coconut component was 1.49 ha. and that of lowland rice was 0.73 ha. Highland areas cultivated with vegetables and other subsidiary crops constituted the rest. A holding consisted of one or more physically separated parcels, located at various distances from the homestead.

The major income of most farmers (62%) came from farming, where coconut cultivation dominated (51%). However, the survey indicated that most farmers were not keen in developing their coconut lands, and in resource allocation, rice cultivation received dominance.

Nearly 90% of the farmers produced more than 50% of their household food requirement on the farm, while only 20% had farm income exceeding Rs.10000.00.

Though essentially all farms had mixed-crop stands, organized intercropping was found only on a few (18%) holdings. Analysis of the development possibilities and farmer participation in development activities revealed that nearly all farmers (93%) were aware of state sponsored programmes, but only 23% of them have ever participated in those.

Nearly 80% of the farmers saw the potential for developing their farms, but did not invest on improvements due to limitations in the available funds, lack of interest due to other commitments, and their indifference towards available technical options for farm improvement.

The study suggests that a well planned diversification programme, supported by a motivational campaign with effective organizational and operational arrangements is vital for development of these farms.