

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT INFORMATION SOURCES IN INFLUENCING FARMER'S SELECTION OF PESTICIDES**

R.AH. PATHIRAJA\*, B.M.K. PERERA\*\* AND G. JAYASUNDERA\*\*\*

*\*Department of Agricultural Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya \*\*Department of Agriculture, Peradeniya \*\*\*Lankem Ceylon Limited, Colombo*

Of the different external inputs used in modern agriculture, pesticides account for a major increase in the cost of production, reducing the profit margin of the farmer. A recognizable yield increase, especially in the rice sector, has been possible in recent years bringing the national average to 3.8 t/ha in the year 2002. In Sri Lanka, it is the rice sector, which uses the highest amount of pesticides, especially for weed control. At present there are more than 105 herbicides marketed in Sri Lanka, resulting in intense competition among the 15 private sector companies. Insecticides and fungicides, too, are important to the cultivator. In spite of the importance of the pesticide market, not much is known about factors influencing the buying behaviour, especially when many new products are being annually introduced to the country aimed at the same market niche.

The present study was conducted in three major rice-producing districts in the country. Kurunegala, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. Stratified random sampling was done and 88 farmers were selected from 11 Divisional Secretary's Divisions. Information was gathered by using a structured questionnaire, by interviewing dealers and experts in the area of research and development of pesticides and by making personal observations. The statistical software SPSS and Excel were used for data analysis. The main objective was to determine the effectiveness of different sources of information available to the farmer capable of influencing the process of selection and purchase of pesticides.

Special attention was given to the study of the role of mass media in awareness creation on pesticides. Results indicated that TV is the most influential source of information, followed by other farmers, demonstration plots and Agricultural Instructors with low priority given to print media. Advertisements on TV motivate the farmer to try new products, especially if evidence of high efficacy was seen in neighbouring farmers' fields or in demonstration plots. The survey has shown that 95% of the farmers have TV sets and watch programmes from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Contrary to expectations, farmers do not seem to be irritated by the repetition of advertisements during highly popular programmes like news and teledramas.

The most remembered advertisement may not motivate the farmer to buy the product advertised by it. Matching of moral values of farmers with what is shown in the advertisement and the credibility associated with the advertisement play a vital role in deciding the purchasing behaviour. Playing the role of farmers by popular actors was reported to diminish the credibility of the message. Instead, farmers attach high credibility to elderly people who are not professional actors playing the role of farmers. Episodes depicting young love, too, were rejected as superficial or lacking in substance. Young people, who have not set foot in a rice field and too young to have any in-depth knowledge in agriculture, are rejected as being able to influence buying behaviour. Radio and print media serve to reinforce the messages given on TV.