

## **FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH FARMERS' DECISION ON CULTIVATION OF PADDY VS. OTHER FIELD - CROPS**

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As a strategy to maximize available resource utilization, farmers grow other field - crops (OFC) in seasons when water is limited. However, most of them cultivate paddy as the major crop in both the *Yala* and *Maha* seasons. Crop diversification is an instrument for food security, income growth, pest and disease management and adaptation to climate change. Despite the potential and the necessity; according to the key informant discussions and secondary data, farmers are reluctant to cultivate OFC. The objective of this study was to identify the factors associated with farmers' decision on crop selection (paddy Vs. OFC).

The study was carried out in Mahalluppallama block of the Mahaweli system-H in the Anuradhapura district which comes under a major irrigation scheme and is an important agricultural area in the dry zone, having suitable agro- climatic conditions for both paddy and OFC cultivation. A sample of 77 farmers was selected by the simple random sampling technique. A structured interviewed schedule was employed to collect data. The majority (80%) of the farmers claimed that the cost of production of paddy is greater compared to OFC. Nevertheless, the farmers (90%) often selected paddy as the main crop for both seasons. This is determined by several factors, mainly; the availability of water for irrigation and rainfall patterns. In the year 2012, irrigation water availability and rainfall patterns (57%), marketability (55%), food security (52%), less labor requirement (23%), availability of planting material (20%) and easy management with less time involvement (19%) were the major reasons for the cultivation of paddy during the *Yala* and *Maha* seasons. Marketability (55%) limited rainfall (46%), and profits (29%) compared to paddy were the main reasons for the selection of OFC by some farmers. Land ownership (tenant/owned) and engagement in farming (full time/ part time) vs. crop selection decision (paddy/OFC) were tested and there was no significant association ( $P>0.05$ ) between observed variables at 95% probability.

The household head was the main decision maker regarding which crop to be cultivated. High input cost, water scarcity and pest and disease conditions were the main restrictions for both paddy and OFC cultivation. A holistic approach to make farmers aware of the strategies for utilizing available water to the maximum possible level would be a good solution to enhance the production and productivity of land in the dry zone. Furthermore, it could motivate farmers to shift from paddy cultivation to OFC in seasons when water is limited. Hence, the resulting crop diversification will lead to increase profits, food security, pest and disease management and efficient water utilization.