

RESEARCH NEWS

**CONTROL OF PESTS AND DISEASES OF COMMERCIAL LEAFY
VEGETABLES BY FARMERS IN THE WESTERN PROVINCE**

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A survey was carried out during November 2003-May 2004 in the Western Province to identify major pests and diseases in commercial leafy vegetable cultivations and their control measures adopted by farmers. The data were collected by interviewing 75 farmers using a structured questionnaire. Regression function was used to analyze the survey data. A baseline understanding of the socio-economic factors that influence the perception of pest management practices of leafy vegetables was described.

The predominant pests found in Gotukola were Red spider mites (*Tetranychus urticae*), Sap sucking bug (*Halticus minutus*) and Root knot nematodes (*Meloidogyne* sp.). Leaf eating caterpillars (*Spodoptera* sp., and *Zytkania* sp.) were common on Mukunuwenna, Kankun and Thampala. Leaf eating beetles found in Mukunuwenna were identified as *Casida* sp. and *Chetocnaema* sp.

The most common disease was White Rust caused by *Albugo aquitica* in Mukunuwanna, Kankun, Tamapala and Sarana crops. Leaf spot disease caused by *Cercospora* spp. and *Pestalotia* spp. was also observed in Mukunuwenna and Kankun cultivations. Brown Rust disease was found in Gotukola fields. The stem and root rot diseases caused by *Sclerotium* spp. showed patchy distributions in Gotukola and Mukunuwenna fields.

Almost all the farmers used pesticides to control pests and diseases in leafy vegetables without proper identification of the problem. The present study demonstrates the indiscriminate and irrational use of pesticides to control pests and diseases of leafy vegetables, irrespective of the extents cultivated or income obtained. Farmers do not adopt the pre-harvest interval recommended by the Department of Agriculture. Factors that influenced the misuse of pesticides in leafy vegetable cultivation were identified as socio economic characteristics of the producers including their education level, source of obtaining pesticide information, type of pesticides and pest management perceptions.