

Effects of Farmer Field Schools programme on pest control practices: a case study

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The study evaluated some important outcomes which resulted from the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) programme conducted during the period of 1994-2002, by the Department of Agriculture in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. The objective of the study was to assess the impact of the FFS programme.

The study included seven sites; *Yatiyana*, *Dayandara* and *Beralapanathara* in *Matara* district and *Ambalantota*, *Meegasara*, *Walasmulla* and *Beliatta* in the *Hambantota* district. After selecting a *yaya* where a FFS had successfully been conducted, 10 farmers were randomly chosen from FFS-participants as well as 10 non-participants. Next, a different nearby (control) *yaya* was identified and 10 farmers were randomly selected for the study. Thus, each location comprises of 30 farmers and the entire sample contained 210 farmers. Information was obtained using a questionnaire in *yala* 2003 season.

The comparison of the insect control practices of FFS-participants with other farmers indicated that the FFS-training had been responsible for some important changes. FFS participants made significantly fewer (<0.001) insecticide applications than non-participants, as 0.6 and 1.7 times/ season, respectively, but there was no significant difference in insecticide applications between the non-participants and the control-farmers. The study also revealed that FFS farmers (21%) use significantly less amount of fungicide (<0.05), compared to non-participants (39%). The time used to monitor field in order to identify pest attacks, was also significantly high (<0.05) in FFS-participants than non-participants. Further, 81% of FFS-participants have never applied insecticide just only on visual evidence of damage but also used quantitative techniques to assess damage. Nevertheless, 60% non-participants used only visual evidence to assess an insect damage. The majority of FFS-participants (87%) showed that they have understood the concepts better than non-participants (53%) pertaining to early spraying.

This study showed that the FFS is responsible for bringing about significant changes in insecticide practices and increasing the understanding of agro-ecological relationships. Thus, a wide range of paddy farmers have reaped advantages from the FFS programme executed in Southern Province.