

Proposals for achieving self-sufficiency in Onions.

P.H.D. Fernando and V.S. Ginigaddara,
District Agricultural Office - Puttalam.

Onion is an important spice. While being nutritional it also possesses medicinal properties, specific for certain ailments.

Although per capita consumption requirement of onion is estimated at 14.93 lbs. (per year per individual), (M.R.I. Report 1984) real per capita consumption is about 6.36 lbs per year. This low level of consumption may be attributed to non availability or short supply of onions. However, since even this quantity has not been produced locally, a fair percentage of onions is imported. Department of Agriculture has from time to time engaged its attention to expand the area under this crop but there were obstacles to achieve this goal. Our experience it is that a programme to increase onion production should receive concerted and combined efforts of several Government Agencies, at the national level.

Responsibilities of these Government Agencies may be as follows:-

1. Dept. of Agriculture. (Seed supply, Planning, Implementation and monitoring and program evaluation)
2. Dept. of Marketing and Co-operatives, (purchase produce from the farmers.)
3. Banks, (Credit facilities).
4. Insurance. (Crop insurance).
5. Agricultural Development Authority. (Co-ordination, input supply).

Suitable areas for successful onion cultivation have been identified and production technologies have almost been perfected. Studies have also been done regarding production trends in onion growing districts. At present Puttalam is the largest onion growing district and it produces only about 10% of total consumption requirement but this can be increased to almost 100% phased over a short period of time. However our target should be to produce the entire quantity of onions needed to satisfy the consumption requirement of the Nation, which is in the region of 8500 tons per month.

However in planning a production programme it is advisable and realistic to base it on the nutritional requirement. Calculating on this index the requirement as stated earlier is certainly attainable in the context of present acre yield of onions obtained in the Regosol region.

Production capabilities of other districts too should be taken into consideration as this commodity could be produced during certain months of the year and this could well augment any production short fall in major onion growing district. Apart from the above considerations the acre yield of onions varies significantly, depending on environmental factors and weather conditions prevailing during the growing season. Therefore the time of planting and harvesting is critical in the production programme. Hence the entire production programme needs careful planning and monitoring.

Based on the foregoing information following proposals are made.

1. Organise and discipline the farmers in traditional onion growing areas for timely planting. This is being done in Puttalam district.
2. Fix an attractive floor price for onions. (Rs.10/- to Rs.12/- per kg.farm gate price)
3. Total stoppage of import of onions by end of 1987 or even earlier.
4. Achieve self-sufficiency in seed material through production of true seed. (50% of farmers seed requirement is now produced in Puttalam district.
5. Provide a soft loan scheme to prospective onion growers under different farming systems and conditions.
6. Undertake detailed research into all aspects of onion cultivation as new problems could be encountered in large scale production.
7. Intensify studies pertaining to true seed production of Big onion.
8. Stop new planting of Coconuts in the Regosol region as this will eventually reduce the land available cultivation of onions.
