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### **Constraints faced by mushroom growers: A case study from Bandaragama in the Kalutara District**

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Small-scale mushroom production represents an opportunity for farmers interested in an additional income and is also an ideal option for farmers without much land. In addition to its culinary appeal, the nutritional value and medicinal properties create a high demand for mushrooms in both local and international markets today. Mushroom growing programmes have been introduced to people in the rural areas as a means of self-employment through many government and non-government poverty alleviation programmes. However, the impact of this industry to the country's economy or the actors engaged in this enterprise and their role has not been investigated so far. Therefore, as an initial step, the present survey was designed to study the small scale mushroom growers in the country and to investigate the problems and constraints faced by the mushroom growers as well as the different people and institutions involved in their enterprise development. The mushroom growers at Bandaragama located in the Kalutara district were selected for the case study. The direct interview method using a structured questionnaire was employed to collect information from 40 farmers. The sample contained 56% females and 44% males of different age categories. Most of the farmers (53%) were new to the enterprise and were still in the process of getting established while 35 % was involved for more than one year and 12% had involved for less than 1 yr. Of the total farmers, 15% was involved in mushroom cultivation as an additional enterprise while for 75%, it was the main enterprise. The farmers buy seeds from the government agriculture centers or the private sales outlet in their village or a few borrowed from friends. The sale of products was carried out by themselves, directly to customers, through a retailer or a middle person or directly sells to exporters or wholesalers or hotels. Only 2% of the farmers were involved in export and all of them were males. The lack of knowledge in mushroom culturing, disease management, financial assistance, business management, finding local or foreign markets, producing value added products of mushrooms were mentioned as problems by farmers. They also expressed the need for more cost effective growing media, packaging methods, viable high yielding seeds, new mushroom types, storing methods as well as support in terms of finance and training to expand their enterprise.

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