

A comparison of the trade of heavy berry and light berry produce of black pepper in Matale district

M A P K Seneviratne*

In-Service Training Center, Department of Export Agriculture, Elwala, Ukuwela

Pepper light berry trade has increased significantly over the last five years. Light berry produce is used for oil and oleoresin extraction. The objective of the study was to identify pepper light berry trade in Matale district and compare with that of heavy berry trade in the same district.

Matale is the second largest pepper producing district and an area where pepper light berry harvesting takes place to a great extent. Therefore, Matale district was selected as the study area. Key- informant interview was the method employed in data collection. Main spice dealers in Matale town, spice dealers in small towns (Rattota, Ukuwela and Pallepola), village level spice collectors and the people who harvest the pepper crop on lease were interviewed. The number of individuals in each category was 05, 10, 10 and 10 respectively. Thirty black pepper producers (15 regular light berry harvesters and 15 regular heavy berry harvesters) were also interviewed across the district to identify trade channels of the two types of black pepper products. Heavy berry products can be sold both in raw and dried forms. Regular spice dealers and collectors were involved in the heavy berry trade. Heavy berry prices were fairly stable and ranged from Rs. 120 to 130/kg during the study period between 2001 and 2002. Price of heavy berry was determined according to demand and supply.

Light berry harvesting was taking place from three-month maturity onwards. The high demand period for light berry lasted between May and June where the pepper crop in Matale attained the desirable state of maturity for oil and oleoresin extraction: between, 4.5 - 5.5 months after initiation of flowers. The price of products is unusually high (approximately 50 rupees/kg higher than the heavy berries on dry basis) during this one month period and seems to be determined by the exporters to coincide with

the maximum amount of extracts in the produce. In addition to the full-time spice dealers, a number of buyers were involved in the light berry trade including non-spice traders like hardware and jewelry merchants, mobile traders from Kandy district and individuals who buy the crop from borrowed money from large scale spice dealers. Unemployed youth and government officers such as teachers, grama niladaris, samurdhi animators have also acted as part-time buyers. People from Kandy district were involved in the drying process of raw products of light berries.

* mapks@sltnet.lk

Tel: 066-2243450