

EDITORIAL

Weed Control in Rice

PROFUSE weed growth which sometimes completely smothers the crop is one of the major causes of poor rice yields in many parts of Ceylon. However, as the density of weed growth varies even from field to field it is very difficult to assess the exact extent to which weeds depress rice yields each season.

At present weed supervision in rice fields is attempted mainly through preparatory tillage and impounding of water. A high degree of weed control can be achieved by this method if the weeds are buried by ploughing and kept submerged for a long period by impounding water. But field preparation over the greater extent of the rice acreage in Ceylon has to be hurriedly carried out within a short period that this method of weed suppression seldom yields satisfactory results, and weeds appear even ahead of the rice seedlings. In row-planted and row-seeded crops, however, weeds can be effectively controlled with the aid of the rotary weeder which crushes all weeds in-between the rows of rice seedlings. These cultural techniques which can be interpreted largely as measures of weed suppression are still practised on a restricted scale that alternative methods of weed control are needed for the large extents of broadcast fields.

So far the only effective method of weed control in broadcast rice has been the actual removal of weeds by hand. Though effective, hand weeding is both difficult and expensive. The main difficulty in hand weeding is the close resemblance of the pernicious weed seedlings to rice. Many of them belong to the grass family and are practically indistinguishable from rice till they flower. Hence, picking them out in a broadcast rice field is extremely difficult. Harrowing the growing crop, though less effective than hand-weeding, is a satisfactory alternative where labour is scarce and expensive.

The real answer to the problem of weeds in rice appears to lie in the use of weed killers that will not cause any harm to the rice plant. Since World War II selective weedicides have begun to play an increasingly important role in crop production but a weedicide that could be safely applied in rice cultivation in the tropics was not available till very recently. Now that the final break-through has come it seems only a matter of time before weedicides become a regular feature in paddy cultivation in Ceylon. The only factor that appears to check the rapid spread of this method of weed control is the present high price of weedicides. It is, therefore, hoped that weedicides will shortly be available at a more reasonable price.