

Pesticide use up as farmers switch crops in parts of state

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bangalore, Sept. 7: A study conducted by the National Institute Advanced Studies has concluded that farmers shifting crops from coarse cereals to paddy and vegetables in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region of the state in the hope of better returns, have been forced to increase the use of pesticides. The same phenomenon has been observed in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Punjab. As a result, farmers have to spend 25-50 per cent of the total cost of cultivation on pesticides only, according to the study.

Dr P.K. Shetty of the Environmental Studies Unit of NIAS conducted the study on the use of pesticides on crops like paddy, cotton and vegetables grown in place of cereals like jowar and millets. He found that farmers had to increase the use of pesticides in Raichur and Bellary in Karnataka, Guntur and Warangal in Andhra Pradesh, Bhatinda in Punjab and Nasik in Maharashtra. The findings of the study were made public last week.

The report said that farmers in Bellary and Raichur districts spend 25 per cent of the total cost of cultivation on pesticides for growing paddy.

In Bhatinda, farmers spend nearly 50 per cent of the total cost of cotton cultivation for pesticides while in Andhra Pradesh, farmers set aside 42 per cent of funds earmarked for the same crop again for pesticides. In Nasik, farmers have to spend nearly 38 per cent of the total cost on controlling insecticides attacking the vegetable crop.

The study concludes that farmers opt for a single crop because of better market returns which however results in the increased incidence of pests and diseases.

According to the study, farmers use irrational combinations of pesticides because of which their fields have turned into "pesticide treadmills."

While the high use of pesticide has given temporary respite for some crops, some pests have developed resistance to insecticides used over a period of time. The high use of pesticides has also had its impact on human health. There have been several pesticide-related poisoning cases in these areas, the study said, adding that pesticide related deaths were however rare.

According to the study findings, on an average, 20 poisoning cases are registered in two government hospitals in

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Bellary and Raichur every month whereas the number of such cases is nearly 50 in Guntur and Warangal. In Nasik, pesticide related poisoning cases are around 10 cases every month while in Bhatinda, around five cases are reported in two hospitals monthly.

The study also observed that representatives of private pesticide companies interact more with farmers than the government appointed agriculture extension officers particularly in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

It recommends that scientists and agriculture extension workers attached to universities should have a constant interaction with farmers and prevent them from using spurious pesticides. Alternative pest management practices, diversification in cropping patterns, inter cropping and organic farming be encouraged to reduce the use of pesticides, the study said, adding that farmers should be educated in the safe formulation and scientific use of pesticides.

HEALTH HAZARD

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