

THE PROSPECTS FOR TEA CULTIVATION IN WEST NILE

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The area of the extreme southwest corner of West Nile District of Uganda is subject to a major landscape transformation with the establishment of the Zeu Tea Project. The area had been studied for its suitability for tea by Mr. E. Hainsworth of the East African Tea Research Institute, Kericho in June 1967. Even before this survey the Zombo Department of Agriculture Experimental Farm, a short distance southeast of Zeu had one acre of tea, half of which had been planted in 1962 and half in 1964. Also, Mr. Mulaya Jaleeba had a small plot of tea near Zeu trading centre even before then. Mr. Jaleeba had worked on the tea estates at Mityana from 1936 to 1948 and had taken 200 seeds of which 20 survived when he retired to Zeu in 1948. These early beginnings indicated that the high altitude (over 5,000 feet) grassland-savanna of southwestern West Nile in Okoro county would make suitable tea growing lands. These hills have a rainfall of between 50 and 60 inches, which would be sufficient for tea, though there was some concern lest the two to three month dry period from January to March might be too severe, but only January has less than 1 inch as an average. From the standpoint of soils the well-drained red clay to loamy soils of Zeu were also suitable. Comparing the two existing plots at Zombo and Zeu it seemed that the Zeu area was the better one for tea. In the vicinity of Zeu, the Arri valley offered 25,000 acres of slightly populated land with well drained slopes suitable for tea cultivation. Equally suitable land from the climatic point of view exists near Eruti further southeast, but this area is more heavily populated. From a nucleus estate at Zeu embracing the Arri valley, it is anticipated that out-growers will also develop plots around Kango, War and Zombo.

The Zeu Tea Project which commenced planting in February 1968 comes under the direction of Agricultural Enterprises Ltd., a subsidiary of the Uganda Development Corporation. It is anticipated that by 1975, 3,200 acres will have been planted. It was expected that 400 acres would have been planted by the end of 1968 rising to a 1,000 by the end of 1969. Some high quality clones had been acquired from Kericho and these are being developed in a 10 acre nursery by vegetative propagation. Already by mid-1968 277 persons were employed on the scheme, mostly Alur (180), but there were even 20 Kiga.

Probably 40,000 acres of this southern portion of West Nile would be suitable for tea, and the farmers in the potential area for outgrowers are already expressing interest, though it is probable that tea will remain of secondary interest to arabica coffee in the area. Also the few farmers in the Arri valley before the tea scheme, are now showing a desire to co-operate with the management and some have planted already.

The Zeu Tea Project has already commenced construction of its factory, has built many new roads, and even has an airstrip.