

Functioning of spice gardens: A case study in Matale District

Spice gardens are confined localities where different spice and herbal plants are grown and their products sold mainly to tourists. Eighty percent of the tourists visiting the country visit spice gardens. This study was conducted to find out functions taking place in spice gardens and what strategies are adopted to carry out the functions.

Out of 20 spice gardens registered with the Sri Lanka Tourist Board, eight on the either side of Matale to North-Matale road were visited during January 2001. In-depth discussions were held

with the owners, guides, gardeners, cooks and grading, sorting and packing personnel of the spice gardens. Observation method was also used to collect data.

The main role of the spice gardens was found to be marketing of spice and herbal products. As the way of fulfilling of this objective, a number of interrelated activities take place. Refreshment followed by the sequential steps of plant demonstration, lecturing and product displaying to motivate clients and marketing of products. Explanations are given in relation to usage of plants, methods of preparation of their products and related agronomic practices. Marketing is the final and most important activity in a spice garden. Self-prepared, purchased, imported herbal products, perfumes or even synthetic products and spices are the variety of products available. Selling of medicinal products to address the most common ailments and application of medicinal balms are important promotional activities. Products are sold as they are or wrapped and packed attractively and sold by changing brand name to an easily remembered version. Except coffee, other spices are marketed either solely or blended form. However, quality of spices is poor. Spice gardens are run independently and state intervention to them is minimum. Most extension principles are incorporated in their functions. Target oriented extension, time management, utilization of different extension devices to motivate clients are few. It is also remarkable that marketing strategies such as offering refreshment and herbal therapy; presentation of products attractively in different packs and wrappings are effectively operating in the spice gardens. A detailed study on the extension and educational aspects would be beneficial as they can be applied in other form of extension activities.