

**FACTORS AFFECTING BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF AGRO-CHEMICALS: A CASE OF CUCURBIT FARMERS IN ANURADHAPURA DISTRICT**

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Vegetable production accounts for 3.6% of the GDP in Sri Lanka, with 56% contribution from low country vegetables, including 45% from cucurbits. Anuradhapura District is one of the agricultural hotspots and holds the second largest production of cucurbits. Usage of agrochemicals is a common practice to control pests and diseases and 29 agro-chemical companies are serving the farmers. Marketing strategies of these companies are not supported by enough scientific findings. Therefore, this study investigates the awareness of common pests and diseases, usage of agro-chemicals and most influencing factors for agrochemical purchasing decision of cucurbit farmers. A questionnaire survey was administered among 62 randomly selected large scale famers in Mahaweli H zone. Flash cards were used to investigate the awareness about pests (*Epilachna* beetle, White fly, Melon fly, Fruit fly and *Aulachapora*) and diseases (Powdery mildew, Downy mildew, Cucumber mosaic virus and *Anthracnose*). Majority (98%) of the farmers were males and over 45 years of age with more than 5 years farming experience. Except pests like fruit fly and *Aulachapora* and the *Anthracnose* disease, famers were well aware of other common pests and diseases as they experienced a severe damage of more than 25% in the last season. Importance of agro-chemicals is highly recognized and mostly used in precaution. Average pesticide and fungicide usage was found to be around 1.8 l ac<sup>-1</sup> and 1.6 kg ac<sup>-1</sup> per season, respectively. Among pesticide usages, Carbosulfan (51%) and Abamectin (28%) were noticeable while Mancozeb (89%) was leading among fungicides. Farmers preferred to have advice from agriculture instructors regarding pest and disease issues. The farmers consult agro-chemical input suppliers (retailers) when purchasing agro-chemicals as they have received trustable advice in selecting chemicals as solutions for pests and diseases in previous occasions. Therefore, required knowledge on pests, diseases and agro-chemical products can be given effectively if marketing and extension services are linked with retailers available in the respective localities.

**Keywords:** Agrochemicals, Cucurbits, Retailers