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THE IMPORTANCE OF SECONDARY CROPS IN IRAN HILL RICE FARMING**R.A. Cramb****INTRODUCTION**

It has long been recognized that intercropping is a universal feature of hill rice farming in Sarawak and of Iban agriculture in particular (e.g. Low, 1848: 229; Ling Roth, 1896: 407-408; Freeman, 1970: 181-182). However little attention has been given to documenting the cultivation practices involved or to assessing the economic importance of secondary crops in the Iban hill farming system. This article considers the cultivation of secondary crops in Saribas District. It is based on observations made during the 1979 — 80 farming season of the farms of 44 households at two longhouse villages — Batu Lintang on the Batang Laya and Nanga Taphi on the Sungai Sepak.

The article is divided into three main sections. The first deals with the production details of the major secondary crops. The second estimates their overall labour requirements. The third assesses their economic contribution to the hill rice enterprise. A brief concluding section completes the discussion.

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by

R.A. Cramb

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Production Details

Table 1 shows the range of secondary crops commonly planted. These crops have different growth habits, root systems, and maturation periods, and effectively utilize a variety of micro-environments within the rice field to provide an almost continuous supply of edible produce during the occupancy of the farm site. Table 2 gives production figures for the major crops, based on a post-harvest survey. Apart from maize and cassava the output of any one crop is usually small, but in total secondary crops make a major contribution to the overall productivity of the hill rice enterprise.

1. **Cereals.** The most important of the cereal crops is maize (*jagong* or *lingkau*). Maize is planted by dibbling, usually in late August before the planting of the rice. The quantity of seed planted by the survey households averaged 2.3 kg and ranged from 0.9 to 6.8 kg. The preferred sites for maize are the more moist and fertile lower slopes and gullies, including areas of weathering shale. These locations are referred to as *tanah jagong*; before underbrushing they support small ferns such as *engkerjai* (*Abacopteris urophylla*). Within these sites (which may account for 10 to 50 per cent of the farm area) the planting distance may vary from 1 to 3 m. The method of harvesting is to cut down the entire plant (*mantap jagong*) and twist off