

Practices adopted by pepper farmers to minimize plant casualties in Matale District

Some pepper cultivations successfully survived in Matale District even with the adverse weather prevailed in the latter half of 2001. The study was initiated to investigate factors affected plant survival during this period by visiting and taking views of 25 successful farmers in September 2001. The study also examined how farmers have deviated from extension instructions given to them in this regard. Establishment of shade; digging of required size pit (45 cm³) and filling with organic manure and placing a thick mulch around the plants are messages usually delivered to farmers before planting is started.

Following of pre-planting activities such as appropriate soil conservation practices; making big planting holes and filling with compost or dung; establishment of temporary banana shade and permanent gliricidia shade at least six months prior to planting have helped all the sample farmers to achieve successful plant establishment. Planting of pepper within a banana bush and gradual removal of banana later was found to be an innovative practice adopted by three farmers. All farmers were of the view that on set of monsoon rains is the right time for planting. A thick mulch around the base; providing artificial shade with leaves of non-shedding plant parts such as coconut fronds; planting of wild sunflower, crotalaria and gliricidia live sticks around the plants have helped them to provide additional shade. Following the field and the establishment of a thick gliricidia shade above the canopy have prevented plants being exposed to hot weather. Intercropping pepper with vegetables and manioc within the first two years gave the similar effect. Slow infiltration of water around the plant base was made either burring clay pots or hanging saline containers by three farmers. Plant infilling have been done by ground runners trained from the adjacent pepper vines; planting a bunch of three nodal cuttings with the hope of thinning out to two and planting a coiled piece of vine. Five farmers combined a few methods along with watering every other day. The study gathered information on the practices other than those extension have prescribed towards successful plant survival. Following the fields and coppicing the gliricidia once a year to provide plants with full shade are practices adopted by the farmers as against extension advice. These practices seemed to be an adaptation to the circumstances. Therefore, extension workers should be careful to establish their stands unless they study the situational aspects. Pepper farmers should be educated beforehand of an inclement weather on the healthy practices identified, including those tried out their own.