

## Farmer education in Sri Lanka reaps benefits



*Piyasena Dayananda: enjoying greater crop yields through the appropriate use of pesticides and fertilizers.*

**Training on using crop protection products has helped thousands of farmers in the country grow more food and better their incomes since the 1990s. It has also generated awareness of responsible pesticide use.**

A thirst to boost productivity through agricultural technology has spurred Sri Lankan farmer Piyasena Dayananda toward continued training. The former Assistant Director at the country's Department of Agriculture believes education is key in helping farmers grow more food as pressure on arable land mounts.

Tapping on training opportunities funded by CropLife Sri Lanka over the last 15 years, Dayananda, 67, has learnt how to deal with pest attacks on his rambutan and tomato crops through the judicious use of pesticides. The result: healthier fruit, a rise in output and a higher income.

"It is a must to get the maximum yield from the available farm land to meet ever increasing food demand," says Dayananda, who owns a 10-hectare farm in the Badulla district, 120 km south of Colombo. "Agricultural technology plays a major role in achieving that."

While there are no food shortages in Sri Lanka, food prices are soaring as annual inflation in the country reaches 30 percent. Indeed, agricultural innovations and training by the private sector provide farmers with the necessary skills to ensure sustainable productivity. In the case of Dayananda, he used to grapple with mildew attacks on his rambutan crops. Production in 2006 was halved as a result.



In addition, early blight and late blight attacks on his tomato crops also sparked losses of about 50 percent. The attacks caused stem lesions on his tomatoes and fruit rot.

“It was a big problem for me,” says Dayananda. “When pesticides are not used appropriately, farmers don’t get the returns they want.”

Besides learning how to use pesticides effectively, he also learnt about fertilizer use. The training proved to be a boon for Dayananda.

“After I learnt how to use pesticides and fertilizers the right way, my annual income has averaged 3 million rupees (\$27,850), up from 2 million rupees previously,” says the farmer, who is also known as Tomato Daya in the village. “Not only has production improved, my crops are bigger and fetch a higher price in the market.”

Indeed, the objectives of CropLife Sri Lanka’s training initiative on pesticides go beyond helping farmers boost productivity. One of the key aims is to promote safe

storage of crop protection products, thus preventing accidental and suicidal poisoning.

A 2004 study by CropLife Sri Lanka found that just 38 percent of farmers stored crop protection products separately from other goods, and of those that maintained separate storage, only 24 percent kept such facilities locked.

CropLife Sri Lanka in 2004 conducted its first program in partnership with the government to promote secure storage of pesticides on farms and in retail outlets. This included providing boxes to farmers to store a season’s supply of pesticides. Since then, the association has trained 6,000 farmers and initiated mass media campaigns involving radio and newspapers. Today, more than 70 percent of farmers store pesticides safely, contributing to a reduction in accidental poisoning.



## About CropLife Asia

CropLife Asia promotes the benefits and responsible use of crop protection and plant biotechnology products, as well as sound regulatory frameworks in support of sustainable agriculture in the Asia-Pacific region. As a regional unit of CropLife International – a global federation of the plant science industry in over 90 countries – CropLife Asia supports the work of 15 member associations and is led by member companies at the forefront of crop production research and development.