

A RECORD PADDY HARVEST IN 1993

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The highest paddy production since 1985 was reported in 1993. The production in 1993 was estimated at 2,567,000 MT- 1,692,000 MT in 92/93 maha and 875,000 MT in 93 Yala. This total is an increase of nearly nine percent over the previous year. The highest production on record is 2,661,000 MT in 1985, after which a declining trend was followed. Whether this trend was leading to a long term decline was a concern. This is the period when the civil disturbances not only in the North and East but also in other parts too, erupted. Because of the disturbances asweddumized lands could not be cultivated fully. Fertilizer subsidy was also withdrawn during this period. Unfavourable weather conditions particularly the drought in 1991 also contributed to retard the production. The upturn in 1993 may be an indication that the production is now on increase as before 1985.

The annual paddy production has almost trebled within the four decades from 1952 with an impressive growth of 296 percent indicating a stable disposition for the staple food of the country. This increase in the rice production has been made possible by improved irrigation facilities and very effective agricultural extension programs. For instance Mahaweli River Development project now provides water for cultivation both in maha and yala seasons for thousands of acres in the dry zone that had been idling. The share of Mahaweli 'B', 'C', 'G' 'H' and Udawalawa areas to the National production were 18 percent and 16 percent in 1992/93 maha and 1993 yala season respectively. Use of tractors for preparation of lands for paddy cultivation has overtaken all other methods with an area coverage of about 40 percent in each season. New improved varieties are extensively cultivated accounting for about 90 percent of the sown area.

Transplanting which is believed to give higher yields over the other methods of sowing is slowly becoming popular. Many other improved practices also have largely contributed to increase the production.

Rice imports declined sharply until early eighties concomitant with the unprecedented increase in the domestic rice production. This decline is more prominent during the five year period commencing from 1981 compared to the previous five year period. The percentage decrease of five year average for the latter period was 13.5 percent while it was 56.5 percent for the former. However, in the 1986 - 1990 period, imports increased by 19.4 percent compared to the previous five year average imports due to the drop in the domestic production.

Self sufficiency ratio which is defined as the percentage of domestic production to the total availability (available for human consumption) is one indicator generally used to describe the self sufficiency achieved by the local production of a particular food commodity.

The self sufficiency ratio of rice has been varying between 85 percent to 93 percent during the last decade where the performance had been exemplary in comparison to the previous three decades. However, it must be noted that imports of wheat flour is slowly increasing in parallel to the decrease in rice imports. Per capita availability of rice has relatively remained at the level of 100 kg/year. Per capita availability of wheat flour, which is considered to be the principle substitute for rice has nearly doubled from 23 kg/year in 1971 to 45 kg/year in 1978. Thereafter it has declined to about 23 kg/year by 1980. But since then, it has been slowly increasing and in 1991 it was about 34 kg per year.

This is an indication that wheat flour based foods are becoming increasingly popular. In urban areas fast food restaurants are spreading like mushrooms. Also people are diet conscious more than before. Convenient and quick meals are also a current issue among many working people. All these may be leading to a slow decline in demand for rice at least in urban areas.

It is up to the planners to make a decision on whether to maintain the self sufficiency ratio at this level and meet the balance demand through imports or continue to put some more resources and efforts to increase the production till the goal of total self sufficiency is reached. As for any other crop production of paddy can be further increased by increasing the productivity that is yield per unit area or by bringing more land under cultivation or by both approaches.

The asweddumized area or area prepared for paddy cultivation has recorded a 44 percent rise since 1952. In the cultivation year 1992/93, the reported asweddumized area was 737,004 hectares. During the last decade the average cropping intensity which is defined as the percentage of the total sown area in maha and yala seasons to the asweddumized area has been about 125 percent. This means that about 75 percent of the sown area out of the possible maximum of 200 percent remain idle each year.

Except for several years, the proportion sown has been less than 50 percent of the asweddumized area in yala season. On the average about 14 to 36 percent of asweddumized land in maha and 45 to 65 percent of asweddumized lands in yala seasons have been left uncultivated. Significantly, most of these uncultivated lands are in the dry zone. Paddy cultivation being heavily depend-

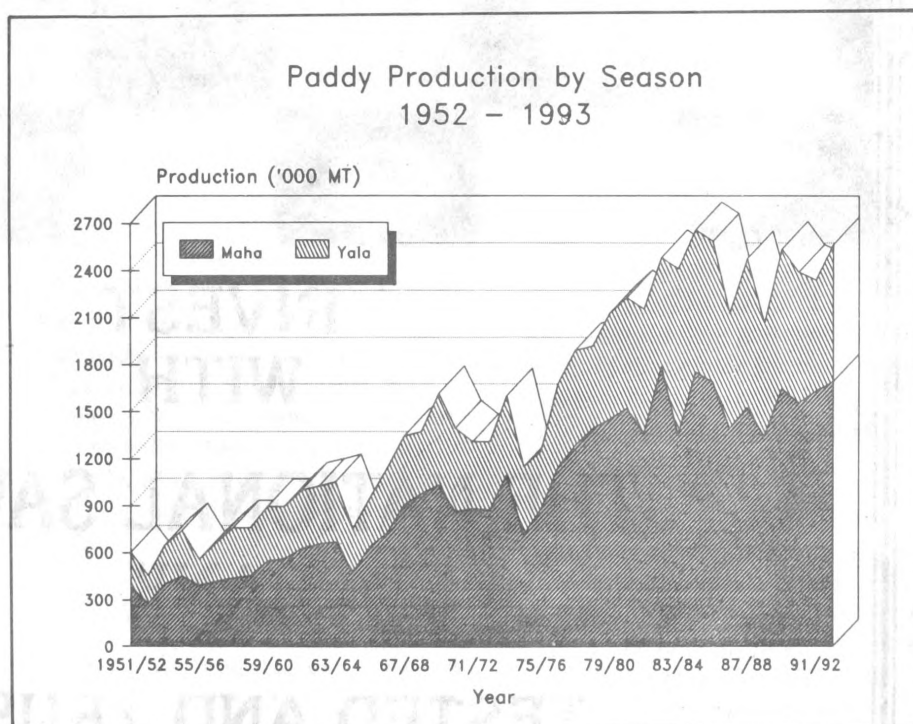
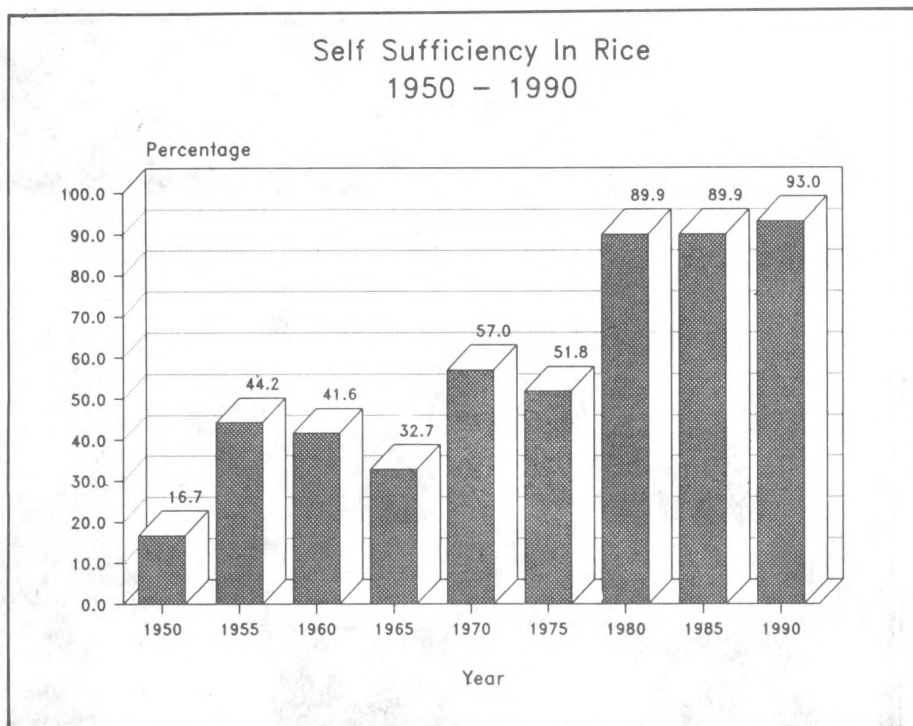
ent upon water, inadequacy of south west monsoon rains in the dry zone and inadequate irrigation facilities are identified as the main causes of non cultivation in yala.

Much have already been achieved in the process of providing irrigation facilities and land development. The cultivated area under major irrigation schemes was raised between 1952 to 1983 by about 188,000 hectares which was about a 355 percent increase. The increase in yala season was about 139,000 hectares and it corresponds to 298 percent increase. Area under minor irrigation schemes was also raised by expanded irrigation facilities. Compared to 1950's cultivable area under minor schemes has been raised by 88,318 hectares or by 155 percent in maha and by 60,506 hectares or by 230 percent in yala season.

The dry zone covers about 77 percent of the total asweddumized lands accounting for 75 percent of the country's National production. Therefore in order to achieve the goal of self sufficiency in rice it is necessary to give further attention to the problem of water in the dry zone.

The availability of water is the determining factor of the extent cultivated as well as harvested. Proportion harvested also depends on the crop damages such as pest attacks, insects, floods etc. However, proportion harvested has been between 72 and 98 percent during the past years. In other words, complete crop damage of a serious nature has not been a common occurrence.

Agricultural research and extension programs carried out so far have made it possible to improve the average yield appreciably recording 128 and 93 percent increase for maha and yala seasons respectively, during the period of 1951-1992. It should be noted that yield has not dropped below 3000 kg/hect. during the last ten years in both seasons. Availability of water, use of improved seed varieties, improved cultivation practices such as transplanting, weeding, pest control etc. have largely contributed towards this end. Intensifying the research and other agricultural extension programs further is also necessary to increase the productivity and thereby the production.



Performance of some of the improved seed varieties heavily depend on chemical fertilizers. As fertilizer is generally imported, this would invariably lead to increase in cost of production. On the other hand, having realized the severity of the environmental pollution and other side effects exporters of these chemical fertilizers such as USA are now focussing on sustainable agriculture and encourage farmers to use organic fertilizers. Therefore agricultural researchers have to pay attention to this also in their endeavour in increasing production.

The issue that must now be addressed is whether efforts should be intensified in raising the production to meet the demand for rice fully or the unmet demand of 10 percent should be imported. The former option requires increasing productivity and or bringing more land under cultivation. Both measures require greater availability of irrigation. A careful examination of availability and distribution of water is a prerequisite. Maintenance and rehabilitation of existing irrigation schemes is a priority if self sufficiency is to be achieved.

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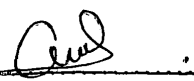
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