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### **Maintenance status of light berry harvesting and non-harvesting black pepper cultivations in the Matale District**

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Black pepper (*Piper nigrum* L) berries take 6.5 months to mature and harvesting of pepper before this maturity stage results in light berries. Premature harvesting of pepper has caused a considerable loss in yield both quantitatively and qualitatively. The objective of this study was to compare the maintenance status of pepper cultivations where light berry harvesting was and was not conducted. The proportionate random sampling technique was adopted for data collection from seven Divisional Secretariat (DS) Divisions in the Matale district namely Pallepola, Rattota, Ambanganga, Ukuwela, Matale, Yatawatta and Galewela. Among pepper farmers in the district, 62 % were light berry harvesters. A 101 farmers who practiced light berry harvesting and 62 farmers who did not practice light berry harvesting were selected proportionately. A questionnaire survey was conducted for data collection on four important agronomic practices: fertilizer application, weed control, shade control and pest and disease control.

Lopping from *Gliricidia* support trees were applied as a green manure by all respondents. However, one-fifth of them also applied sufficient quantities of chemical fertilizer. Nearly 68 % practiced weeding twice a year whereas others practiced it once a year. No significant association was observed between light berry harvesting status and fertilizer application ( $p=0.68$ ) and the light berry harvesting status and weed control ( $p=0.76$ ). A significant association ( $p=0.04$ ) was observed between shade control frequency and status of light berry harvesting. Shade control was not adequately practiced by 73.2 % of light berry harvesters whereas this inadequacy was observed with respect to 26.8 % of non- light berry harvesters. A significant association ( $p < 0.001$ ) was observed between light berry harvesting status and control of pests and diseases. Of the light berry harvesters, 94.1 % did not control pest and diseases mainly due to cost involved in pesticides. The farmers, who look after their pepper cultivations by adopting agronomic practices such as shade control and pest and diseases control, refrained from harvesting light berries. Similarly, those farmers who neglected their pepper cultivations tended to practice harvesting of light berries.