

## THE IMPACT OF THE PROHIBITION OF THE POLYTHENE PRODUCTS WHICH IS LESS THAN TWENTY MICRONS IN THICKNESS, SUPERMARKETS IN SRI LANKA

B.A.I. Piumi<sup>1</sup>, A. Gunawardena<sup>2</sup> and S.N. Dissanayake<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Department of Agricultural Systems, Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.*

<sup>2</sup> *Institute of Policy Studies, Colombo 04, Sri Lanka.*

During the last thirty years, polythene has become more popular in Sri Lanka. Even though polythene products have advantages, due to indiscriminate usage and practicing ineffective disposal systems have led to environmental hazards vis-à-vis soil and water contamination, blocking of drains and health hazards etc. Hence the Central Environmental Authority of Sri Lanka considered about this situation and decided to ban the manufacture of polythene products of twenty microns or below in thickness for in country use; and the sale or use of polythene or any polythene product which is twenty microns or below in thickness with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007. When the polythene ban was put into the action, supermarkets which have grabbed a certain amount of the total retail trade in Sri Lanka and use extensive amounts of polythene in their operations had to find alternatives to cope up with this policy.

The purpose of this study was to identify the impact of polythene ban, which is less than twenty microns on supermarkets in Sri Lanka. More specifically it aimed to identify the economic and other impacts that and to identify the strategies adopted by supermarkets in order to comply with the policy and to identify behavioral changes by the consumers. Five supermarkets entered in to an agreement under the patronage of Central Environmental Authority to completely deter the usage of polythene bags by laying a nominal price. Key informant surveys were carried out in eight selected supermarkets using interview guide to investigate the former, while 110 randomly selected consumers from Gampaha and Colombo districts were interviewed using a pre-tested questionnaire to examine the latter. Data related to the charging system was also gathered from supermarkets.

Policy made the supermarkets to provide thick polythene bags for their customers. The results revealed that the spending on polythene bags by supermarkets had increased ranging from 10 % - 100 % . In addition, there is rising trend of price of polythene bags due to increasing of petroleum prices. Introduction of cloth bags, cardboard boxes, educating the staff and customers were adopted by supermarkets through several promotions. Findings suggest that initiation of different promotion campaigns to increase the reusing of the environmental friendly alternatives would be quite advantageous. Although charging system is a new scenario, supermarkets have experienced drastic change in the behavior of their consumers, though some consumers did not change. Therefore study recommends implementing an integrated approach to create awareness among consumers on reduction, reuse and recycling of polythene.

*Key words:* Polythene ban, Supermarkets, Polythene bag usage