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### **Misappropriation of tapping technologies by kitul (*Caryota urens*) tappers**

M A P K Seneviratne\*

*Department of Export Agriculture, 1095, Kandy Road, Peradeniya*

Sap extracted after seasoning immature inflorescence of kitul tree (*Caryota urens*) is used to make a variety of products including treacle, jaggery and toddy. There is a perception among industry stakeholders that tappers frequently engage in different practices to alter standard tapping techniques. These practices are believed to have adverse effects on productivity of trees and consumer health. The objective of this study was to identify incidences of unhealthy tapping techniques among current tappers. Data were collected from 304 tappers selected from all 12 kitul growing districts in Sri Lanka using a multi-stage stratified random sampling framework. A pre-structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Data were analyzed to calculate percentage responses.

According to the findings, incidences of unhealthy tapping techniques were a) use of non-standard seasoning mixtures such as battery carbon and urea (30%), b) tapping of top-most inflorescence (24%), c) over-exploitation of sap (18%), d) removal of upper leaves (30%) and e) burning of fibrous roots (15%). The use of non-standard ingredients in excessive doses stimulated continuous draining of sap in high volumes, and finally leads to the death of the tree prematurely due to exhausting. Tapping of top-most inflorescence is associated with decapitation of the crown of the tree and cutting leaves. The excessive damage facilitates access of red weevils to the tree trunk, stagnating of water and hence fungal infections. This practice causes an unbearable stress to trees leading to the death of trees. The consequence of removing upper leaves above the tapping inflorescence is the insufficiency of leaves for photosynthesis and subsequent build up of starch reserves. In order to keep the sap volume constant, during annual reviving of the root system, some tappers resorted to burning of the in-coming root system, and thereby absorption of water and nutrients and anchorage are affected.

The consequences of unhealthy tapping techniques were understood by only nine percent errant tappers. Therefore, increasing awareness on healthy tapping techniques and their effect is necessary.