

Exploration of reasons to change farmer's attitudes towards ecological vegetable farming in southern Sri Lanka: evidence from a case study

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Abstract

Ecological farming has to be understood as part of a sustainable farming system and a viable alternative to traditional agriculture. The basic working hypothesis is that better management of ecological farming and food systems is a cost-effective strategy for improving human health, environmental protection, long term income, sustainable production and social welfare. This implies that agriculture must be viewed as ecosystem management and that the principles of participatory approach through farmers' educational systems were applied. To test this hypothesis and to ultimately contribute to the well-being of the rural farmers in Sri Lanka, a number of interventions were considered.

Randomly selected vegetable grown farmers (120) in Udupila area, Matara district were surveyed to determine their present situation. Future wanted situation of the sector was developed by using farmers' ideas developed through a visionary thinking process. As part of the strategy to increase farmers' knowledge, training programs, workshops, field visits, and field research were designed. Those different educational activities were conducted during ten months of intervention period from June 2006 to March 2007.

After intervention farmers were consulted again. Farmers convert to ecological farming due to various reasons. 78 % of farmers converted into ecological farming because of the health condition of the family. 65 % farmers changed into ecological farming because it is a low input production system; therefore cost of production is less. But 40 % changed because it is an environmentally friendly method. 13 % converted due to high market demand, and 8 % changed due to higher price for the product. Some of them make conversion due to one, two or more of these reasons. Most of them changed their attitudes about ecological vegetable farming and had experienced rapid improvement of their yield and income. According to the results it can be concluded that knowledge and attitudes of farmers following ecological farming concept in study area was developed by the research program.

Keywords: Ecological Farming, Intervention Period, Matara District, Participatory Approach