COCOA IN COCONUT PLANTATIONS

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Coconut farm management in the Philippines can still withstand much improvement to get more returns from every hectare of coconut land. The present poor conditions of small Filipino coconut planters is largely attributed to the low income derived from coconut plantings, especially during times when copra prices fluctuate. Income from coconut lands can be greatly increased and improved by the application of modern techniques of coconut plantation management.

The growing of other cash producing crops in coconut farms is one of the ways by which coconut farmers can alleviate their present living standards. This country is endowed by nature with a climate favorable for diversified farming. Tropical and sub-tropical crops can be grown here successfully.

In this era of population explosion in Asia, Asian farmers should depart from the traditional subsistence farming economy and aim to increase farm output at the maximum levels to cope with the population increase. Present trends of farming is to produce more per unit area with lesser capital and labor because land is limited and a deteriorating resource which does not increase with the growth of population. To attain this objective, one must resort to the application of scientific, adaptable and practical knowledge of farming.

There are many adapted cash crops for intercropping with coconut. Cacao is a promising one. The crop at present has an unlimited local and foreign market demand. We are importing cacao beans and other cacao products valued at thousands of pesos annually.

There are agriculturists who do not favor the growing together of coconut and cacao. These plants are attacked by a number of the same pests and diseases. Common example is the Phytophthora fungus causing pod rot and stem canker of cacao and bud rot of coconut. When left uncontrolled, these diseases can cause heavy damage to both cacao and coconut.

Due to advances made in the science of chemistry, discoveries of a number of insecticides, pesticides and fungicides that could effectively control or check plant pests and disease outbreaks makes it possible to grow both crops without fear in regions where cacao is adapted to the soil, climate and economic factors for a successful culture.

One has to be particular with the cultural requirements of both cacao and coconut to attain success in this crop combination. This was suggested by Mr. Pablit Feraren, an agriculturist who has now more than 3,000 three-year-old cacao plants grown between rows of coconuts.

Cacao is a tropical plant. It is adapted to most parts of the Philippines. Areas with a uniformly distributed rainfall throughout the year with a well-drained loamy soil of volcanic origin or enriched by alluvial deposits rich in organic matter are the best for cacao.

In the culture of cacao with coconut, emphasis should likewise be given to the correct distancing of these crops. In the Feraren farm at Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte, the coconuts are distanced 10 x 10 meters, while cacao were planted at the center of every two rows of coconut with a distance of 4 meters between plants in the row.

A regular spray schedule to control plant pests and diseases with fungicides and insecticides is a very essential part of management. Fertilization, ring weeding, pruning, planting of temporary and permanent shades, cover cropping and other important cultural practices should be closely adhered to. During a visit to the Feraren farm, the writer observed that the cacao plants are still young and delicate. The coconut palms serve as the permanent shade.

The plantation is cover cropped with calopogonium, centrocena and tropical kudzu, leguminous plants that add considerable amount of organic residues and atmospheric nitrogen to the soil annually. These plants also help control noxious weeds such as cogon that are very harmful to the young cacao plants. Care is constantly observed not to allow these legumes to climb the trees. This is done by ring weeding about one and one half meters from the base of the trees three times a year.

Every 4 to 6 months, the area is rolled over with an animal-drawn equipment to have the cover crop creep closed to the ground. This is necessary to check the cover crops from climbing the principal crops and to make gathering of nuts and movement in the plantation easier.

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Fertilization with complete fertilizer is done three times a year. The fertilizer is drilled in spots around the plants just below the spread of the branches. The application is usually done when the soil is moist.

Cacao plants are pruned four times a year. This is done in order to have a well formed crown and branches, to remove the dead, decaying and diseased branches and to maintain a height that is convenient for spraying and harvesting. The operation is done with sharp pruning tools. The cut surfaces are painted with tar to avoid or check the entrance of harmful organisms.