

Dangers of adulterated pesticides and chemical cocktails



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"Adulteration, adulteration, oh brother, it's everywhere you see." Wrote the poet Sukhanta Bhattacharya. Where could a pure thing be? In this whole country, cast the thought of 'purity' from your mind. Only the name 'adulteration' is real; the rest is all fiction. These poetic lines, once a metaphor for society's degradation, have now come true in literal terms. As an agricultural analyst, there is one thing that worries me. It is that the chemicals, which used to act as a "medicine" for crops, have now turned into "poison" for consumers. People need to know about how extensive the damage caused by such products can become. Most of the time, the general perception revolves around formaldehyde in markets. But most people don't know that only 25% of toxic chemical contamination occurs during storage, marketing, and processing. In contrast, 75% occur during the pesticide use stage. Hence, there is a "crisis of purity" in the field of agriculture, the extent of which cannot be comprehended easily.

There exists a deadly practice among farmers, which goes under the name "totka." It involves spraying random chemicals into the crop at once. At times, when farmers are unable to determine what sort of pests and diseases they are dealing with, they follow this practice at the suggestion of uneducated retailers. Usually, these chemical cocktails involve insecticides and fungicides, miticides, plant hormones (vitamins), and micronutrients/auxiliary feeds. One should know that combining chemicals in this way, without any supervision, can cause unforeseen interactions and may result in the cre-

ation of a new substance that will harm both the crop and the person consuming it. Therefore, the totka, which lacks any scientific foundation, poses a significant challenge for agriculture. The main reason for this practice is the belief that all possible combinations of substances should be sprayed, as if working inside a lab.

Totka practice continues to persist owing to the vicious circle of "push selling." Unlicensed sellers of adulterated products try to make a bigger sale by mixing one high-quality pesticide with a low-cost adulterated one. Farmers soon realize that only one of the chemicals works. Such a phenomenon helps sellers earn enormous profits out of the situation. The case of 'Amjad,' who suffered from this issue, shows this point

Hence, consumers receive products that contain active chemicals. Effects of this practice on people's health can be classified into two categories: Short-Term Effects: Eye Irritation (Burning), Skin Blisters, Breathing Difficulties, Nausea, Vomiting, Physical Weakness, etc. Long-Term Chronic Effects: Renal Diseases, Colorectal Cancer, Infertility, Birth Defects, Neurological Disorders, etc. The special types of cancers of the prostate, liver, lung, and stomach have direct connections with such chemicals.

Furthermore, excessive and adulterated use of chemicals does damage to soil as well. These chemicals tend to eradicate biological processes within the soil. That is to say, these substances hinder the activities of soil microorganisms that contribute immensely to the pro-

Special Powers Act 1974, for punishing food adulterators with death or life imprisonment, this law has never been enforced after the liberation of the country. In fact, most of such people get away with light fines and a few months in jail as a sentence. Among such laws, whose potential is yet to be harnessed, are the Pure Food Act of 2005 (or its 1959 version), the Consumers Rights Act of 2009, the Penal Code of 1860, the Poison Act of 1919, etc. Until the government decides to utilize these "unused" laws, the 4,000-5,000 crore BDT market of pesticides would always remain susceptible to adulteration.

To build a "poison-free" future, it is imperative to switch back to the wisdom of organic agriculture by using compost, poultry manure, and green

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dually: He was an experienced farmer of tea plantations (teasel gourd leaves). As his leaves started to curl, he bought fertilizer and pesticides at the suggestion of a seller. Both of them did not work for him. To stop such vicious cycles, it should become mandatory to ask agriculture experts to first check pests before any sales begin.

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ductivity of land. The death of such biological organisms, in turn, forces farmers to continue spraying harmful chemicals. Hence, farmers continue to kill earthworms, beneficial insects, frogs, monitor lizards, and aquatic life. The more pesticides used, the fewer "workers" are left on farms.

Such a problem continues to plague our lives for a long time owing to the "paper tiger" approach of our justice system. There is no denying the existence of stringent laws concerning pesticide adulteration in Bangladesh. But in practice, our legal framework is a paper tiger. There exists an irony in our judicial procedures because even though there exist special powers, under the

manure. On the policy side, the government should concentrate on controlling the imports of 25-30,000 metric tons of pesticides per year. Besides, another area where consumers should develop a sense of responsibility lies in stopping themselves from demanding perfect-looking products. Often, the attractiveness of fruits is a result of such toxic agents as calcium carbide, ethephon, and ripen. The consumer should start questioning the health risks associated with the use of such products and insist on the adoption of safe agricultural practices.

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