

Potential knowledge transfer through tea leaf supervisors

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Tea provides 82.35% proportion of the foreign exchange earnings coming from plantation crops in Sri Lanka. Tea cultivation is carried out by two categories of producers; large estates and smallholders. Even though the smallholding sector is increasing in terms of area of cultivation and contribution to total tea production, their adoption rate for innovations developed by Tea Research Institute (TRI) is found to be low. However, with the assistance of leaf supervisors, there is a potential to disseminate technologies to the smallholdings. Therefore, objectives of this study are to assess the efficiency of knowledge transfer through tea leaf supervisors, to identify and estimate drawbacks, and propose appropriate solutions to improve the efficiency of this communication channel. Most of the information in the study is based on field investigation carried out with 30 leaf supervisors and 100 smallholders selected from the Ratnapura district.

The findings of this study indicate that there is a wide knowledge gap between leaf supervisors and smallholders, and knowledge of leaf supervisors is higher than that of smallholders. Lack of knowledge was one of the major constraints in adopting innovations in the smallholding sector. In this respect, leaf supervisors with sound educational background and experience about tea cultivation have a greater role to play. They should be trained at TRI before sending for leaf collection, especially to deal with smallholders as communicators for tea technology transfer. It is necessary to establish a strong link to feedback TRI for necessary improvement. Productivity of smallholdings as well as quality of end product of tea factories could be upgraded by implementing the above technique.

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