

Impact of Alternative Food Trends on Under Utilized Crop Value Chains: A Case of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The world's food energy depends on only about 30 crop species whereas over 7000 species have been known to be used for food and are either partly or fully domesticated. This large portion of crop species known as underutilized crops. With health concerns, urbanization, income levels; the demand for underutilized crops was rapidly changed in both locally as well as globally. Present approach was to investigate the emergence of alternative food trends (Organic food, Chemical free, wild collected etc.) in local market and export market (ethnic market), to identify the impact on underutilized crop value chain actors; small scale farmers, middlemen, exporters and consumers and to find out the impact of alternative food trends on farming environment. Mixed method approach was employed and the sample size was 450. Farm households were selected from Uva and Eastern provinces. Key informant interviews, focus group discussions, interviewer administered questionnaires were used to collect data. Consumption of wild collected fruits and vegetables, chemical free, village food, organic food (certified and non-certified) and healthy food/functional food were identified as important alternative food trends in local market. In export market; demand was for authentic Sri Lankan food types. Nearly 50 different types of crops were identified in farmer level (was 60% vegetables, 30% cereals and pulses and 10% fruits) and best crops were recommended to each district based on the crop suitability index and developed a map of crop suitability. Informal collecting canters were common and 70% went as raw products to the market. These village level collectors link farmers and wild collectors with the upstream of the value chain. Middlemen were mainly responsible for collecting, marketing, transportation, storage as well as for huge post-harvest losses. Out of 50 exporters only 35 exporters were dealing with value added underutilized food products and they more concerned on safety and quality requirements. The main environmental issues identified were wild life threat, pest and diseases problems, changes in rainfall pattern, access rights and water scarcity.

Keywords: Food trends, Underutilized crops, Value chain

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