

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Other Field Crop (OFC) production in the country has been on the decline after mid 80's and this trend continued the dependency on imports to meet the national requirement of these commodities at an increasing rate. Consequently few crops gained some importance in rural economies. This trend has no exception in the North Western Province too. Reviewing the growth and setback of the sector in relation to the factors of change provides lessons to policy makers to design appropriate policies. Therefore this study attempted to examine the changes taken place in the farming systems in the Kurunegala and Puttalam districts over the years and the factors which influenced the changes in extent cultivated, shift in crop mix and varietal changes to draw the issues impediment for the expansion of the other field crop sector in the NWP.

The main other field crop farming systems in the NWP were identified by reviewing the literature on studies done on other field crop cultivation in the province and by discussions with officials in the Department of Agriculture and Department of Agrarian Development. The three main OFC farming systems were studied taking Moragollagama, Rambe, Madahapola, Nagollagama Agrarian Development Divisions (ADD) from Kurunegala district and Nawagaththegama, Karuwalagaswewa, Kalpitiya ADD from the Puttalam district as study locations. Key informant interviews, focused group discussions and farmer survey were carried out during August to September 2011.

According to the findings it is revealed that there has been a continuous decline in extent under other field crops in the province. Population pressure and legal restrictions have caused people either to abandon *Chena* or to grow their *Chena* land with perennials. Abandoning of *Chena* cultivation has significantly influenced the area under millet and sesame. Today, there are few illegal *Chena* cultivation practices that are taking place. With the abandoning of *Chena* cultivation, bringing large tracts of dry zone land under irrigation and liberalization of the input and output markets, several OFC farming systems evolved in the province. Permanently cultivating homestead with mono-crops without fallowing (*Goda hena*), cultivation of OFC in irrigated rice fields, OFC cultivation in supplementary irrigated uplands are the existing farming systems that produce OFCs to national production. However, cultivation of OFC under main farming systems found in the province i.e, *chena*, diversified rice fields, and the dry and irrigated uplands has been in the decline.

Economic factors, chiefly market prices and trade policies, have been important determinants in the expansion of OFC cultivation in the country. Liberalisation of the economy, output as well as input markets influenced the farmer's decision that commercial cultivation gained impetus in the direction of increasing cultivation of vegetable and cash crops such as big onion, whereas semi-subsistence low income farming received a setback. Though diversification programs during late 80's had made an impact on cultivation of green gram, cowpea and other subsidiary crops in the rice fields, liberalization of trade has reversed the trend that continuous decline of these crops are evident after mid 90's. Particularly in the Kurunegala district, *yala* cultivation of sesame and chilli has drastically dropped. Several farming systems have evolved for vegetable cultivation in the province. Along the Kalpitiya belt, onion-

chilli-tobacco farming system has changed to high-tech mixed crop cultivation. Liberalization of seed industry has also caused these changes in the farming systems with the abundant availability of imported hybrid seeds in the market.

Diversification has also been constrained during the *yala* season due to water scarcity. In the irrigation assured areas labour shortage has pushed farmers to grow paddy during *yala* season. Extension services and other promotional programs have made an impact for promotion of some OFCs, nevertheless that collapse as the promotion is withdrawn. Pest and diseases endemics have also caused sustainability of some farming systems that some crops have been wiped out from the fields.

Other field crop sector is still predominantly a semi-subsistence family labour dependant farming system in the province although few farming systems have been evolved as sub-commercial systems based on market signals. Therefore less input and less labour demanding innovative farming methods are still needed to be developed for the welfare of the dry zone farmer. Genetic improvement of local varieties with resistance to local conditions is also vital. In addition, water security by micro irrigation methods and tank rehabilitation could assure OFC farming during *yala* season. Extension service, promotional programs, contractual agreements on marketing and school nutrition programs link to production program are important to promote cultivation of OFCs. Research on innovative farming systems should be undertaken that takes productivity, labour saving and sustainability into consideration. Research is needed to be undertaken to explore the feasibility of mechanized large scale commercial cultivation of OFCs and the required institutional set up in the dry zone.