

FARMERS' EXPECTATIONS OF LARGE ONION PRODUCTION

H.A. Kulatunga
Onion Producer
Dambulla

The Honorable Minister of Agriculture, Food and Co-operatives, the Director of Agriculture, ladies and gentlemen, first of all may I thank you for giving me an opportunity to express our expectations on large onion cultivation. I consider it a great privilege to say a few words after coming all the way from my village, Kimbissa which is close to Dambulla. Today, I am relating not only my ideas but also the views of my fellow farmers.

We have cultivated large onion in Yala season for the last 10 years. As this cultivation is profitable, we have been able to increase the crop extent by 25 times. We have had vast experience during the last 10 years, but still we have to learn a lot about cultivating this crop.

The recent increase in fertilizer prices is an unbearable shock to farmers. Farmers have to undergo so many difficulties. I propose that the government authorities draw their kind attention to reduce the price of fertilizer and custom duties on water pumps, tractors and agricultural implements. We need seeds of good quality at a reasonable price which give a good yield in a short period. The expected quantity of seeds should be issued in early April.

We farmers expect cultivation loans on time. The present cultivation loan of Rs 12,500 for one acre of large onion is not sufficient because the cost of labor has gone up. The prices of agro-chemicals, fertilizer and tractor charges also have increased. Therefore, the cultivation loan for one acre of large onion should be increased to Rs 20,000.

The DOA has taken a major role in establishing large onion cultivation by giving necessary instructions on its cultivation. But due to a rapid increase in the number of the large onion cultivators and the removal of village extension workers from the Department, this service is now not sufficient. Cultivators of large onion must have the facilities to obtain the necessary agro-chemicals and fertilizer on time and at reasonable prices.

At present the CWE and local dealers purchase large onions. The CWE offers us Rs 12.50/kg but purchase a limited quantity because of their lack of facilities and storage. Taking advantage of this, local merchants buy our produce at a lower price. So we request that CWE authorities make

arrangements to buy our produce without any delay, to avoid the inconveniences we had to face last year.

The increasing number of large onion cultivators will cultivate more extent this year. We expect an improvement in our level of production too. Naturally, when production goes up the price comes down. This is harmful to the cultivator. To overcome this situation we request that the DOA and the CWE give us instructions and technical knowledge on how to store our large onions for at least one or two months without spoiling. This will be a great help for both sellers and buyers. The rush of selling our produce will be lowered and cultivators will have a chance to sell their produce at a higher price during the off-season. So, we appeal to the Honorable Minister of Agriculture to help large onion cultivators by giving loans to install store houses. This loan can be repaid in 5 years.

At a period when large onion cultivation is expanding rapidly in Sri Lanka, more and more farmers expect to grow this crop. So, we humbly appeal to the Honorable Minister of Agriculture to stop importing large onions when our farmers gather their harvest. This will enable cultivators to sell their large onions at a good price and they will increase their cultivation year by year. So, we hope Sri Lanka will be self-sufficient in large onions in the near future. I request you honorable gentlemen, on behalf of all large onion cultivators, to increase the price of large onion to Rs 20/kg.

Large onion cultivation is generally done in the Yala season but we have started off-season cultivation in a small way on high lands. Off-season cultivation does not give a very good yield. As prices are high in the off-season, cultivators get a better price. It would be a great help to farmers and consumers if the DOA would help us in our off-season cultivation. The CWE should make arrangements to store onions and sell them when there are shortages.

Normally, large onion cultivators have to spend a large amount of money for cultivation. Unfortunately, if their crops are destroyed by insects, rain, drought or wild animals they are helpless. To overcome this difficulty we propose that the Honorable Minister of Agriculture help us by introducing an insurance scheme to cover our expenditures in case of such a destruction. May you consider these suggestions for the upliftment of large onion cultivators.