

Several farmers are trying out the heap method of composting rice straw in Yala 1981. It is hoped that this experience will be useful in adopting this practice on a national scale.

The very life of Sri Lanka depends on her rice crop. National rice production depends very heavily on the quantum of fertilizer used. In this context we cannot afford to waste or under utilize rice straw.

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Part I.                      AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION  
OVER A HUNDRED YEARS

Agricultural education is nearly a hundred years old in this country. The earliest recorded activities were in the 1980s even before the Department of Agriculture was formally set up. At that time the organization that existed in Peradeniya gave its attention to the investigation of the flora of the country. Subsequently it introduced large numbers of exotics, and helped to build up the prosperous agriculture (plantation crops). It was then called upon to deal with pests and diseases of those crops. Later it made experimental investigations into the cultural and manurial requirements of the various crops began work on the improvement of existing varieties of cultivated crops and took up the furtherance of agricultural education.

In the early part of this century, agricultural education received further importance and the entire school garden movement came under the guidance and management of the organization at Peradeniya. All pupils above standard II were expected to do at least 30 - 45 minutes work in these school gardens three times a week. The purpose of this was to train the pupil's powers of observation and to acquaint them with some of the cultivation problems in the raising of fruit trees, economic plants and ornamental plants. It was soon realised that the value of this training depended entirely upon the

teachers and with a view to assisting teachers in vernacular schools to learn agriculture. The first training course for teachers was commenced in Peradeniya in 1916.

Thus the first School of Agriculture commenced functioning in 1916 for training teachers, village headmen, and sons of well to do farmers. The Director of Agriculture was also the Principal with four other lecturers and a registrar. The school subsequently developed four courses of instruction a 2 years course in English for the training of Agricultural Learners intended for service as instructors in the Department of Agriculture. A one year course in Sinhala for teachers and village headmen and a practical farm course for others. The practical training for these students was provided on the Experiment Station which had 30 acres under rotational crops, 23 acres under fodder and pasture grass, besides the plantation crops, 10 acres orchard and dairy & poultry units. The School of Agriculture moved to its permanent buildings in 1938.

In the 1920s the shortage of foodstuffs during the war, directed attention to the need for cultivation of essential food items within the country. A large number of itinerating Agricultural Instructors were recruited to assist farmers in the improvement of cultivation of paddy and other crops. Supervising Officers were appointed, demonstration plots opened, competitions began, school gardens and cooperative societies expanded and a Board of Agriculture established with a view to bringing practical agriculturists into close contact with the Department of Agriculture and to thereby providing the Department with the assistance and advice of those connected with all branches of the Agricultural Industry. Research Staff was also increased to develop commercial possibilities of crops.

Since the peasant cultivation was the ultimate target of all such development activities, the Department and the Board of Agriculture then took a decision to expand the training opportunities for farmers. Thus the Practical Farm Schools were set up in the provinces as a result of this need. The earliest schools were established at Labuduwa, Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Wariyapola, Wagolla, Mapalana and Karadian Aru and Horana.

The Farm School at Jaffna was run for many years on the same lines as the School at Peradeniya for the benefit of educated sons of landowners but later converted to the same type as other practical farm schools. All practical farm schools conducted the one year practical course for sons of peasant farmers. The instruction was mainly practical and covered a broad range of subjects. Special subjects were emphasized in special localities as irrigation in Jaffna, plantation crops in Labuduwa and Wagolla and so on. The Jaffna School had in addition a 4 month course for vernacular teachers and shorter courses for students during vacations. The students were paid -/50 cents a day each for the work they did and for running their own mess. The objective of these school was to train rural youths to settle in farming and during the early years nearly 75% of the trainees went back to the land.



## Post Independence Era :

With independence agricultural policies placed greater reliance on domestic agricultural production, to provide help to the small farmer to increase the production of essential food commodities and to reduce imports. The late Honourable D.S. Senanayake as the Minister of Agriculture and subsequently as the first Prime Minister initiated several far sighted measures towards achieving these goals. In the field of agricultural education, agriculture was introduced as a subject in teacher training colleges, the Faculty of Agriculture was set up on the University of Peradeniya, a Girls Farm School similar to the Boy's School was set up at Peradeniya for a 2 year course and later moved to Kundasale. Several practical Farm Schools were also established at Vavuniya, Karapincha, Bibile, Ambepussa, Pelvehera, Bindunuwewa, Batangala and Sammanthurai to train farmers - both practising as well as young farmers.

In the years that ensued, successive governments realised the importance of developing particularly the research, extension, and education sectors in agriculture not only for increased production to meet local demands but also as a means of raising the income levels of the large majority of people who were dependents in agriculture in this country. Farmer education was recognised as a crucial input and extension services were reorganized in the sixties. Annual Implementation Programmes were introduced in the districts and this gave direction and purpose to extension work. Clear programmes of work and training were defined within the framework of the implementation programmes.