HARTI

POLICY BRIEF

Connecting Research into Practice

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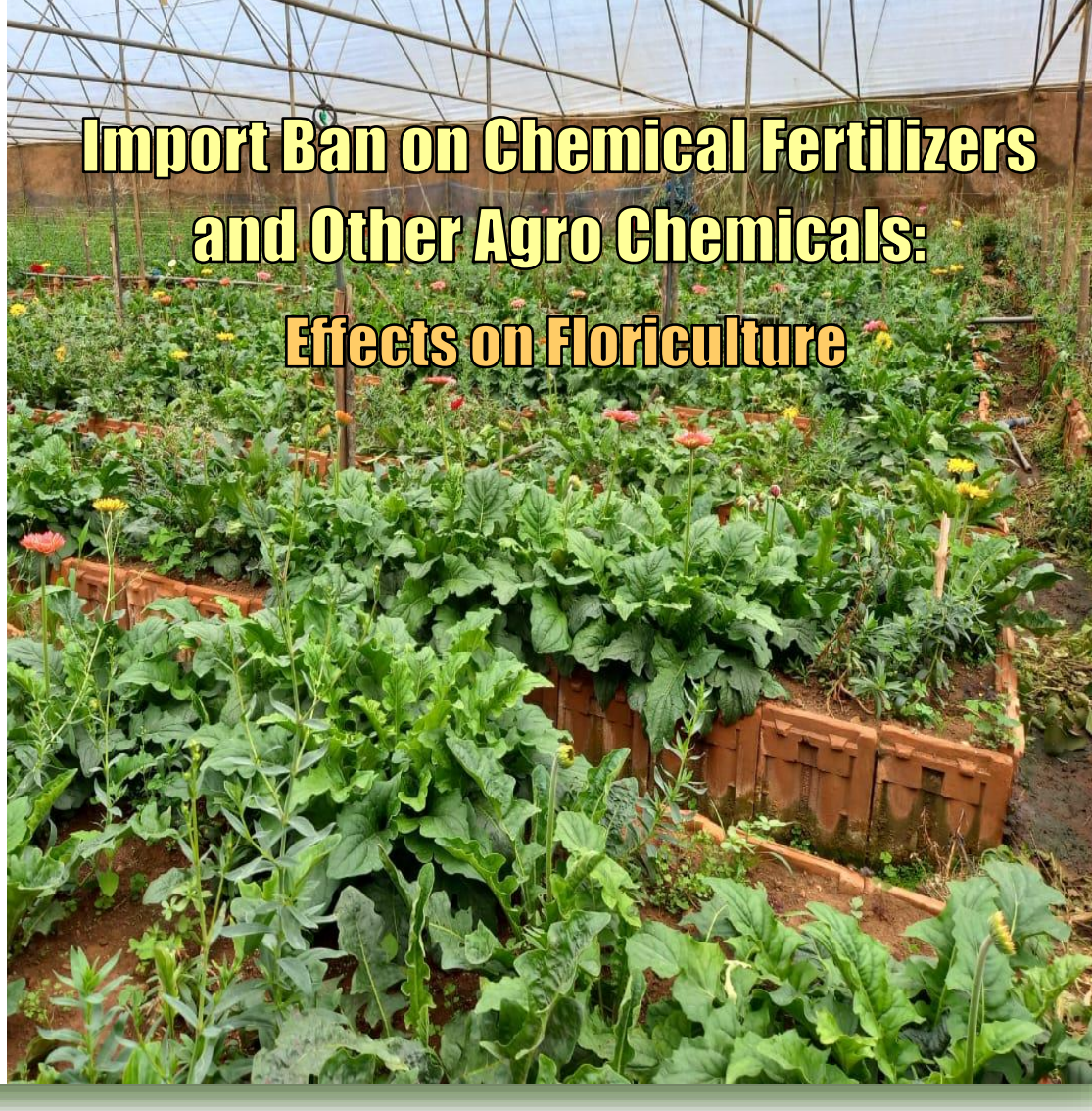
WFP World Food Programme

Australian Aid

Import Ban on Chemical Fertilizers and Other Agro Chemicals: Effects on Floriculture



Background

In May 2021, Government of Sri Lanka enacted the Import and Export (control) Regulations No. 7 which banned importation of chemical fertilizers and other agrochemicals to the country and declared a green agricultural movement. The objective was to make agricultural systems more financially and environmentally sustainable. This swift change created a sense of uncertainty and unrest among farming communities who have been accustomed to input intensive agriculture throughout their lives.

Subsequently, the government lifted the ban on importing chemical fertilizers on 30th November 2021, allowing the private sector to resume importing chemical fertilizers. Yet, as a result of foreign exchange shortages and high international market prices, fertilizer importation has not reached the volume of imports that was observed before the financial crisis.

In addition to the food crop sector, this situation has also had an impact on the floriculture industry. Although the floriculture industry in Sri Lanka generates relatively less foreign currency, it employs nearly 20,000 people directly and supports similar number of people indirectly.

A study was conducted by HARTI to identify the effects of the import ban on fertilizer and other agrochemicals on farming communities growing flowering and non-flowering live plants, foliage and cut flowers. Considering the fact that large commercial ventures for export are much more resilient to short term shocks, they were exempted from this study.

Data collection was done through key informant interviews and by interviewing individual farmers using a semi structured questionnaire. The questionnaire survey was carried out between October and November of 2022. The respondents were 142 farmers from the four districts namely Badulla, Kandy, Colombo and Gampaha where the floriculture industry is well established.

Key Findings

The scarcity and elevated cost of certain plant micronutrients and other agricultural chemicals is presenting significant obstacles to farmers engaged in floriculture industry. These inputs cannot be replaced with organic alternatives or manufactured by farmers themselves. Consequently, around 86 percent of farmers have had to downsize their operations, leading to a substantial decrease in household income derived from floriculture. In addition, the shortage of these inputs has restricted farmers from cultivating certain plant varieties that have a high demand in the market.

Female farmers, who constituted a significant portion of the surveyed sample, used floriculture as a supplementary source of income for their households, but are now unable to do so as previously due to these constraints. Most of the sample farmers (92 percent) are of the view that most of the organic fertilizers and agro chemicals currently available on the market are of inferior quality and therefore not very effective. Non chemical pest and disease control methods have failed to compensate for the effects of agro chemicals in growing floricultural crops.

Forty one (41) percent of the households that rely on floriculture, as one of their sources of income are presently experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity. The World Food Programme's (WFP) methodology for evaluating household food security was adopted in this assessment.

86 percent

Farmers have reduced the scale of farming operations

92 percent

Farmers have quality concerns with available fertilizer and agro chemicals

41 percent

Households are moderately or severely food insecure at present

Food Secure	**37%**
Marginally Food Secure	**22%**
Moderately Food Insecure	**29%**
Severely Food Insecure	**12%**

Suggestions and Recommendations

- To address the immediate concerns of the farmers, it is important for relevant authorities to have discussions with the main floriculture growers' associations in the country to identify essential plant nutrients and other agro chemicals. Government should intervene to ensure availability of those products in the market in sufficient quantities.

- Further, the current regulatory mechanism should be strengthened to ensure quality of the fertilizers (organic and chemical) and other agro chemicals available on the market.

- Creating awareness and training farmers on the use of organic fertilizers to maintain the nutrient status of soil and other potting media, non-chemical methods of controlling pests and diseases in floriculture will contribute to reducing the use of agro chemicals in the long run.

- It is also useful to explore new foreign markets for floricultural products that require less nutrients and agro chemicals to manage pest and disease incidences.

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Authors

Geethani Samarasinha, Thushara Dharmawardhana & Rifana Buhary of Environment Division, HARTI