

BOOK REVIEW

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND PAPUA NEW GUINEA FOOD CROPS CONFERENCE.
Edited by R.M. Bourke and V. Kesavan. Three volumes, 571 pages.
Konedobu, D.P.I. 1982. Cost K8.50

By Sheldon G. Weeks, Educational Research Unit,
University of Papua New Guinea

The Second Papua New Guinea Food Crops Conference was held in Goroka on 14-18 July, 1980. The Proceedings are published in 3 parts. Part One includes papers on Food and Nutrition Policy and Crop Production; Part Two includes Farming Systems and Human Nutrition, Agronomy, Processing and Post-Harvest Handling; Part Three includes Crop Protection, Marketing, Farmer Training in Food Crop Production, Research Priorities for Food Crops and Poster Display Summaries.

In all, there are 71 papers and 16 poster summaries in the volumes. Together they form a basic reference on food crops and nutrition in Papua New Guinea. They show that a lot of research and other work on food crops has been carried out - and much remains to be done.

These proceedings should help to prove that two commonly held ideas are not true:

1. That D.P.I. is not interested in food crops - only in cash crops.
2. That no-one needs to bother about food crops because Papua New Guineans know all about them through hundreds of years of growing them.

It is easy to forget about food crops. For example, 30 years ago in Africa not many people would have guessed that it

would be only a few years before the people could no longer feed themselves because of increasing population, lower yields, etc.

Papua New Guinea farming has been given the label, 'subsistence affluence' - meaning that more than enough food can be grown by subsistence farmers. But farmers now are not growing so many traditional food crops. Land is used for cash crops, and people buy more tinned fish and rice with money sent by relatives working in the towns. Barry Shaw's paper 'Options for Feeding People in PNG: Policy and Nutritive Implications' talks about this problem.

A major source of protein in the highlands (for half the population of the nation and for up to a third of a year) is *Pandanus julianettii*, or Karuka. C.P. Rose of D.P.I., Tari, has an 8-page paper about this high protein nut. He says there are indications that children in Tari are healthier following the karuka season!

Karukas are cultivated between 1500 and 2500 m. Could a variety be developed that would grow at lower altitudes? Could more karuka be grown? Could varieties be grown that are higher yielding, softer shelled, tastier? How could the nuts be processed and storage improved so that they could be sold throughout the country?

Karuka is a good example of a neglected food crop, but one of national significance. There have been research stations for cash crops, for example pyrethrum at Tambul - why not one for karuka at Taluma?

Most of the contributions are from either D.P.I. or U.P.N.G. There are a few papers by Institute of Medical Research, Health and NPO staff.

It is a pity that more people involved in education and school agriculture and nutrition did not present papers. There is an important paper by Elizabeth Cox and Jim Tyler starting Part Two: 'Improved Subsistence Agriculture for Genuine Village Development'. They were formerly education officers with the East Sepik Rural Development Project Education Sub-Project on Agriculture and Nutrition. The section on farmer training has a short contribution by John Tompkins, formerly Adult Education Officer in Mendi, Southern Highlands Province.

There is a paper by Bruce Bennett on 'Food Crop Production

in Solomon Islands Secondary Schools'. He is based at the Teachers' College in Honiara. But there is nothing equivalent from Papua New Guinea.

Crops covered in the papers include roots (taro, cassava, kaukau, yams), grains (rice), leafy vegetables (aibika, winged bean), and fruits and nuts. There are also many survey type contributions.

Bourke and Kesavan are to be commended for editing these three volumes, and D.P.I. for their production and distribution. There is much here for both the specialist and the layman. Teachers, extension officers and researchers who are involved in agriculture will want their own set for ready reference.

You can obtain copies of the Proceedings of the Second Papua New Guinea Food Crops Conference, from:

Publications Section
DPI, P.O. Box 417.
Konedobu.

Tel: 214699