

Sustainable agriculture and Codex Alimentarius: Sustainable economics?

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Sri Lanka is endowed with vast quantities of arable land and a network of rivers and streams that facilitates agriculture making it one of the biggest attractions in terms trade and employment. As a result many, and in fact approximately 32.7% of the population is involved in Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries out of labour force of 8.1 Million in the country as per Central Bank records of 2011. This makes Agriculture one of the biggest priorities in the country.

The statistics show that fertilizer imports to the tune of US \$ 164, 193 577, 193 and 240 Million have been recorded over the years from 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively. Except for somewhat of an aberration in years 2008 and 2009 the amount has been steadily increasing. This is best demonstrated by the following graph..

What we have to remember is that the amount of fertilizer that is being introduced into the soil is increasing. In this backdrop there are several issues that have been brought up by experts around the world. Principally these issues are centred on how sustainable in real terms this form of farming is.

True scientists such as Fritjof Capra have delved in this area for many years. Scientists like Fritjof Capra are 'true' to the extent that their philosophies and ideologies are not rooted in commercial interest while being fundamentally strong in the area of analytics. Fritjof Capra in the Tao of Physics says " Since the conceptual framework of economics is ill suited to account for the social and environmental costs generated by all economic activity, Economists have tended to ignore these costs, labelling them 'external' variables that do not fit into their theoretical models."

Moreover, the fact of the matter is that economists the world over are employed by interest groups and their cost benefit analyses invariably are biased in favour of their employers projects. For instance the country very recently started talking about reducing fertilizer imports because they are (a) unhealthy and (b) are harmful to the soil in the long term. This was of course the government view. However, what they were trying to reduce was the fertilizer subsidy - obviously. IF the government really cared about these then there are other matters that are required to be dealt with and that is what we are going to look at now.

Take a single crop like Tea. Sri Lanka accounted for 314000 MT of tea in the year 2010 based on data from the Central Bank. Agriculture contribute 11.9% to GDP in the year 2010. Just goes to show how important the agricultural sector is to the economy. Moreover, in the wake of a global

Item	2005(a)	2006(b)	2007(b)	2008(c)	2009 (c)	2010 (c)
Labour Force, '000	8,141	7,599	7,489	8,082	8,074	8,108
% of Household Population (aged 10 Years and above)	48.3	51.2	49.8	49.5	48.7	48.1
Male	67.1	68.1	67.8	67.8	66.6	67.1
Female	30.9	35.7	33.4	33.2	32.8	31.2
Total Employed, '000	7,518	7,105	7,042	7,648	7,602	7,767
Employment by Sector, %						
Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries	30.7	32.2	31.3	32.6	32.6	32.7
Manufacturing	18.4	19.2	18.9	18.5	17.7	17.1
Construction	7.3	7.4	7.7	7.7	7.4	7.1
Trade and Hotels	13.9	15.3	14.9	14.3	14.7	15.5
Transport and Communication	6.5	6.1	6.5	5.9	5.9	6.3
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.4
Personal Services and Other (d)	20.2	18.8	17.7	17.9	18.8	15.2
Total Unemployed, '000	623	493	447	434	471	401
Status of Employment, %						
Public Sector Employees	13.3	13.4	13.8	15.2	15.5	14.3
Private Sector Employees	46.1	42.1	42.7	41.2	42.1	41.2
Self Employed	29.7	30.8	30.4	30.3	30.2	31.5
Other	11.0	13.6	13.1	13.4	13.2	13.0

food shortage it becomes almost imperative to protect this sector. So what ails the agricultural sector?

Principally the ailment are based on excessive energy and resource dependencies in the economy reflected in the fact that our economies are becoming more and more capital-intensive and not labour intensive. However, capital represents a potential for work, extracted from past exploitation of natural resource. It is this continuum that many economists have chosen to ignore.

Furthermore, because of this narrow understanding of productivity there is always a tendency to substitute capital for labour in both capitalist and Marxist economies.

Many scientists have spoken about the capital intensive enterprises but globally agriculture is a case in point. Let us take a distant case - that of the American system of agriculture. Agriculture in the USA exerts its inflationary impact on the economy at various levels. To achieve production they rely heavily on automation which relies on machinery that are energy-intensive..even the irrigation systems. To add to this the soil is sprinkled with oil-based pesticides and fertilizers. These meth-

ods not only destroy the organic balance in the soil and produce poisonous chemical substances in our food, but are also yielding ever diminishing returns and thus making farmers prime victims of inflation.

In the Marketing continuum the agricultural produce enter the Marketing realm within the food industry which turns this produce into over processed, over packaged and over advertised food products which are then transported across land to be sold in large marts using excessive amounts of energy; fuel causing inflation.

On the otherhand conventional economic wisdom holds that there is a free market which naturally stays in the balance. But this is not so specially since inflation and unemployment are interdependent.

Capra maintains that the Phillips curve articulates a phenomenon that is not realistic.

With over 30 million out of work in Europe alone, unemployment has become such an intrinsic feature of our economy that government economists now speak of full employment.

Meanwhile scientists such as Ranil Senanayake have been advocating a look at rebuilding the top soil ecosystems in the country and specially in the tea growing areas.

A brief look at the minor hill tops in tea growing country will reveal the brownish and croplless hill tops - an indication of loss of the highly vital black soil containing the necessary life for agriculture. HE has spoken in many for a and has spoken in depth of the Loss of ecosystem stability. The loss of the huge capital of topsoil, increase of floods, decrease in water quality. It has also impacted the basic functioning of the hydrological cycle of the island from water retention to the generation of Cloud Condensation Nuclei (CCN).

The question is sadly, do economists understand that we will not be able to sustain agriculture as we know it in the longer run?

What exactly is Codex Alimentarius

The Codex Alimentarius (Latin for "Book of food") is a collection of internationally recognized standards, codes of practice, guidelines and other recommendations relating to foods, food production and food safety.

Its name is derived from the Codex Alimentarius Austriacus. Its texts are developed and maintained by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a body that was established in early November 1961 by the Food and Agriculture

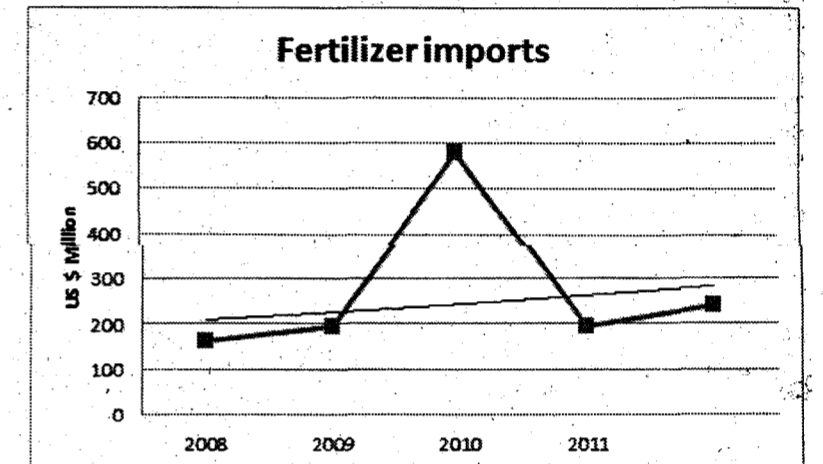
Organization of the United Nations (FAO), was joined by the World Health Organization (WHO) in June 1962, and held its first session in Rome in October 1963.

The controversy over the Codex Alimentarius relates to a perception that it is a mandatory standard for the safety of food, including vitamin and mineral supplements. Supporters of the Codex Alimentarius say that it is a voluntary reference standard for food and that there is no obligation on countries to adopt Codex standards as a member of either Codex or any other international trade organization. From the point of view of its opponents, however, one of the main causes of concern is that the Codex Alimentarius is recognized by the World Trade Organization as an international reference standard for the resolution of disputes concerning food safety and consumer protection. Proponents argue that the use of Codex Alimentarius during international disputes does not exclude the use of other references or scientific studies as evidence of food safety and consumer protection.

imum consumption levels of vitamin and mineral food supplements." The WHO has also said that the Guidelines "ensure that consumers receive beneficial health effects from vitamins and minerals."

In 2004, similarities were noted between the EU's Food Supplements Directive and the Codex Alimentarius draft guidelines for vitamin and mineral supplements'. Additional controversy has been expressed by proponents of ecologically and socially sustainable agriculture and food systems, such as the Slow Food movement, although the Slow Food movement has become more closely aligned with the EU. In addition, the Manifesto on the Future of Food stated that "bureaucracies like the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Codex Alimentarius have codified policies designed to serve the interests of global agri business above all others, while actively undermining the rights of farmers and consumers".

Codex Alimentarius has



It is reported that in 1996 the German delegation put forward a proposal that no herb, vitamin or mineral should be sold for preventive or therapeutic reasons, and that supplements should be reclassified as drugs. The proposal was agreed, but protests halted its implementation. The 28th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission was subsequently held July 4-9, 2005. Among the many issues discussed were the Guidelines for Vitamin and Mineral Food Supplements, which were adopted during the meeting as new global safety guidelines: "The guidelines say people should be encouraged to select a balanced diet to get the sufficient amount of vitamins and minerals. Only in cases where food does not provide sufficient vitamins and minerals should supplements be used." This text has been the subject of considerable controversy among proponents of dietary supplements.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) has said that the Guidelines call "for labelling that contains information on max-

already become law in the EU, in Australia and New Zealand, in Canada and all WTO member countries will have to abide by these "harmonized" laws. Canada has already banned the use of traditional and herbal remedies. Codex was passed in Canada in 2008. How many of us are aware that in 2011 ALL NATURAL PRODUCTS became illegal within the EU?

Thus far Codex has been accepted in 120 countries. Sources indicate that incidentally Sri Lanka had ratified Codex as far back as in 1972. It has gone on to establish a National Codex Committee. What we must worry about is that the Health Ministry says Sri Lanka's National Regulations on Food Safety and Food Standards have been formulated according to Codex. Codex is nothing to be proud as far as we can see. We don't know how far the Sri Lankan authorities have gone to harmonize national interests to satisfy Codex and how far ancient alternatives like ayurveda,

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Item	US Dollars million					Rupees million				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010(a)	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010(a)
Consumer Goods	1,782	1,768	2,184	1,713	2,613	185,461	195,480	236,512	196,718	295,204
Rice	6	39	44	23	59	576	4,261	4,785	2,616	6,741
Flour	3	2	1	2	1	321	230	111	195	61
Sugar	224	154	206	219	363	23,256	17,055	22,350	25,119	41,117
Milk and Milk Products	171	187	296	166	259	17,761	20,688	32,042	19,013	29,235
Intermediate Goods	6,161	6,751	8,720	5,928	7,753	640,810	747,489	943,750	681,261	875,991
Fertilizer	164	193	577	193	240	17,036	21,422	62,420	22,215	27,175
Petroleum	2,070	2,501	3,368	2,167	3,019	215,168	276,899	364,284	248,959	341,307
Textiles	1,546	1,632	1,702	1,442	1,732	160,987	180,689	184,404	165,717	195,549
Wheat and Meslin	199	234	375	259	257	20,679	25,891	40,563	29,769	29,120
Investment Goods	2,246	2,685	3,048	2,451	2,970	233,637	297,266	330,272	281,441	335,410
Building Materials	546	780	943	714	810	56,822	86,414	102,060	82,020	91,491
Transport Equipment	365	365	439	436	642	37,928	40,292	47,699	50,038	72,538
Machinery and Equipment	1,065	1,247	1,331	1,013	1,206	110,852	138,033	144,147	116,373	136,154
Unclassified Imports	65	92	139	115	176	6,781	10,152	15,111	13,198	19,999
Total Imports	10,254	11,296	14,091	10,207	13,512	1,066,689	1,250,366	1,525,705	1,172,618	1,526,604
Import Value Index (1997=100)	174.8	192.6	240.2	174.0	230.4	308.3	361.4	440.9	338.9	441.2
Import Volume Index (1997=100)	163.4	169.5	176.3	159.4	180.1	163.4	169.5	176.3	159.4	180.1
Import Unit value Index (1997=100)	107.0	113.6	136.3	109.1	127.9	188.7	213.1	250.1	212.6	244.9
Terms of Trade (1997=100)	96.6	94.0	82.9	103.1	97.6	96.7	94.0	83.0	103.1	97.5

Sources: Sri Lanka Customs, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Prima Ceylon (Pvt) Ltd, Lanka IOC PLC, Sarembil Flour Mills (Pvt) Ltd, Ceylon Petroleum Corporation

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homeopathy etc have become compromised. According to Codex once a country subscribes to Codex all national laws are subservient to CODEX.

It appears that in short Codex attempts to take away our food sovereignty and our right to natural health treatments. According to some experts CODEX intends to

- * Abolish organic farming
- * Facilitate introduction of Genetically Modified food and livestock
- * Colour labelling of products.
- * Restrict natural remedies (all supplements, herbs, vitamins, minerals, homeopathic remedies, flower remedies etc.)

So what does this mean for us

After April 2011, many herbal products and food supplements containing herbs became ILLEGAL. This is because of changes in law at a European level. On 30 April 2011 a European Directive, known as the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive

(THMPD) came fully into force. Since this time, only herbal medicines that have been registered under the scheme will be available EU-wide. For a wide range of herbal products, especially those from non-European traditions such as Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine, the requirements of the scheme are either impossible to meet or are prohibitively expensive. In many cases, both constraints apply so the result is that virtually no herbal medicines from these traditions have been registered. These products have effectively been banned since end of April 2011. The ban has also effected medicinal herbs in food supplements, which are used by many thousands of people across Europe to help maintain their health.

It means that we should really be weary of what we take in and pay very close attention to who we put in power over ourselves. A shuddering thought is 'Was Aldous Huxley in - a brave new world - right?