

INTENSIFYING LAND USE IN IRRIGATION SCHEMES WITH
OTHER FIELD CROPS: THE CASE OF IMPORT SUBSTITUTION

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Paddy is the primary crop which continues to be grown under irrigation in the country. At present, paddy yields are stagnating, production costs are escalating and the returns are declining. The paddy-based irrigation leads to a low level of cropping intensity of around 140%. In order to increase the level of utilization of irrigable lands and to increase returns to irrigation, several crops other than paddy were introduced for cultivation during the Yala season in 1960s. They are pulses, chillies and vegetables. These crops save on foreign exchange by import substitution in addition to providing better returns to the farmer compared to paddy. Among the main problems which all the adoption of these crops are the weak price structure and poor marketing mechanism pertaining to them.

In 1980s and thereafter, the attention was directed mainly towards the promotion of exportable crops such as gherkins, asparagus, sweet corn, etc. in the intensification of irrigable land. Evidence indicates that the prospects for exportable crops are not bright which is attributable to a variety of reasons.

This paper analyses the volume and the value involved in importing agricultural commodities which could be grown locally. Accordingly, it identifies several crops other than rice which continue to be imported into the country. The paper emphasizes the importance of import substitution in the selection of crops for cultivation in irrigation schemes. It finally highlights the economic impact attributable to import substitution and calls for the need for institutional and policy reforms aimed at promotion of import substitution.