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Exetel devotes \$ 300,000 to 'Saving Elephants by Helping People' Project

Through a fortuitous set of circumstances Exetel Private Ltd and the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society (SLWCS) have collaborated to develop a project that would contribute to dry zone dairy development through sustainable land management to benefit both elephants and people.

Sri Lanka's primary rural industry is agriculture and nearly 80% of Sri Lanka's population is rural and more than 40% of the rural poor people in Sri Lanka are small farmers who suffer pre and post-harvest losses as high as 40-50% mostly due to Human Elephant Conflict (HEC). The annual cost in terms of damage caused by elephants to agriculture crops is estimated to be Rs. 1,100 million (~US\$10 million) annually.

Elephants and agriculture livelihoods based on crops practiced by Dry Zone farmers are incompatible, however it has been discovered that elephants and cattle inhabiting the same area use the same sources of food and water and live without conflicts. This behaviour



From left: Janaka De Silva (Shift Supervisor, Exetel), Theje Gunatilake (Shift Supervisor, Exetel), Rohan Sirisena (IT Consultant, Exetel), Chandeep Corea (Operations Director - SLWCS and GIS Specialist) and Samantha Mirandu (Project Manager, SLWCS)

was first documented by a government veterinarian A.P.W. Nettasinghe, as far back as 1973 when he conducted a seminal study on the inter-relationship of livestock and elephants at the Thamankaduwa Farm with reference to their feeding and the environment.

The proposed project is to establish a model sustainable dairy farm based on the concepts of eco-agriculture to support the SLWCS' efforts to develop sustain-

able solutions to mitigate human elephant conflicts and also function as an extension unit to demonstrate and disseminate good animal husbandry practices among the village communities and thereby encourage them to adopt livestock management as an integral part of their agricultural activity since it is highly compatible with elephants.

The ultimate goal and objective of the project is to develop a dairy model on the

concepts of eco-agriculture which will provide a sustainable land-use system to manage the land to both produce food and to protect wildlife and other critical ecosystem services as well as greatly minimize HEC.

An Exetel director explained the company's role in the project "We have undertaken this project in light of the realization that private sector resources need to be channeled into the rural agricultural sector if

the incentives and support provided by the State are to be utilized effectively by subsistence farmers. The farm whilst being a commercial operation will also be a platform for facilitating the supply of veterinary extension services provided by the State to subsistence farmers. It is also intended to demonstrate to local farmers that adopting appropriate eco-agricultural practices is commercially viable and will vastly improve their socio-economic status".

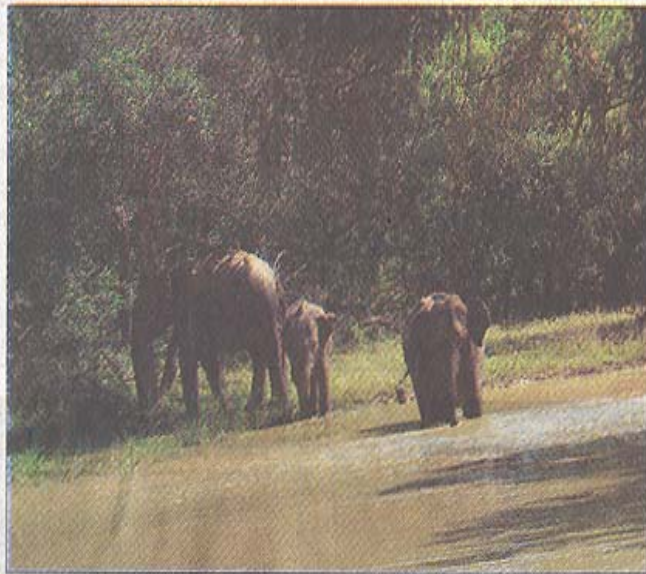
The Society will work in partnership and consultation with the Farm Animal Production & Health Department and Faculty of Veterinary Medicine & Animal Science of the University of Peradeniya, National Livestock Development Board, Department of Animal Health and Production, the Engineering and Electronic Communications Laboratory of the University of Moratuwa as well as various local and national government institutions including the Hector Kobbekaduwa Agrarian Research and Training Institute.

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