

BOOK REVIEW

"HANDBOOK ON COCONUT PALM"

Thampan, P.K. (1981). Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi. 311 pp.

The preface of this book says that since the publication of the author's last book on coconuts five years ago, multidisciplinary research in coconuts has been substantial, especially in areas such as hybridization, management and post-harvest technology. Ostensibly, the volume is aimed at farmers and entrepreneurs, upon whom programmes of coconut development depend.

It is the feeling of the reviewer that the book is too technical and detailed to be of great value to the majority of farmers and entrepreneurs, but insufficiently comprehensive to be of real use to scientists already established in this field. The book will most probably be used by students studying plantation crops and research workers new to coconuts and who wish to gain a rapid insight into the crop. At 32 rupees per copy (about K4), it will serve that purpose well and cheaply. However, if the reviewer's copy is typical of the standard of production, it will not bear too much thumbing before disintegration sets in.

Useful though the book may be to newcomers to coconut studies, it is marred by important omissions, mistakes and evidence of sloppy editing.

Nowhere are polybags mentioned for use in the nursery, despite a good survey of nursery practice in the major coconut growing countries, where polybags are standard procedure. There can be no excuse for this in a book which is up to date in practically all other areas of coconut husbandry and technology.

The chapter on pests is rather short on

details where possible agents of biological control are concerned, and often the name is the only detail given. *Brontispa* spp. and *Scapanes australis* Boisdual are not mentioned.

More rigorous editing might have spotted nonsensical statements such as (on p. 50), "For assisted pollination, the usual requirement of pollen is about 1 kg/ha" (over what period of time?), and (on p. 145, writing of yield in plantations) "Generally there are three main groups, viz., poor yielders, medium yielders and heavy yielders" (why not two or even ten groups?), and unsupported recommendations such as (p. 14) "In some areas husks are burnt and the ash applied to the palms. This practice, however, is not recommended."

This is the fourth general work on coconuts to have appeared in the last 25 years, and one wonders if more are really necessary. In a book of this nature, inevitably much has to be left out due to the vast nature of the subject, which limits its usefulness for the scientist. To cover adequately the current research on coconuts, perhaps several multi-author volumes on the subjects covered in each chapter of this book are necessary.

The bibliographies at the end of each chapter are comprehensive, and an adequate index is provided. In conclusion, many will find this book a useful introduction, especially at the price.

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