

Constraints Faced by Potato Farmers in Major Potato Growing Areas in Sri Lanka: An ICT based Intervention

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Potato is one of the most attractive crops and plays an important role in human nutrition. However, the average yield of the potato is less than its yield potential and local production is insufficient to meet the demand in Sri Lanka. Therefore, a field survey was conducted in major potato growing districts such as Badulla, Nuwara-Eliya, and Jaffna to examine key challenges faced by potato farmers. One hundred potato farmers were selected through a purposive sampling technique and interviewed using a structured questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS. The majority of farmers from study areas cultivate potato for consumption other than seed purpose and enriched with smallholdings. Results revealed that low farmgate prices (37%), pest and disease attacks (32%), and high cost of farm inputs (20%) are the major challenges faced by the majority of farmers. Low farmgate price for potatoes is mainly due to the involvement of a higher number of middlemen, the majority of farmers cultivate potato at the same time and low quality. Potato early blight, late blight, and bacterial wilt were common diseases; mite and whitefly attacks were the common pest attacks faced by the majority of farmers. Furthermore, high input price constituted the cost of seed potato (63%), fertilizer and chemical cost (18%), machinery and labor cost (12%), and cost for irrigation (7%). Thus, the importation of seed potatoes was the key influential factor for the increase of input price. The study recommends improving better coordination among stakeholders in the industry and it is crucial to direct farmers to follow proper cultivation and harvesting techniques. Further, the study suggested that it is important to come up with a mobile-based solution mainly among farmers to access context-specific information promptly and easily; that could be resolved major challenges faced by potato farmers in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Key challenges, Potato farmers, Yield

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