

Unhealthy practices of pesticide use by farmers in a village in Puttalam District

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The objectives of this study are to examine harmful farming practices in pesticide use and to find out the reasons for such practices. The area selected for the study was the farming village of Palasola in Madurankuli Division, Puttalam District. Twenty five out of a total of 128 families were randomly selected for the study. The methodology adopted included the collection of information through a questionnaire to members of the selected sample, discussions and interviews with officers in the Agrarian Services Centre at Madurankuli, private medical practitioners in the area, consumers and buyers of vegetables in the surrounding area, and through personal observation of farming practices in the field.

The information collected revealed that there are at least three important farming methods common to all farmers. They are watering crops twice daily, using application of artificial fertilizer and application of pesticides and herbicides. Farmers and agricultural officers believe that these methods are essential for effective vegetable farming.

The unhealthy practices noted among farmers are exceeding the recommended quantity of pesticides in preparing the mixture for application, repeated application of pesticides before expiry of recommended period, and pesticide application preceding the harvest contrary to recommended time lag. The reasons for the continued use of unhealthy practices were examined. Farmers were not entirely convinced about the accuracy of recommendations by manufacturers on the use of their pesticides and therefore farmers have developed their own methods of application. It was also noted that farmers were aware of the dangers of some of their incorrect practices in use of pesticides. Despite this awareness farmers persisted in these practices because of their desire to obtain maximum income from their farm products in the absence of any other possible sources of income.

Key words: Farming methods; Pesticides; Health aspects; Puttalam District