CONSERVATION FARMING

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The principal elements in the Ecology and Conservation Programme are environmental conservation and education, research, and landscaping, and tree planting around the Institute of Fundamental Studies. Major emphasis during the year under review was, however, directed toward experimenting with conservation farming technologies.

A particularly promising technological package, developed in the Philippines and bearing the acronym SALT (Sloping Agricultural Land Technology), was tried out on the degraded lands surrounding the Institute. In essence, SALT technology consists of contour planting of hedgerows of fast-growing nitrogen-fixing trees and shrubs spaced 4 to 5 meters apart. The hedgerows are lopped every 6 to 8 weeks and the loppings are used as mulch in the avenues (space between hedgerows). Mulching protects the soil from erosion; checks weed growth; conserves soil moisture; and upon decomposition, supplies essential plant nutrients to crops grown in the avenues.

Preliminary experiments indicate that *Desmodium renzonii* and *Sesbania aculeata* are promising species to be used in hedgerows. The establishment of hedgerows in the Hantana region is best accomplished with the onset of southwest monsoonal rains in April–May.

The Popham Arboretum in Dambulla, a unique collection of indigenous trees and shrubs, was the main focus of conservation and educational activities.

Landscaping and ornamental tree planting—the aesthetic component of the Programme—was confined to about two acres of degraded land opposite the Institute.