

THE ROLE OF THE SEED DIVISION IN THE SUPPLY OF BIG ONION SEED

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Introduction

Seed, the most important input in crop production, is also the cheapest. It is critical that sufficient quantities of quality seeds of proper varieties be available to farmers at the correct time and place. Fulfilling these criteria is an important part of the Seed Division's mandate to serve the farming community of Sri Lanka.

Objectives of the Seed Division

The Seed Division is responsible for:

- a) Producing, procuring, processing, storing, and distributing basic seed and planting material to meet the national demand
- b) Importing and supplying exotic vegetable seeds and seed potato as necessary to maintain productivity levels and create a buffer stock for price stabilization
- c) Providing technical assistance and support for developing a seed industry in the private sector
- d) Maintaining buffer stocks of all crop seeds for emergency situations

Present Status of Seed Supply

In keeping with the Seed Division's responsibility to supply producers' with exotic vegetable seeds, it imports seed of big onion from Holland (Table 1). There is no local production of big onion seed because a suitable variety has not yet been released.

Table 1. Quantity (kg) and cost (Rs) of big onion seed imported by the Seed Division and the private sector.

| Year | Seed Division | | Private sector (kg) |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------------|
| | Quantity | Cost | |
| 1984 | 3500 | 525,927 | - |
| 1985 | - | - | 510 |
| 1986 | - | - | 1620 |
| 1987 | 3000 | 699,177 | 775 |
| 1988 | 6750 | 2,721,966 | 184 |
| 1989 | 4000 | 952,821 | - |
| 1990 ¹ | 7000 | - | - |

Source: Seed Division
¹ To be delivered before February 1990

To meet the national demand for big onion approximately 4,000 ha (Extension Division projection) must be planted annually. This hectareage requires about 32,000 kg of seed at a cost of Rs 8 million (at the present price of Rs 250/kg). Allowing for inflation, this cost could be more than Rs 10 million by next year. The annual drain of Rs 10 million will recur if local production of seed is not initiated.

Future Strategies

A local supply of big onion seed will be assured only if the following steps are taken:

- a) Breed or select good lines which will set bulbs under local conditions and are acceptable to farmers
- b) Identify cultivars which will set seed under our tropical environment
- c) Release suitable varieties through the National Seed Committee for seed multiplication
- d) Initiate breeder seed production at research stations
- e) Release breeder seed to the Seed Division for further multiplication to obtain sufficient quantities to initiate a seed program
- f) Certify onion seed through the Seed Certification Service

- g) Initiate commercial-scale seed production by contract growers, provincial agricultural departments, government farms and any other agency so that the total seed requirement will be produced within the country
- h) The Research Division has already identified a suitable variety, K-1, that will be released in due course. Once a variety is released, the Seed Division can undertake seed production on a limited scale while arrangements are made for commercial multiplication.