

# REHABILITATION, PROMOTION, AND EXPANSION OF MANIOC AND SWEET POTATO PRODUCTION.

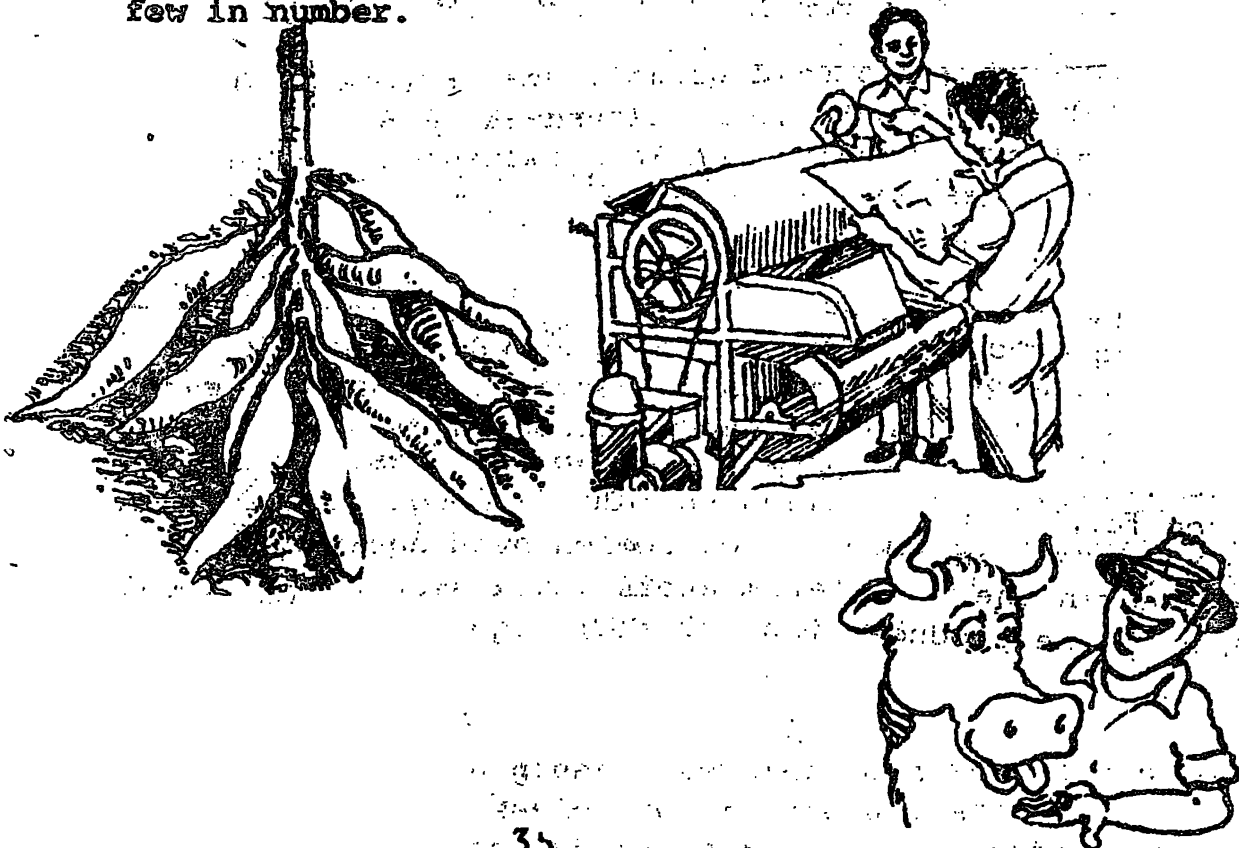
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## Introduction:

Manioc and Sweet Potato are two food crops that deserve much greater emphasis in terms of research and extension than at present. These two crops grow and produce well under less than optimum conditions of cultivation and management. Specially during periods of "Crisis Situations" These two crops have helped to overcome food shortages. Specially in some rural areas manioc is the second most important food crop. (The first being rice).

## Present Situation:

Manioc has a great potential both as a human food and animal feed. Manioc tubers are a useful raw material for several agro-industrial products. In spite of the potential for large scale production of animal feed, starch, glucose, and industrial alcohol, manioc still assumes mainly the role of a home garden crop. A few farmers grow manioc on a slightly larger scale than a home garden crop, to satisfy their domestic needs plus a little extra produce for sale in the local market. However such farmers are too few in number.



When the supply of rice and other cereals in the market is adequate for the consumers, the traditional root crops are almost always neglected. Unless appropriate measures are not adopted, very few farmers would consider production of these crops as worth while. Table 1, illustrates the declining trend in cultivation of manioc and sweet potato in Sri Lanka.

Extent cultivated (Hecares)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Manioc</u>	<u>Sweet Potato</u>
1974	91,000	23,000
1977	54,500	11,000
1980	27,000	6,400
1983	26,000	6,100
1984	22,500	4,609

Perhaps most of the farmers who planted manioc and sweet potato in 1974, would have decided either not to grow these crops or drastically reduce their cultivated extent gradually from year to year.

If this is the trend then the future of manioc and sweet potato is bleak. To avoid this situation a decision was made in May, 1984 to -

1. Establish demonstration plots in selected school gardens with improved manioc and sweet potato varieties. This will help to produce planting materials for neighbouring schools and farmers.
2. Provide in-service training for the extension staff on root crops.

Uses of Manioc:

Dried and processed manioc tubers is a very useful ingredient to make poultry feed. Annual import of this material to Sri Lanka is 5000-8000 metric tons, at a cost of Rs.3500-3600 per metric ton. Thus the annual expenditure for importing processed manioc for animal feed is Rupees 17,500,000 to Rs.28,800,000.

At present Sri Lanka imports around 100 metric tons of starch for use in the textile industry. At Rs.6000 per metric ton, 100 tons is worth Rs.600,000. Manioc starch can be used in the textile industry. If high quality manioc starch could be produced in Sri Lanka, all this money can be saved.

Proposed action programme.

In view of the economic importance of manioc and sweet potato the following activities could be useful to reap the potential benefits from manioc and sweet potato crops.

(1) On a home-garden scale.

- 1.1. Extend school garden demonstration plots so that each school in each district will have demonstration plots of manioc and sweet potato.
- 1.2. Establish and maintain demonstration plots of recommended manioc and sweet potato varieties at the premises of Agricultural services centres.
- 1.3. Extend manioc and sweet potato cultivation in Agricultural settlements including the Mahaweli settlements.

(2) On a commercial Scale.

- 2.1. Identify the potential areas for cultivation of manioc and sweet potato. Then initiate action programs at district level to popularise their cultivation.
- 2.2 Encourage farmers to adopt the recommended package of practices (including the use of recommended varieties, correct spacing weed control and fertilizer application.)

(3) Research needs.

- 3.1. Study the feasibility of underplanting manioc and sweet potato in coconut lands.
- 3.2 Develop techniques for processing manioc tubers into high quality starch, as a cottage industry.

(4) Marketing facilities.

- 4.1. Organize purchasing points for sale of processed manioc products for farmers convenience.
- 4.2 Provide incentives for processing manioc tubers into flour or starch.

4.3 Provide a guaranteed price for processed manioc tubers.

(5) Supply of Planting Materials.

5.1. Preferably each Agricultural Service Centre area should be self sufficient in its planting material requirements of root and tuber crops. After obtaining good quality planting materials from relevant sources, multiplication and distribution of planting material should be organized and coordinated; so that they are readily available locally.

Conclusions.

Improvements in the production and processing of manioc and sweet potato as well as other roots and tubers is an important aspect that deserves attention of the farmer, the extension worker, the researcher, as well as the policy maker and the agro-industrialist.

Although arrowroot grows well in Sri Lanka, no systematic programme has been implemented for the production and marketing of arrowroot flour. But in some countries arrowroot flour production is a flourishing industry. However, unlike arrow root, manioc could be of far greater economic significance to Sri Lankans as we can achieve a substantial saving in foreign exchange if we develop the manioc industry, effectively and without further delay.

