

Post-harvest losses of fruits and vegetables cost Sri Lankan economy Rs. 20 billion annually

Sat, Apr 10, 2021, 12:09 pm SL Time, Colombo Page News Desk, Sri Lanka. Apr 10, Colombo:



In accordance with an audit conducted by the National Audit Office in 2015, the Committee on Public Accounts (COPA) disclosed that about 270,000 metric tons of vegetables and fruits are being wasted annually and as a result, the loss to the Sri Lankan economy is around Rs. 20 billion.

This was revealed at the Committee on Public Accounts chaired by Prof. Tissa Vitharana at the parliament complex recently. .

According to the report, post-harvest damage to vegetables and fruits in Sri Lanka is between 30-40 percent. The report further reveals that about 73 percent of the adult population of the country do not consume adequate amounts of vegetables and fruits and that the malnutrition level of children under the age of 5 is also around 21 percent.

It was also revealed at the Committee on Public Accounts that Sri Lanka does not have a standard agricultural policy formulated to cover the agriculture sector as a whole.

The attention of the COPA was drawn to the fact that the last domestic agricultural policy formulated in 2019 is currently at the draft level and the need for an agricultural policy targeting the local and foreign markets.

These matters were revealed when the audit report regarding the Minimization of Post-Harvest loss of Vegetables and Fruits in Sri Lanka and the intervention of the relevant government agencies for fair sale was discussed.

Another important area of focus of the Committee members was to establish an expeditious mechanism to prevent the unlimited profits made by middlemen causing a problem for both the local farmer and the consumer, minimizing post-harvest damage to vegetables and fruits in the country and the sale of agricultural products at reasonable prices.

The Committee also pointed out that due to the lack of an extensive cultivation plan covering the island to meet the food demand of Sri Lankans, farmers have resorted to cultivating to their liking thus resulting in over-harvesting of certain crops.

Though the Department of Agriculture is conducting a crop forecasting program every fortnight with a pre-announcement pertaining to the suitable vegetables to be cultivated for the next two weeks at present, it was noted that there was an inadequacy of the measures to resolve the said issue. Thus, the COPA chair Prof. Tissa Vitharana instructed the officials present before the committee to pay further attention towards resolving the matter.

The Committee also paid attention towards obtaining the contribution of the District / Regional Agriculture Committees for this purpose; increasing the participation of agricultural officers engaged in the field of giving basic advice on cultivation plans related to vegetable and fruit cultivation, providing adequate training to a sufficient number of Agricultural Instructors, Agricultural Research and Production Assistants who are directly involved with farmers and farmers, minimizing the damage caused by the use of plastic crates during harvesting and transportation, the use of dehydration methods to reduce food waste, and formulating a proper mechanism to resolve the difference between wholesale prices in economic centers and retail prices in the surrounding area due to transportation costs as well as the large number of intermediaries.

The Committee chaired by Prof. Tissa Vitharana paid a special attention to formulating a standard agricultural policy that protects both the farmer and the consumer of Sri Lanka to which State Ministers Duminda Dissanayake, Dayasiri Jayasekara, (Dr.) Sudarshini Fernandopulle, Lasantha Alagiyawanna, Members of Parliament and a number of high-ranking officials were present.