

LEYTE FARMERS' PERCEPTION OF AND EXPECTATION FROM THE NATIONAL COCONUT PLANTING/REPLANTING PROGRAM

Belita T. Amihan

Instructor, Office of the Director of Extension, Visayas State College of Agriculture, ViSCA, Leyte, Philippines.

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ABSTRACT

Three hundred coconut farmers in 5 municipalities of Leyte, Philippines were interviewed to find out their perceptions of and expectations from the National Coconut Planting/Replanting Program (NCP/RP). The overall perception of the respondents towards the NCP/RP was low specifically on its implementing policies. Thirty-five percent of the farmers agreed to have their coconut lands replanted and one-half of this number wanted to be among the first recipients of the program. Almost 50% of the farmers anticipated that the program would have a low chance of success in accomplishing its objectives. This low expectation was attributed to (1) inadequate supply of high-yielding coconut varieties; (2) inadequate price support for copra; (3) lack of readiness on the part of coconut farmers to adopt the program; and (4) the high risk associated with the adoption of the high-yielding coconut varieties. Among the respondents' suggestions to carry out effectively the NCP/RP were: disseminate more information about the program, strengthen the program's management and technical delivery services, and implement the corresponding price increase for copra when replanting begins.

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KEY WORDS: Coconut farmers. Perception. Expectation. National Coconut Planting/Replanting Program.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the coconut industry's prominence in the local and export markets, production is still charac-

terized as low. National statistics (1978) revealed that the average yield of coconuts in the country was only about 38 nuts per tree per year compared with 44 nuts per tree in

the 1960's. This was very low compared with the yield potential of about 150 nuts per tree per year in other countries. This low yield was attributed to the inherent capacity of the palm to produce, the environmental factors, the cultural management practices, and the senescence of the palms. To save the coconut farmers from the decreasingly low productivity, the National Coconut Replanting Program (NCRP) was conceived to improve the industry (Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA), 1976). Presidential Decree 584 was issued on November 14, 1974, directing the PCA to formulate and implement within 5 years a nationwide coconut replanting program using "precocious or early-bearing, high-yielding seednuts acquired under the program." Early in 1980, the NCRP was renamed National Coconut Planting/Replanting Program (NCP/RP) with emphasis on planting the hybrid seednuts in vacant lands for the first 2 years of the program. The actual implementation phase was scheduled in 1980 and will be carried out for 80 years.

The program focused on the planting/replanting or replacement of all unproductive coconut plantations using the new high-yielding variety of coconut. In general, the NCP/RP aims to: (1) increase farm productivity and income of farmers; (2) promote stable supply of coconut; (3) increase competitiveness in the local and foreign markets; and (4) bring about transformation of the industry with maximum profit and income for farmers. The imple-

menting arm of the program is the Philippine Coconut Authority which shall undertake at no cost to farmers all replanting operations and see to the proper care and maintenance of the planted seedlings for 5 years. The program shall also provide the coconut farmer a financial package of ₱15,200 per hectare; ₱5,200 for inputs and ₱10,000 soft loan from the United Coconut Planters' Bank aside from the ₱1,500 cash allowances for incidental expenses.

Like any other development endeavor, the NCP/RP aims to increase the farmers' productivity and improve their economic well-being. However, Jocano (1975) pointed out that technological innovations aimed at encouraging and sustaining development can succeed only if the people accept them. As end-users of the fruits of science, they decide whether or not they will use the products of technology, and as such, they serve as indicators of the success or failure of any scientific undertaking. Therefore, it is important to find out the coconut farmers' knowledge or awareness of anticipation on the NCP/RP which may serve as baseline information to help guide policy makers and program implementors in carrying or redirecting the program. It may also provide them tentative projections of the outcome of the NCP/RP in view of the present assessment. Thus, this study aimed to find out (1) Who are the Leyte coconut farmers and what are their perceptions of and expectations from the NCP/RP? (2) What influence their perceptions of and expectations

from the program? (3) What do farmers suggest in order to have an effective nationwide coconut planting and replanting program?

METHODS

Multi-stage random sampling was employed in selecting the respondents. Five coconut-producing municipalities in the eastern and western parts of Leyte, namely; Inopacan, Baybay, Capoocan, Javier and MacArthur were randomly chosen. In order to get a more or less balanced view of the NCP/RP, the coconut farmer-respondents were selected from among the participants and non-participants of the Coconut Hybridization, Replanting and General Cultural Practices Training Program conducted by the Regional Coconut Research Center (RCRC) in ViSCA, Leyte. The data were obtained by using a structured interview schedule. Frequency counts, percentages, means, chi-square and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation were used to analyze the data.

To measure the farmers' perceptions of the NCP/RP, 2 sets of questions were presented. The first set required the "yes" or "no" answers and the second set required the farmers' views toward some statements, their degree of agreement or disagreement. The point scores in both sets of perception questions were summed up. Respondents who had scores above the mean were considered to have "high" perception and those within and below the mean had "low"

perception. The Likert scale was used in measuring expectations. A mixture of negative and positive expectation statements was presented in order to determine the consistency of the respondents' answers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Leyte Coconut Farmers.

The majority of the respondents were males, married, with a mean age of 52 years and with an average of 4 dependents. Most of them finished elementary education, and more than one-half belonged to the middle income group with the mean annual gross income of ₱10,485.10, mostly from coconut production. Three-fourths of the farmers owned their coconut lands with an average total area of 3.58 hectares. Over 50% had not availed themselves of credit for coconut production. Low adoption of coconut farming practices was indicated by most respondents. "COCOFED officials" and "neighbors" were mostly utilized as personal information sources; radio was the most common mass media source of information. One-half of the respondents attended training/seminars where the NCP/RP was discussed.

Farmers' Perceptions of the NCP/RP.

Most of the coconut-farmer respondents regarded themselves as having similar economic level with other farmers like the rice farmers. Most of them refuted the belief that "coconut is a lazy man's crop."

Almost 100% of them perceived the need to improve the coconut industry, especially the fluctuating price of copra. Three-fourths of the respondents were aware of the NCP/RP and its objectives while 50% had known of Presidential Decree 582 which created the replanting program.

More than one-third of the farmers were uncertain that the program would ensure them a steady supply of coconut oil, less than 50% believed that the NCP/RP would modernize the coconut industry, and almost one-half of them revealed that the program would improve the coconut productivity of the farmers.

In general, the farmers had favorable views toward the implementing policies of the program; however, 50% were undecided as to its faithful implementation. The majority upheld the idea that replanting should be done on voluntary basis. Less than 50% of the farmers agreed to have their coconut lands replanted, but only one-half of them wanted to be among the first recipients. The high-yielding characteristic of the new coconut varieties introduced by the program was the foremost advantage perceived by the respondents. Among the perceived disadvantages of the new coconut varieties were: "short life span," "easy to steal," and "need much attention." In the overall analysis, less than 50% of the respondents had high perception of the program.

Expectations from the NCP/RP.

The majority of the farmers signified their neutral views towards the 10 statements of expectations from the program that were presented to them. Almost 50% anticipated that the NCP/RP would have a low chance of success in accomplishing its objectives. Some of the reasons advanced by the respondents were: unavailability of the high-yielding varieties of coconut, inadequate price support for copra, lack of readiness of the coconut farmers to adopt the program, and high risk of adopting the HYV. In the total analysis, the expectation score showed that 46% of the farmers had high expectations from the NCP/RP.

Relationship Between Respondents' Perceptions of and Expectations from the NCP/RP and Selected Variables.

The Pearson's r yielded a highly significant relationship between the farmers' perceptions of and expectations from the NCP/RP. Thus, when the farmers were aware of the program, they formed their anticipations of the program's results based on their perception of its nature, objectives and implementing policies.

The chi-square test was used to determine the relationship between the farmers' perceptions of and expectations from the NCP/RP and the selected socio-demographic, economic and agricultural factors, and communication and training-

Table 1. Summary of chi-square values showing the relationship between the independent and dependent variables in the study.

Independent Variable	Perception X ² value	Expectation X ² value
Socio-demographic characteristics		
Age	3.72617 ^{ns}	10.28110**
Civil status	5.19765 ^{ns}	0.26619 ^{ns}
Educational attainment	20.32622**	8.965731*
Number of dependents	6.20142*	3.92152*
Organizational affiliation	19.39101**	1.78923 ^{ns}
Level of living	6.14859*	0.43318 ^{ns}
Economic and agricultural factors		
Annual gross income	7.39849**	2.56860 ^{ns}
Size of farm	1.52684 ^{ns}	0.85175 ^{ns}
Tenure status	2.72582 ^{ns}	9.16098*
Credit availability	2.69791 ^{ns}	0.24603 ^{ns}
Farming experience	0.57201 ^{ns}	11.33961**
Farming practices	0.71144 ^{ns}	6.31591*
Communication sources and training-related factors		
Personal media	20.59621**	16.01636**
Mass media	8.94821**	2.72220 ^{ns}
Training-related factors	12.42352**	4.14113*

* Significant

** Highly significant

ns Not significant

related characteristics. Table 1 shows the relationships between the aforementioned variables.

Among the socio-demographic characteristics, only age and civil status were not significantly related to farmers' perceptions of the program. Thus, farmers with high educational attainment, with many dependents, high organizational affiliation and level of living had high perceptions of the NCP/RP. However, only older farmers with high

educational attainment and with many dependents possessed high expectations from the program.

Out of the 6 economic and agricultural factors, only annual gross income of the farmers was found to be highly significant to their perceptions of the program. On the other hand, farmers' tenure status, farming experience and practices were significantly related to their expectations from the program.

All the communication sources (personal and mass media) and training-related factors were observed to be highly significant to farmers' perceptions of the NCP/RP. The higher the farmers' exposure to information sources and training, the more they increased their knowledge regarding the program. Except for the farmers' exposure to mass media sources, personal media sources and training-related factors were significantly related to farmers' expectations from the program.

The respondents' recommendations to effectively carry out the NCP/RP were: (1) conduct more information dissemination through trainings/seminars; (2) provide effective management and delivery of technical services to farmers; (3) assure farmers of a corresponding price increase of copra when replanting begins; (4) set up model farms to show preliminary results to farmers; and (5) provide enough seedlings to be equally distributed to farmers.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The coconut farmers' low perception of the NCP/RP showed a need to conduct more information dissemination programs through trainings/seminars or through the use of personal and mass media. These programs must be designed for farmers whose characteristics were categorized under low perception level, i.e., low education, low level of living, low exposure to

information sources, etc. Existing organizations, especially the COCO-FED, must be strengthened so as to provide effective educational, social, economic and technical services to the farmers.

The farmers who were old and with many dependents had high expectations from the program. They placed their high hopes on the increased productivity that the program would bring which would ease their financial burden. Likewise, the farmer-owners had high anticipations but the share tenants had low expectations from the NCP/RP. The latter may be apprehensive that when replanting begins they would have no income until the coconut trees bear fruit, thus, creating financial loss for them. It is therefore significant for policy makers to consider the tenure status of farmers in the replanting program operation.

The study also ascertained that almost one-half of the respondents expected a low chance for the NCP/RP's success. They were apprehensive of the high risk of adopting the new coconut variety, inadequate price support, lack of readiness of farmers to adopt the new coconut variety, and the unavailability of the high-yielding variety of coconut. This implies that the farmers were not fully aware of the developments of the replanting program, thus, they had low expectations from it. The implementing agency should see to it that farmers would be kept abreast of what is going on within the coconut industry.

It is recommended that the

implementing and cooperating agencies of the NCP/RP must also take into consideration the farmers' suggestions to effectively carry out the program and be assured of their

full cooperation. After all, any agricultural endeavor should ultimately be geared towards the farmers' needs.

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