

## MAXIMUM PRODUCTION OF TEA AND LENGTH OF PRUNING CYCLES DURING EMERGENCY CONDITIONS

The question of the length of pruning cycles under present conditions was discussed at a Meeting of the Tea Research Institute Experimental Sub-Committee held on the 10th April, 1943. The following note represents the view of those present at the Meeting:—

Producers of tea in Ceylon have been told that 110 per cent of the estate's assessed quota is required under the present emergency. Labour is short on the majority of tea estates today; not very short, but a little, and is likely to get shorter.

The problem arises how to produce as near the desired quota with the available labour, bearing in mind the high rates of wages now being paid, and shortage of artificial manure. With the exception of Low-country areas, the general tendency has been to increase the length of pruning cycles in Mid and Up-country; the reasons for so doing are well known, and need not be discussed in this note. In practice it has been found that, although the lengthening of a cycle by 6 or 12 months has not in many cases resulted in a decrease in monthly yields for that extra period, the extra labour required to pluck areas on lengthened cycles is considerable.

A field in its first year from tipping can be plucked by, say, 4 to 6 pluckers per acre per round; averages will be high

and costs low. The number of pluckers required per acre rises as the age of the field from tipping increases. This is particularly noticeable when it becomes difficult for pluckers to force their way along the lines and reach the top flush of bushes which have grown high. Pluckers lose interest and adopt the attitude that 15 or 20 lb. earns them a name, so why take so much trouble to earn a few cents more on present high rates of pay? However, on easily plucked fields, where high averages can be obtained, interest returns to the pluckers who go "all out" for a high daily intake.

For example an estate of 250 acres of tea (all in plucking) could be plucked 3 times monthly by 145 pluckers on 26 working days, provided the area can be covered by an average of 5 pluckers per acre. If the condition of the bushes required a general average of 10 pluckers per acre then double the labour force is required, or some of the acreage goes partially, or wholly, out of plucking.

The point at issue is that a maximum crop is required to be produced by a limited labour force; to achieve this it appears evident that a reduction in the length of pruning cycles on many tea estates is necessary.