

FARMER PERCEPTIONS ON UP-COUNTRY VEGETABLE MARKETING: A CASE STUDY IN NUWARA-ELIYA DISTRICT

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Marketing and pricing mechanisms currently in place for vegetables in Sri Lanka are almost independent from government intervention, i.e. in terms of both facilitation and regulation. This study aims to explore farmers' perception towards existing up-country vegetable marketing systems with special reference to Nuwara-Eliya district. Farmers who cultivate vegetables in small, medium and large-scale were contacted using a number of data collection techniques, including personal interviews and focus group discussions supported by pre-tested, semi-structured discussion guides as well as in collaboration with the popular *Sirasa Gam Medda* program. The discussions were recorded and then transcribed, translated, and analyzed using the *N-Vivo* Qualitative Data Analysis Software (*Version 10*). The outcome of analysis reveals that, in general, farmers are involved in cultivating several kinds of up-country vegetables such as carrot, beet, leeks, cabbages, cauliflower, lettuce etc. Simultaneously, it was observed that most of them practiced cultivating potatoes in the same fields during alternative seasons together with other vegetables. Farmers perceived that lack of a proper mechanism to control production to be a critical issue that directly affects vegetable prices, and were of the view that for the most part, wholesalers dominate at the point of price setting. Further, it was found that the price information provided by Consumer Affairs Authority in the form of a text message was rarely used by these farmers. The wholesalers from Nuwara-Eliya Economic Centre and Cargills Fruit and Vegetable Collection Centre act as the main up-country vegetable buyers, where the latter pay a higher price for the farmers, but only for the portion of their products which comply with their high quality parameters. Also, they were unhappy with the mechanism in place to import potatoes, as it diminishes their ability to claim for higher price for better quality "Lanka potatoes".

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