

AGE-COMPOSITION OF MATURE AREA UNDER NATURAL RUBBER IN INDIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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The paper revisits a study undertaken by the authors in 2008 on the trends in age-composition of mature area under natural rubber cultivation in India and reviews projected status for the period from 2008-09 to 2014-15. The projections of the earlier study showed that the share of area under the yield-declining phase would rise to touch 53.3 per cent by 2011-12 before falling to 46.0 per cent by 2014-15. The earlier study had also highlighted inconsistencies in the official data and recommended a national census of rubber area for fixing the same. However, the earlier study failed to capture the postponement of the uprooting of rubber trees beyond 22 years of tapping age and the resultant emergence of a senile group of trees having more than 22 years of tapping age. Due to retention of aged trees, the gap between the projected figures of mature area and the corresponding official figures sharply widened from 2.2 per cent in 2008-09 to 25.3 per cent in 2014-15. The area occupied by trees having more than 22 years of tapping age steadily grew by 144.7 per cent during the period from 2008-09 to 2014-15. In absolute terms, the area under this age-group increased from 10,255 hectare to 99,313 hectare with important policy implications. The results of the study reconfirmed the need for a national census of rubber area, as proposed in the earlier study.

Keywords: Age-composition, Average yield, Census, New-planting, Replanting, Tapping age

INTRODUCTION

The over-riding influence of age-composition on the yield and production of perennial crops is widely recognised from the academic and policy perspectives (Wickens and Greenfield, 1973; Nerlove, 1979; George, 1984; French and Gorden, 1985; Akiyama and Trivedi, 1987; George *et al.*, 1988; Narayana, 1994; Jacob and George, 2008). A pioneering study on the influence of changing age-composition of mature area under natural rubber (NR) cultivation in India estimated the annual

average yield and production for the period from 2001-02 to 2007-08 based on the historical data on planting in the country (Jacob and George, 2008). The study also projected the annual average yield and production for the period 2008-09 to 2014-15. The estimates of the study for the period 2001-02 to 2007-08 were significantly lower than the official estimates on the annual average yield and production of the crop. Despite the reservations in accepting and revising the published official data on the annual average yield and production,