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## Floriculture industry in Southern province of Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic

S.H.S.Chamalke, S.Y.Munasinghe, H.I.G.K.Anuruddi, D.L.C.K.Fonseka\* and P.H.M.Dharmasena

Department of Crop Science, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka

### Abstract

Over the past few years, the floriculture industry in Sri Lanka has experienced significant growth and has emerged as one of the major sources of foreign exchange for the country. Despite this, the industry has been negatively impacted by occasional internal and external surges in recent times. The most recent COVID-19 pandemic together with the economic crisis has resulted in a dual shock on floriculture markets, affecting supply and demand in both international and domestic trade. Therefore, there is a need to analyze the current situation of the sector and possible interventions for its expansion. The scope of the study includes recognizing the current status of different entities engaged with the floriculture industry in southern province. A field survey was conducted in Galle, Matara, and Hambantota districts covering 20 secretariat divisions from July to September 2022. In-depth interviews were conducted with 100 floriculture producers selected by snowball sampling method. A pre-tested questionnaire with formal and informal discussions was employed to gather data. Data were subjected to descriptive analysis and correlation was tested between relevant parameters. According to the results, majority of the respondents were middle-aged (26-50 years old) males (86%) who were self-employed (75%). Their monthly income from floriculture operations has been drastically reduced between August 2019 and August 2022 due to the production loss with the chemical fertilizer ban in 2022 (Pearson Correlation Coefficient  $\rho = .613$ ). Nearly 46% of the respondents gradually halted their production during the time period from January to September 2022 due to the reduction of demand and higher input costs. Meanwhile, lack of fertilizer availability in the markets diverted them to use organic fertilizers (41%) and some of them (27%) completely avoided using any fertilizer. On-site planting material production and using tissue cultured materials have been reduced by 38% and 13% respectively due to a lack of labor and profits from January to August 2022. Some respondents (20.6%) expect government support to establish shade net houses and to introduce new varieties (21.73%). Only 20% of the producers are using online platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to market their produce. Almost 60% preferred of developing a virtual platform to connect different stakeholders in the sector of Southern Province. Weaknesses in the available extension services, lack of market awareness, and limitations in government interventions are some other issues identified. Therefore, connecting different entities in the sector is critical for better corporation and promotion of the floriculture sector in the Southern province Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Floriculture, Present situation, Southern province

**\*Corresponding Author:** [dlckumari@crop.ruh.ac.lk](mailto:dlckumari@crop.ruh.ac.lk)