PLANT PROTECTION INFORMATION : ITS DISSEMINATION AND ADOPTION IN THE JAFFNA DISTRICT

By

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ABSTRACT

Indiscriminate use of pesticides in the Jaffna district has led to occupational hazards, pesticide residues, ecological imbalance and pest resistance to pesticides. Most of the problems posed by farmers to KVSNs are related to plant protection. This study examined the process of dissemination by KVSNs of plant protection technologies on chilli and brinjal and their adoption by the relevant growers. Data were collected through structured questionnaires from a stratified random sample of 180 chilli and brinjal farmers and 22 KVSNs from six agricultural instructor ranges in the Jaffna district.

Only 25% of the KVSNs had experience in the cultivation of chilli and brinjal. On an average, 25 % of the highland acreage a KVSN was responsible for, was under chilli and about 9 % under brinjal. Majority of the KVSNs preferred the T & V system and were satisfied with the pre-seasonal and fortnightly training classes but looked forward for more practical sessions and development of communication skills. Majority of the KVSNs adjusted the fortnightly messages in order to suit the field conditions such as economic status and the literacy level of farmers. Field visits and farmer forums were the main teaching methods while live specimens and handouts were utilized as extension teaching materials. The KVSNs upgraded their knowledge by attending in-service training sessions,

reading agricultural magazines and having contact with research. Of the non-chemical pest control methods the KVSNs stressed on crop sanitation. They were dissatisfied with the pesticides recommended to control whitefly in brinjal and were confident that pesticides recommended for the other pests in brinjal and for pests in chilli were fairly successful.

Most of the farmers were full-timers and had experience in chilli and brinjal cultivation. The Department of Agriculture (DOA) staff, pesticide dealers and fellow farmers assume equal importance as supplier of plant protection information to farmers. Usefulness of a source was determined by its reliability, experience and the ability to provide new information. Farmers were aware of farmer training classes but their participation was low. They generally lacked knowledge on biological pest control methods and resorted to scheduled spraying of pesticides. Crop rotation, weed control and removal of pest infested plants were adopted; crop disposal was, however, improper. Staking and firewood purposes hindered the removal of crop residues. Farmers read the trade name and dosage on the label. They were aware of pesticide hazards and did report experiencing mild symptoms of pesticide poisoning. Improper disposal of empty pesticide containers was noticed.

Research recommendations with economic and social considerations, proper training to KVSNs on practical and

communication skills, guidance and supervision will help disseminate plant protection information effectively to farmers. Mass media and group approach in extension are vital to reduce pesticide hazards and to encourage proper adoption of plant protection measures by farmers.