
Safe use of Pesticides – Investigating the knowledge gap of *Piper nigrum* Pepper farmers in Kandy District

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Sri Lankan Export Agriculture market faces frequent issues and trade barriers related to pesticide contamination. To secure the export market, Sri Lanka needs to strictly adhere to the global standards in agricultural exports. Research data is lacking on the pesticide usage of spice crop farmers in Sri Lanka hence this study aims to assess the awareness of Pepper (*Piper nigrum*) farmers on safe usage of pesticides. The main aim of this study is to assess the awareness of Black Pepper (*Piper nigrum*) farmers regarding the safe usage of pesticides. The study employed a qualitative research methodology and primary data collection was done through an interview survey with 80 farmers representing 20 Divisional Secretariat Divisions in the Kandy district. Findings of the study confirm the existence of a gap between expected and existing knowledge of farmers regarding the safe usage of pesticides. Their pesticide-use practices such as wearing safety clothes, disposal and storage were contrary to the expectations, despite their knowledge on the harmful effects of pesticides on humans and the environment. Study reveals that farmers mainly rely on agriculture extension agents, pesticide sellers and fellow farmers for information rather than the instructions in the pesticide container. According to the data, the most reliable source of information of the farmers is the recommendation of agriculture extension agents. Conducting awareness programmes for farmers on the safe use of pesticides through extension agents is the best method to overcome the problem.

Key words: *Pesticide, safety, awareness, pepper (Piper nigrum), farmers*

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