

The Rubber Outgrowers Unit (ROU) is the extension wing of the Ghana Rubber Estates Limited (GREL) responsible for the implementation of the Rubber Outgrower Plantations Project (ROPP). ROPP is a government project aimed at assisting Outgrowers to alleviate poverty. The vision of the unit is economic empowerment through rubber cultivation for sustainable rural community development to alleviate poverty. Its mission statement are to deliver quality and affordable inputs and services to rubber Outgrowers through advance and innovative technology; to enable Outgrowers have sustainable income, enjoy a better living and to contribute to national development and to collaborate with all stakeholders to effectively and efficiently utilize public funds to improve the living standards of the rural communities.

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The Paraa

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CENTRAL REGION "ROPP" TO GET NEW WEATHER STATION

One of the first news items people look out for in the daily news papers is information on weather. Literate or not, one is curious to know whether the weather would be 'friendly' or not before he or she embarks on the day's activities; be it trading, travelling, farming or driving. Hence a culture of study of the weather sometimes determines the level of productivity one will achieve in a working period.

As agriculture is dependent largely on rain, it is imperative that the Rubber Outgrower Plantations Project stays up-to-date with current weather trends and up-to-date forecast. Successful achievements of technical operations such as good land preparation, field and replacement plantings, fertilizer application and even tapping, are largely dependent on the weather forecast for the period and the availability of weather information.

Against this background, the Rubber Outgrower Unit of GREL has acquired a state of the art scientific weather station to be cited at Assin Fosu Office of ROPP. The station, when set up, would replace the manual and obsolete weather machines which readings could not be very reliable any more, due to time. Again, the issue of human error in recording and interferences from other obstacles are significantly minimized and thus makes this weather station a welcome news.

The station consist of a field high technology console that is solar powered to measure, temperature, humidity, evapotranspiration, heat index, solar radiation intensity, pressure, rainfall, wind speed and direction.

Data from the console is transferred to receiver through a wireless antenna. The receiver "vantage pro 2" has a chip installed that stores data every minute. When connected to a computer the data is downloaded and various analytical reports are automatically produced. The receiver provides all the weather information such as daily rainfall as and when it is raining, temperature, humidity, solar radiation etc and then makes a forecast for the next 24 hours.



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RUBBER OUTGROWER UNIT (ROU)

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The Rubber Outgrower Projects Commended-Minister



MOTI on visit at Outgrower farm

The Minister of Trades and Industry, Ms. Hannah Tetteh paid a one-day working visit to GREL on the 22nd of January, 2010. The purpose of the visit was to familiarize herself with the operations of GREL and the management of the outgrower projects. In his address, the managing director of GREL, Mr. Marc Genot petitioned the government to help prevent unfair competition in the rubber industry. He further explained that if there is unfair competition, there would be massive diversion of outgrower produce to other competitors which would result in non-payment of the loans contracted from the banks. The losing parties, according to him are not only

GREL and the banks, but also the government. On his part, the Project Director of the outgrower projects, Mr. Emmanuel A. Owusu said the project has assisted 2,700 farmers to plant over 12,000 hectares of rubber and another 2,750 farmers are being considered to plant over 10,000 hectares. He informed the Minister that an outgrower in production with average holding of 10 acres is able to get a monthly net income of over Gh. ¢ 1,500 after all operational expenses have been paid. He further stressed that several lives and families have been transformed in the communities in which the project operates. The Human Resource and Administrative Manager of GREL, Mr. J.C. Garbrah also took the opportunity to brief the Minister on the contribution of GREL to rural development through provision of schools, scholarships, clean water, KVIPS, electric poles among others in the operational area of GREL. The minister later inspected the GREL nursery, some outgrowers fields, ROAA nursery and the factory. She commended GREL and the especially staff of the project for their relentless efforts in ensuring that rubber outgrowers get a quality plantation.

PSC of ROPP Meets

The Fifth Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting of the third phase of the Rubber Outgrower Projects was held on the 2nd and 3rd of February 2010. The 2009 activities of the Rubber Outgrower Unit was reviewed as well as discussion and approval of the work plan and budget for 2010. After the presentation by the Project Director, there were other presentations by ADB, NIB, CIRAD/ARC and ROAA. Speaking on behalf of the rubber outgrowers, ROAA complained about the high mortality of planting materials which were planted in 2009. The Project Director cited the extreme

drought and high amount of rainfall experienced during May and June 2009 respectively as the main reasons for the death of the planting materials and assured the meeting of adequate provision of planting materials to be used for replacement planting in 2010. ROAA again informed the meeting on their intention to develop a database to capture the information of all their members which was agreed by the meeting. They however petitioned the meeting to expedite action on the process of launching phase IV of the rubber project.

Adhere to Technical Instructions

At the dawning of a new year, I want to use the opportunity to wish you a happy and productive 2010. It is always a delight to communicate with you. This year is a very packed one, coupled with the commencement of a new phase. Currently, a section of the project staff are conducting census on all rubber trees which were planted from 2004 to 2009. Outgrowers are to undertake their line cleaning in order to aid the counting process. On behalf of GREL, I wish to assure all outgrowers of adequate availability of planting materials to be used for planting and replacement planting on all 2009 plantings. Outgrowers are also to aim at achieving good land preparation. Good land preparation ensures reduction in termites attack on the rubber, free movements of personnel, inputs and equipments and ultimately leads to quality plantation.

Again, a section of staff are also engaged in the opening of new trees for tapping. Opening of trees, just like tapping is a skilled activity. The project has therefore trained a team of workers on panel opening so that all trees due for opening would be opened by them and not the outgrower himself or herself. I wish to remind outgrowers that it is an offence to open the trees by yourselves. With reference to the tripartite agreement, an outgrower stands the risk of losing his or her

farm if he or she does not adhere to the technical instructions of the project.

Finally, outgrowers should be reminded that, we are still in the dry season and that the responsibility of protecting your farm against fire outbreak lies in your domain.



MR. EMMANUEL A. OWUSU
THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

Deteriorating Tapping Quality

Written by Mr. Robert Kojo Danquah

Tapping is described as the careful, systematic and controlled wounding of the bark of a rubber tree to induce latex flow. Unfortunately, most outgrowers and tappers tend to neglect the aspect of being careful during tapping resulting in the deteriorating standards of outgrower farms. Recent technical farm visits undertaken by the project staff on mature farms revealed that about 40% of outgrowers change tappers very often without enquiring from the projects about the expertise of the new tappers. Again, very minimal or no coaching is given them to enhance their tapping skills. Furthermore, there are few outgrowers who are beginning to engage some tappers on 'ability basis'. This means the more the tapper produces more cup lumps, the more money he/she gets. This situation compels the tappers to tap the trees in an inconsistent manner and in some cases do 'slaughter tapping'. The resultant effect is that, there is excessive consumption of the bark of the tree, poor angle of slope, deep permanent wounds, long or short front and bark channels. Outgrowers are therefore cautioned to desist from slaughtering the trees and plan their future by protecting the rubber trees.

ROPP Phase IV

In an anticipation of the launching of phase IV very soon, GREL has selected about 1200 farms to plant 3000 hectares of rubber in 2010 in Western and Central Regions. Farmers who have had the opportunity of being selected are to note that establishing a rubber plantation requires dedication and hard work especially at the initial stages. Though difficult in the beginning, it is hoped that it would not be long and all their 'sweats' would be turned into 'sweets'.

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High Prospects for Natural Rubber

It would be recalled that a year ago (January 2009), GREL's purchasing price of rubber to the farmers fell down abruptly, as the rubber prices also fell on the world market. Shortly afterwards, there was remarkable recovery of the price as performance of commodities started improving on the world market. Presently, the price per kilogram of rubber has gone even far above the Gh. c 1.00 per kilo in 2008 which was considered as the highest price ever in the history of rubber purchases in Ghana. Why such a rapid recovery and what should be expected in the future? We have witnessed many crises on the rubber prices in the past, which usually took more time to recover, sometimes two years or even more. This was usually as a result of reduction in demand from customers. Even though the demand was low and prices kept on falling, rubber producers kept on producing because they had no other choice than to tap the rubber trees. With reference to the last economic recession, the major reason why the price did not fall as much and for a short period was simply linked to the rapid development of Chinese and Indian economies. Despite the sharp reduction of demand in North America and Europe, the total global demand of rubber did not reduce as much as expected. In fact, a greater percentage of Ghana's production were exported to Asia in 2009 as some European customers defaulted.

Again, the production of natural rubber in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia represented about 75% of the world total production. Due to industrialization, production of natural rubber from these countries have been declining. This situation contributed to rapid recovery of the price.



Mr. Marc Genot
Managing Director of GREL

Indeed, it is believed that the current development in the rubber industry is generally a good news for rubber producers. Rubber is being planted on a large scale in the world especially in Vietnam, and this would eventually lead to increased production of natural rubber in the long term. However, the prospect of China's and India's economies growing sustainably, coupled with the gradual reduction of production from Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia would also keep demand high.

Weeping Trees, Laughing People - says Jill Quaye

The Rubber outgrowers in production have expressed the joy they derive from the ever weeping rubber trees. They stated that the more the rubber trees wept the more joy and laughter they get. This revelation was made on Tuesday, September 8, 2009, when representatives from Deutsche Welle a German Radio Station and Radio Universe from Accra paid a day's visit to the Rubber Outgrower Plantations Project. The visit was to beam the project to the outside world what agriculture is doing in rural development and how GREL (ROU) is helping the rural farmers in Ghana. The brief visit took them to places such as the Nursery, Outgrower farms, ROAA, Factory, and NIB. Some of the farmers who are already in production stated that they had no regrets whatsoever venturing into rubber farming because the benefits were enormous. On whether credit facilities are accessible to the farmers, officials at the NIB Bank said when all their conditions

are met, a date is set on which NIB staff meet the farmers at various payment centres within the operational Districts of the project and payments are effected to beneficiaries. The Director of the Project, Mr. Emmanuel Akwasi Owusu attested to the fact that though the loan facilities are granted for a period of twenty two (22) years, some of farmers were able to pay off their loan within a period of five (5) years after maturity. He was however quick to add that the ability of the farmer to repay the loan within the five year period depended on a number of factors, among which are the prices of the rubber at a time, good yield as far as production were concerned coupled with the interest to be paid on the loans. With all the successes chalked so far by the Rubber Outgrower Unit, the fourth phase will soon be launched to give opportunity to others to join in the testimonies of those already in the rubber farming.